

## Stretch and Relax

**Department:** Mobility and Fitness

**Priority:**

Moderate priority from program perspective

**Overall purpose of class:**

This is a modified yoga class designed to increase flexibility, posture, balance, and body awareness, as well as to improve deep breathing and relaxation techniques.

**Number of classes held per week:**

2

**Optimum class time:**

Afternoon ok

**Instructor requirements:**

1 PT or yoga instructor with training in adaptations for individuals with disabilities

**Number of students:**

Up to 20 depending on mat and floor space

**Student ability range and limitations:**

Students must be able to get down to the floor either independently or with the assistance of parallel bars or bench.

**Space and Equipment requirements:**

Large room with mats and parallel bars. Chairs for each student are good too for some sitting postures.

**Student Needs to be met from the perspective of the instructor:**

Students who need toning and flexibility as well as to develop a relaxing take home program are offered this class.

**Typical Student Goals that lead to placement in the class:**

Students goals revolve around flexibility and finding stress reduction and relaxation techniques that they can learn to use at home.

## Stretch And Relax Sample Exercises

### I. BREATHING:

The purpose of these activities is to increase the student's ability to oxygenate the blood by training and strengthening the muscles of respiration. Deep breathing increases the oxygen to the brain and entire body, which improves circulation, and may lower blood pressure and heart rate as well as decrease stress.

#### A. Diaphragmatic Breathing

1. Position: Supine (on back) with feet about 18" apart and arms a few inches from the body with palms up. Eyes are closed. It is easiest to first teach proper breathing initially with the student supine, but once the technique is accomplished, it should be practiced in all positions.
2. Have the student place their hands on their abdomen, and instruct them to focus on their breathing. Inhalation and exhalation should be through the nose in an easy, steady manner.
3. Inhale as you stretch the abdomen outward. Each inhalation is followed with an exhalation, gently pressing in and back with the abdominal muscles.
4. The shoulders and upper chest should not move with the breathing.

Gradually have the student increase the amount of time spent on each inhalation and exhalation and in the depth of the breath.

#### B. The Complete Breath (The Three-Part Breath)

1. Student should be supine as in A above .
2. Instruct student to relax, close the eyes, and focus on the breathing
3. Inhale slowly through the nose. First, fill the abdomen, letting it balloon out. Next, stretch the ribs out as the middle chest fills. Then fill upper lungs under the sternum and shoulders.
4. Hold the breath momentarily.
5. Exhale slowly through the nose reversing the sequence in #3: Be sure to try to gently squeeze out all stale air - **WITHOUT STRAINING OR FORCING**.
6. Continue the smooth flow of one breath after another, watching for an increase in depth. As practice continues, the breath will grow steady and longer in duration.

### II. POSTURES Allow the students to rest after each posture, focusing on the changes observed in their own bodies.

#### A. Supine

1. Bridge - Bend the knees and position the feet on the floor beneath the knees, hip width apart. Exhale in this position, and as the inhale occurs, press the buttocks together and upward, lifting the tailbone and each vertebrae in a rolling sequential manner. Arms can lie palms down beside the hips, or, to increase leverage and lift the arch higher, the hands can grip the ankles.
2. Knees-to-Side Twist - Extend the arms out from the shoulders in a "T" position. Bend the knees and bring the feet close to the buttocks. Inhale with the body centered. Exhale, as you roll knees and face simultaneously in opposite directions. Hold. Inhale and return to center; then exhale with the stretch in the opposite direction.

3. T- Twist - Extend the arms out from the shoulders in a "T" position. Turn the head and look at the right hand, palm down, on the floor. Bring the right foot up to knee level and then over the extended left leg, placing it outside the left knee. Keep the shoulders flat as you place the left hand on the outside of the right knee and roll the right knee toward the floor. Remember to breathe as you hold the pose, at least 15 seconds, before slowly releasing the pose. Repeat pose to the opposite side.
4. Knee Hug- Flex the knees to the chest, encircle them with clasped arms and squeeze gently. If the abdomen is bulky, part the knees. A gentle rolling back and forth or side to side may feel good.
5. Leg Stretch - With both legs straight, raise one leg, grasping as far down the leg as is comfortable. Use a tie, towel, or sock if you are unable to reach the leg comfortably. Keep the leg on the floor as straight as possible. Hold for at least three good breaths, then release and observe any changes. Students should start with the weaker or tighter leg first.
6. Tree - Draw one leg up to a high stretch, so that the sole of the foot rests against the inner thigh parallel to the floor. Press the pelvis flat, and allow gravity to open the hip joint, as the knee relaxes to the floor. Rest and observe the stretch. Lift the arms to an overhead "prayer" position, thumbs touching the mat, if possible. Breathe deeply, abdominally. Reverse sides.

#### B. Prone

1. The Pose of the Child - This is the classic resting pose. Kneel on the mat on your shins.  
Stretch the upper body forward and rest the forehead on the mat. Place the arms on the floor beside the legs' and relax. Breathe deeply. Turn face to one side and rest on cheek if you like.
2. The Swan - From a prone position, push up to hands and knees with the shoulders directly over the hands, hips over the knees. Gently play with your spine's capacity for stretch by dropping your hips and pelvis toward the mat. Next press up through hands and knees into the "pose of the child", rounding the back in a convex line. Alternately dip and fold the pelvis, watching the breath and allowing it to flow freely as you move.
3. The Cobra - Lie face down, resting brow on the mat. Stretch the body long as you firm the buttocks and bring feet snugly together. Place the palms under the shoulders and slowly begin curling the upper body as you raise the brow, nose, chin, shoulders and chest sequentially with an inhale breath. The pelvis should remain on the floor, and the shoulders should be relaxed and low. Do not push with the arms, let the spine lift as much as possible. Stop at the maximum point of stretch. Breathe. Slowly uncurl.
4. The Locust - Bring your arms beneath your body, forming a protective "V" with the wrists together. Keep the toes pointed and the inner surfaces of the legs together. Rest the chin on the floor. Tighten the muscles across the small of the back, inhale and raise one leg. Hold the leg extended and as straight as possible for 5-10 counts. Exhale as you slowly lower the leg. Repeat with opposite leg.
5. Bow - From a prone position, bend one knee with your heel toward your buttocks. Reach back and grip the ankle with the hand on that side. Gently squeeze the buttocks together and lift the foot and knee upward as you inhale. Be aware of the stretch your "quads" and low back are comfortable with. As you arch your back, lift

the head and keep the arms straight. Exhale, lower the body face down and relax. Reverse sides.

### C. Hands and Knees

1. Table - From a prone position, place the hands directly beneath the shoulders, straighten the arms, and push the hips up and back, directly over the knees. The back should be parallel to the floor.
2. Cat - With the exhaled breath, the head hangs down stretching the muscles along the back into a rounded position. With the inhalation, the head is raised and the waist sags down toward the floor.
3. Cat: Lateral Stretch - From "table" exhale as you turn laterally, looking over your shoulder, creating a spinal curve like the letter "C". Inhale as you slowly return your face to center, and exhale as you look over the other shoulder. Care must be taken not to "wag" the tail.
4. Cat: Leg Stretch - With an inhalation, one leg is lifted back and up, simultaneously stretching the chin upward, creating an arc. Smoothly, with the exhalation, the knee is bent and brought forward to the chest. The head is curled under.
5. Cat: Balance - From "table", focus the eyes upon a spot at eye level. Inhale, lift and extend opposite hand and leg. Move slowly back to "table", rest, and reverse sides. It is helpful to hold the pose for a few breath cycles.
6. Cat: Leg Lift - From "table", raise one bent leg so that it is level with the back. The knee is bent at a 45 degree angle. Inhale while extending the lower leg out to the side. The extended leg should be parallel to the floor. Fold as you exhale, and continue movement with slow breathing. Reverse sides.

### D. Seated

1. Tailor Sit - Sit on the floor with hips and knees bent, hips outwardly rotated with ankles crossed Indian fashion. The spine should be as straight as possible, hands resting comfortably on the lap. Some students may need to stall with hand support on the floor. Progress to "butterfly" sitting (soles of feet together), if possible.
2. Head-to-Knee - Sit erectly and extend one leg, pressing the back of the knee to the floor.  
The other leg is folded at the knee and placed at a wide angle, heel in the perineum, or as far up the inner thigh as possible. With inhalation, the arms lead the upper body in a great upward, then outward, then downward stretch, Keep the back straight. Hold the stretch, breathe into it, and lead the body out of the pose with the arms. Inhale as you stretch out and up and lower the arms with the exhaled breath. Reverse sides.
3. Full Forward Bend - Sit erect, tipping the pelvis forward toward the thighs. With the legs extended, straighten the knees and "square off" the feet so the soles are perpendicular to the legs. Inhale, opening the chest with an arm raise; exhale as you stretch outward, then downward. It is more important to keep the back straight than to round the back and bring the head closer to the floor. Relax in the stretch. Don't strain.
4. Spinal Twist - Sit erect, legs extended. Fold the left leg. Cross your right foot over the outside of the left thigh. The outer side of the right ankle should be touching the outside of the left thigh at midpoint. Inhale, and as you exhale, rotate the trunk to the

right keeping the shoulders level. Bring the left arm alongside the outer side of the upraised right knee. Using the left arm as a lever, grasp either the left knee or the instep of the right foot. Stretch the right arm up, around and back, placing the palm on the floor behind the seat. Turn the head over the right shoulder as you twist the upper spine. Release and repeat on opposite side.

### III. RELAXATION

Lie on the back with feet about 18 inches apart and arms a few inches from the body, palms up. Have the eyes closed. Raise, tense and then abruptly relax each part of the body in this order: right leg, left leg, right arm, left arm, buttocks, abdomen, chest, shoulders, neck and face. Now with the body remaining still, check over each part mentally. Now watch the breath, letting it be completely relaxed. Come out of the relaxation slowly by imagining fresh energy entering each part of the body from the head downward. Slowly sit up. Visualization may also be used during this time.