

# OFFICE YOGA

STRESS RELIEF AND BODY STRETCHES



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# About this

This booklet is designed for everyone who sits a lot throughout the day. When not taking regular breaks, you might feel tight, stressed out and notice a lack of energy.

To improve the physical and mental wellbeing this guide contains a collection of short exercises that can easily be performed at the office.

Try to carve out a little bit of time for yourself in your busy workday! Take time to connect your body and your mind, time to breathe, and to move your body.

The exercises are designed to fit in your workday. A lot of them can be done sitting at your desk, some can be practice when on a way to the next meeting or when on the phone.

You can choose to combine the exercises to a full lunch break mindfulness-session or just practice one whenever you can spare a moment or decide to take time actively for yourself. Make it work for you and your needs.

Try to close every session that contains more than one physical exercise with a breathing or mindfulness exercise to reduce your stress levels as well.

Before you start: Read the full description of the exercise, think it though and imagine yourself doing it, before really start doing it actively.

When practicing, start gently and listen to your body. If you feel any pain, stop and come out of the pose. If you feel comfortable with it, try it again a little more gentle, not going as deep into the pose as before.

Don't stress too much if the pose feels different every time you do it – accept what is, because we are not machines, and every day can be a little different.

If you are practicing exercises from this booklet, you are doing it on your own recognizance and own risk. You are responsible to decide if you are in the physical shape to do yoga, and to only go as deep into the poses as you feel comfortable without any pain.

When in doubt ask your doctor or other healthcare professional.

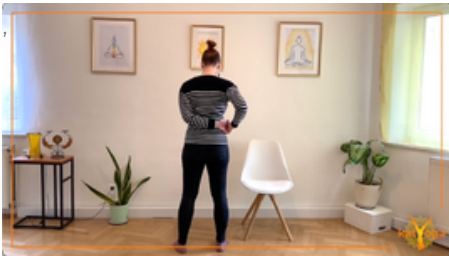




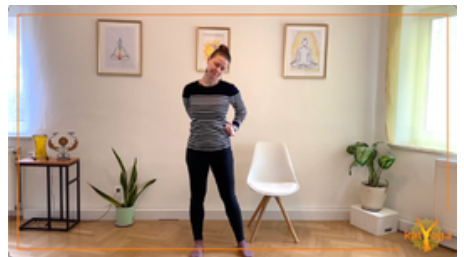
# MOBILIZING THE SPINE

## NECK STRETCHES (SITTING OR STANDING)

Clasp your hands together behind your back. Lengthen your spine and slowly pull both hands to the right side. The upper arm snuggles against your side body and the forearm is across your lower back. Keep the core engaged and softly push against the arm with your spine.

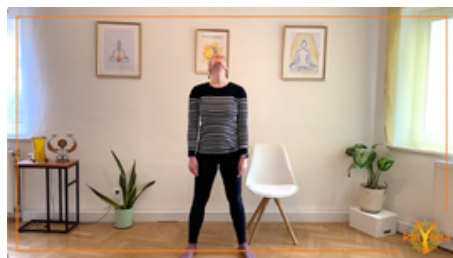
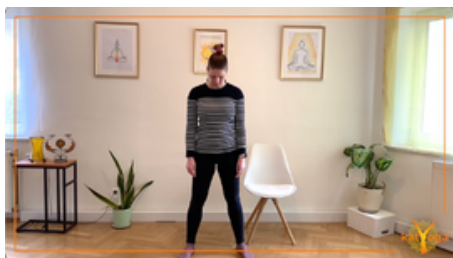


Keep your spine straight, softly pull the hands to the side and then lean your head towards the same shoulder for a stretch of the side neck and the front and upper shoulder. Hold a few breaths, then come back to the center, reach the arms behind you to the other side and repeat.

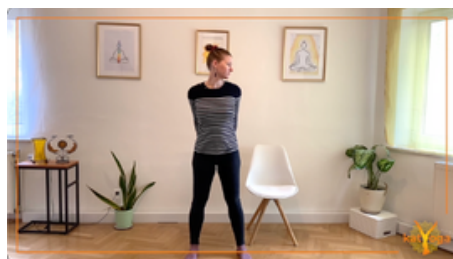
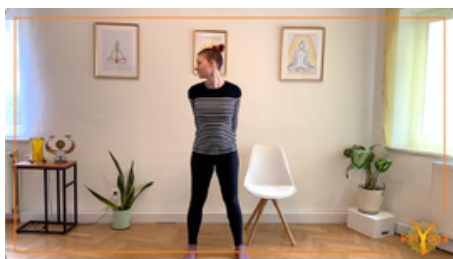


## NECK MOVEMENT (SITTING OR STANDING)

Lengthen spine and sit or stand upright. With the exhale, bring your chin towards your chest. Keep the back straight and only bow your head forward, so you'll feel the stretch in the back of the neck. With the inhale bring your nose up into the air towards the ceiling. Repeat as often as needed.



Turn your head towards one side with the inhale. Exhale back towards the center, and next inhale towards the other side. Hands clasped behind your back optionally. Repeat as often as needed.



## NECK (HALF) CIRCLES (SITTING OR STANDING)

Connect the above movements in a lower half circle (left side – center chin to chest – right side up and back again) or upper half circle (left side – head back nose up – right side down and back up again). Be mindful with your neck in the upper half circle.

## CAT-COW (SITTING OR STANDING)

Inhale – lengthen spine, gaze to the front and up, pop your chest forward, shoulder blades pull together behind the back. Exhale – round your back, tuck the tailbone in, belly button towards the spine in the back, gaze downwards, arms pull forward. Repeat as often as wanted.



## PUSH OUT FOR THE SEAT AND LENGTHEN THE SPINE



Grab the side edges of your chair with your hands. Push into it with the heels of your hands. Now straighten the arms and push down, while the spine lengthens, and the crown of your head rises. Hold here, then release. Repeat as wanted.



## WIGGLE OR CIRCLE YOUR HIPS

Sitting down, wiggle your hips from side to side, front to back, or draw circles. You can also write your name or the company's name with your hips. Do that as long as you feel comfortable, to bring circulation into your pelvis after sitting for a long time.

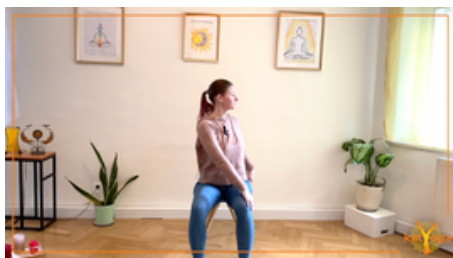
## SIDE BEND (SITTING OR STANDING)

Stand with your feet hip width apart. Tuck in your tailbone, and interlace your fingers in front of you. Turn the palms away from you and push forward a little. Then bring the arms over your head and really lengthen the spine and bring your palms towards the ceiling.

Engage your core, and with the next exhale softly bent towards the right. Keep the spine long and the hips over your feet. Take a few breaths here before rising up once again with an inhale. Exhale and repeat to the other side.



## TWISTS (SITTING OR STANDING)



Sit upright, feet hip width apart, legs parallel to each other. Lengthen the spine and then turn to the left; grab the backrest with your left hand. Bring your right hand onto your left thigh or the outside of your knee. Keep the legs engaged so the knee doesn't fall inwards.

Inhale and lengthen spine, exhale come deeper into your twist. Keep the core engaged and sternum lifted. Hold for three or more breaths, and then repeat on the other side.

## FORWARD FOLD

Sit on the front edge of your chair. Feet are firmly planted on the ground and hip width apart. You can adjust the width of your stance according to the space you might need in your forward fold. Lengthen your spine and engage your core.

Optional: Reach behind your back and interlace fingers. Pop your chest out and lift your sternum.

Now lean forward as far as possible, your belly wants to reach the frontside of your thighs. If you have the hands interlaced behind your back, you may softly pull upwards with the arms to deepen the stretch in your back. If you have the arms in front, let the fingers slowly wander down your legs and let them rest wherever they may reach in your forward fold.

Hold for a few breaths before rising again. Repeat as often as wanted.



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## PUSH OUT FOR THE SEAT AND LENGTHEN THE SPINE



Grab the side edges of your chair with your hands. Push into it with the heels of your hands. Now straighten the arms and push down, while the spine lengthens, and the crown of your head rises. Hold here, then release. Repeat as wanted.

# OPEN UP THE CHEST AND SHOULDERS

## CHEST OPENING FLOW

Come towards the front edge of your seat. Plant your feet firmly on the ground, keep your legs parallel to each other, feet hip width apart. Sit upright and lengthen your spine.



With the inhale, bring your arms straight up above your head and lengthen your spine, pull the belly button in towards your spine. Engage your core.



With the next exhale, bring the straightened arms towards the front – keep the core engaged and back straight.



Inhale – open arms to the side, pull your shoulder blades together behind your back. Bend elbows to cactus arms if you don't have a lot of space towards the sides.



Exhale – bring your arms behind your back and interlace fingers. If you don't reach to interlace the fingers, just pull as far back as possible.

Inhale – pull shoulder blades together once more and pop your chest to the front.

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Exhale – release arms down to the sides and lengthen spine again.

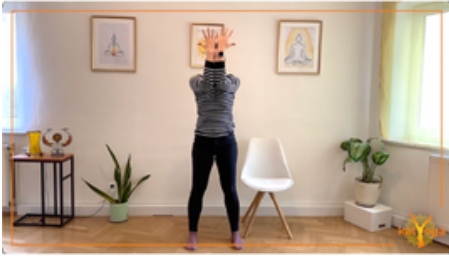
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Repeat as often as you want, at least three times.

# STRENGTHEN YOUR BACK FOR BETTER POSTURE

## CLOSE AND OPEN CACTUS ARMS (SITTING OR STANDING)



No matter if you are standing or sitting, keep your back straight and your core engaged. Belly button pulls in towards your spine.

Bring your arms out to the front, bend your elbows, and bring the forearms close together in front of you. Palms are facing towards you.



With the inhale open the arms towards the sides. Shoulder blades pull together behind your back. Core stays engaged, be careful to not lean backwards. With the next exhale bring the forearms together in the front.

Keep the elbows approximately at the same height as the shoulders, but keep the shoulders away from the ears. Repeat as often as you want and keep the movement aligned with your breath.

## (DON'T) FLIP THE DESK



Sit upright and stabilized on your chair. You can do this at your desk, or just in the air while engaging the same muscles as if you were at your desk.

Bring your palms to the underside of your desk. Hug the elbows into your side body and roll the shoulders back and down.

Engage your core, and at the same time pull your shoulder blades together and downwards. Push upwards with your palms and bring tension to your whole upper body. Hold for three breaths, then release and relax your shoulders and arms. Repeat two or three times. Be mindful to not really lift or flip the desk.

# STRENGTHEN YOUR CORE

## SITTING CRUNCHES

Sit on the front edge of your chair. Lengthen your spine and bring your arms up. You can interlace your fingers and turn the palms upwards, but that is not a necessity, although it makes it easier to engage the core. Have the upper arms right next to your ears and try to keep them there even when moving.

With the exhale round your back and gaze downwards, arms are now parallel to the floor with palms or fingers facing forward. Core is engaged, tailbone is tucked under.

Inhale rise again, palms or fingers facing upwards, spine long, back straight. Repeat for five breaths.



## SITTING DOWN DOG VARIATIONS

Sit on the front edge of the chair, feet on the ground hip width apart. Engage your core and lengthen your spine. Inhale and bring the arms straight up in the air with the upper arms next to your ears. Exhale and lean forward with a straight back and straight arms, just as far as you don't round your back. Keep the spine long and straight. With the next inhale rise again with a straight back. Repeat for five breath cycles.



You can also do this exercise with straight legs for more core engagement and a little stretch in the hamstrings. Push the heels into the ground. Then lift the arms up, lengthen spine, engage core. Exhale lean forward – now you need more core engagement (front and back) because you can't put as much weight into your legs as before. Inhale and rise. Repeat three to five breath circles.





# LEGS AND HIPS

## OPEN UP YOUR HIPS



Sit on the front edge of your seat. Depending on the fabric of your clothing you might need to pull the leg pants up for more range of movement.

Cross your left ankle over your right knee. Keep the left foot engaged and softly pull the knee downwards. ,

If the sensation in your left hip is too intense with the ankle crossing over, you can try to start with the calf on top of the right knee. This way the rotation and opening in your left hip isn't as intense.

Keep the back straight and the left knee to the outside. Hold for a few breaths and repeat on the other side.

## PYRAMID POSE (STANDING)



Stand behind your chair, softly resting your hands on the backrest of the chair. If it's a rolling chair, please be mindful that it doesn't roll away whilst you are leaning on it. Take a smaller step back with your right leg while keeping your hips squared and parallel to the backrest of the chair in front of you.

The right hip crease pulls forwards a little bit, while the left hip crease pulls back. Tuck the bellybutton in towards your spine. Both legs are straight, and the core is engaged. Now lean forward with your upper body, while keeping the back straight. Gaze forward and down as you would into a pond. Ground down through your feet and feel the stretch in the backside of the left leg. Lengthen the spine with every breath, while keeping the core engaged. You can keep your hands on the backrest in front of you or bring the arms to the sides of your body and keep them straight.

Hold for three to five breaths and then rise. Repeat on the other side.

## WARRIOR 1 (STANDING)



Stand behind your chair, softly resting your hands on the backrest of the chair. If it's a rolling chair, please be mindful that it doesn't roll away whilst you are leaning on it. Take a step back with your right leg while keeping your hips squared and parallel to the backrest of the chair in front of you.

The right hip crease pulls forwards a little bit, while the left hip crease pulls pack. Tuck the bellybutton in towards your spine.

Bend your left knee while keeping the right leg straight. The left knee is on top of the left heel; the right heel pushes back and down but doesn't necessarily have to touch the ground. If your left knee travels further than the heel, increase the distance between your feet. Ground down through your feet, while rising up through your crown. Keep breathing and hold the pose for three to five breaths, then repeat on the other side.

## DANCER'S VARIATION (STANDING STRETCH)



This stretch of the front hip is to counteract the long time sitting at your desk.

Stand in the room or behind your chair to maybe help with your balance. Keep your feet close together, lengthen your spine and engage your core. Lift your right foot towards the back, so your heel tries to reach your right buttock.

Now grab the foot with your right hand wherever you might reach – a toe, the foot, the ankle. Now try to stand up straight, pull your belly button in towards your spine, pull down with the right knee and forward with your right hip crease. You should feel the stretch on the frontside of the right thigh and the right hip flexor.

Hold for three to five breaths and then repeat on the other side.

# BREATHING

Try to breathe through your nose - or breathe in through your nose and exhale through the mouth. Try to find your own breathing pattern that's comfortable for you. It's more important that you can relax into your breath right now.

## DEEP BELLY BREATH

Take deep breaths in and out. Deepen the breath and send it down into your belly. Now bring your awareness to your stomach, right above your belly button. Notice the movement of your belly when you inhale – it pushes forward a little bit. With the exhale it sinks back down, closer to your core. You can put your hand onto your belly to feel the movement, as your stomach pushes against the palm with the inhale, and the palm sinks back down with the exhale.

You can do this breathing exercise whenever you feel like it; just a few breaths or for several minutes. Just as it fits your needs.

## FULL YOGIC BREATH

Settle in and take a few deep belly breaths. Once you feel calm, bring your awareness to your ribcage. You can bring your palm onto your sides to feel the movement.

Now try to inhale deep into your chest, pushing the ribs to the outside, opening up the front. Feel your ribcage expanding and pushing against your palms. With the exhale the chest sinks back towards the middle, towards your core. After a few breaths like this, try to combine your belly breath with the chest breath – at first inhale into your belly, notice the stomach pushing forward, and then continue inhaling into your chest, into your ribcage, opening up to the sides. With the exhale bring your ribs in once more, and then the belly closer in towards your core. Repeat a few times, first filling up your belly and then continuing into the ribcage.

## BOX BREATH

Calm down and take a few breaths. Bring your awareness to the four phases of the breath: inhale – then the moment the inhale turns into the exhale – exhale – and the moment the exhale turns back into the inhale.

Then silently start counting out the length of your breaths. Try to exhale as long as you inhale. Once you've established that, bring your awareness to the moment between the inhale and the exhale, and between the exhale and the inhale respectively. Notice the exact moment your breathing pattern turns from the inhale to the exhale, like when a wave in the ocean reaches its highest peak and then ebbs down again. Then lengthen that moment into a short pause of one or two counts. Same with the moment between the exhale and the next inhale. Try to get into a pattern of inhale 4 counts – pause 2 counts – exhale 4 counts – pause 2 counts and repeat for 10 breaths.

To calm down even further you can lengthen the exhale in comparison to the inhale. Come into a 4 – 2 – 6 – 2 pattern, or even a 4 – 2 – 8 – 2 pattern. This is also great to do at night to help yourself calm down and fall asleep.

# MINDFULNESS

## BODY SCAN

Settle into your seat and arrive. Take a few deep breaths until you are completely calm. Now send your awareness to your legs, down into your toes. Maybe wiggle them softly, really feel your toes.

Then send your awareness over your feet, towards the heels, your ankles, up your legs over the knees and thighs up to your hips. Feel if you are tight, if you are holding onto any tension in your legs and try to release that with the next exhale.

Then send your awareness into your fingertips, spread them out, notice your palms, wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, and your shoulders. Relax your shoulders down with the next exhale and release all the tension that might be in your arms.

Then bring your awareness towards your hips on your back body. Let it wander along your spine up towards your shoulder blades, shoulders, neck and back of your head.

Then come to the front body, from your belly up towards your chest, sternum, throat, your jaw and up to your forehead.

Relax and release everything with the next exhale. Feel your body relaxing and releasing all the tension it might hold.

Take a few more breaths before returning to your workday.

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Settle into your seat, take a few deep breaths, and arrive. Really focus inwards, feel your whole body, and keep breathing.

The steps are the same for every muscle group you are targeting. You'll start with the right foot and leg, then continue with the left leg, go on to the right hand and arm, then continue with the left hand and arm.

Fully concentrate onto the body part you are starting with, for example the right foot. Flex your toes, then curl them under. Flex again, and then flex your right foot. Engage the muscles around the foot, further up to the leg, straighten the leg, and now hold the muscle tension for the whole right leg and foot. It is important to really feel the tension in the muscles, which may even cause a bit of discomfort or shaking. After about 5 seconds, let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. Exhale as you do this step.

You should feel the muscles become loose and limp, as the tension flows out. It is important to focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This is the most important part of the whole exercise. After three breaths move on to the next muscle group.

Repeat the tension-relaxation steps. After completing all the muscle groups, take some time to enjoy the deep state of relaxation, before returning to your work.



## ABOUT ME

KatYoga - dein  
Yogastudio am Sagberg  
Mozartgasse 1  
3011 Purkersdorf  
office@katyoga.at

katyoga.at

I've been doing Yoga for decades, as well as having worked in the corporate environment for a dozen years. Finding ways to create balance for myself was always important, and that is something I want to teach my students as well.

Taking a few minutes every day to breathe, relax, stretch, can be more effective than going to the gym once a week for an hour. Try to carve out a little bit of time to reconnect with yourself, your body and your mind.



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