

****A quick routine for All-Over Strength and Stretch.**

This routine is useful in the morning, but will also invigorate you after a dull day.

Prepare your space. Put the short edge of your mat against a wall. This routine should take 15-20 minutes. If you are attending a regular class these poses should all be familiar. You can supplement my notes by using 'Iyengar – The Path To Holistic Health' or 'Iyengar Yoga for Beginners', books available through my Yoga Kit For Sale page.

The focus is on **extension**, not tension. As you hold the poses, use your breath to release the tension but keep the shape you have created. This takes time and practice, but watch for signs that you are forcing the pose, like tight shoulders or jaw, hard face or eyes, gripping around your diaphragm, or holding your breath. Keep a slow, steady rhythm of breath and movement throughout.

N.B. You need to be fit and healthy for this routine. If you have any condition, acute or chronic, see your doctor. If you have stiffness in your neck and shoulders, do a routine for that before attempting this routine.

- To begin with, face the wall (or a door) with your feet about 8 inches away. Without leaning your body on the wall, stretch your arms up and press your hands into the wall, keeping your ears between your arms, nose just on the wall. Working from your feet, feel your body stretch and align itself. Press your thighs back, press your tailbone towards the wall and shoulder blades in, squeezing your outer elbows towards each other, and stretching the palms and fingers up. Keep your breathing soft and your jaw relaxed. With each exhalation, gently extend your body more, feeling all your joints become more spacious and your limbs and trunk lengthening, creeping your fingers up the wall if you can. Softly release the pose.
- **TADASANA** - turn round and face the other end of your mat. With your buttocks against the wall and heels an inch or two away from the wall, feet slightly apart, lift your chest, roll your shoulders back and feel your upper back and the back of your head touching the wall. Inhale, lifting your chest more and expanding your rib cage. Straighten your arms and fingers; stretch them down the wall until you can feel their whole length, right to your little fingers, against the wall. Roll your shoulders back more, lengthen your lower back down the wall, keep breathing smoothly releasing muscle tension with each breath until the pose 'holds itself'.
- Keeping your pose steady, inhale and lift your arms straight forwards and up, taking your thumbs to the wall above your head, palms facing. Stretch your whole body and slowly bring your hands back down as you exhale. Repeat again, this time lifting your kneecaps and squeezing your thighs back towards the wall as you stretch up. Slowly bring your hands back down, keeping the lift and extension of your body as you do so. For the third stretch, link your fingers well in front of you, turn your hands over and press your palms away, straightening your arms. Lift up a third time, and your little fingers should find the wall above your head. Breathe steadily and quietly, slowly bringing your arms back down without 'dropping' your chest or sagging your shoulders.

- Now take a step forward away from the wall, bring your feet together, big toes and inner heels touching. Repeat the standing pose, as if the wall was still there, arms stretching down. Allow your weight to settle evenly over your inner heels and outer heels, as well as your big toe joints. Take a few moments to feel the changes in the alignment of your posture, to allow your body to stand straight and tall without strain, chest lifted and shoulders back, as you breathe gently.
- **ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA** - put your hands down about 12" from the front of your mat, little fingers near the outer edges, spread your fingers well and press your hands down. Step your feet back towards the wall, coming up off your heels and taking the weight across from the balls of your feet to your little toes. Straighten your legs and open the backs of your knees. Lock your elbows and straighten your arms. Your head will come between your arms, and you will be looking towards your ankles. Rest your heels on the wall if that feels comfortable. Press your thighs up and back towards the wall. Notice how your chest moves towards your legs as you do this, and use your hands and arms to assist that movement, stretching through your elbows and armpits, and drawing your shoulders up your back, away from your ears. Lift your buttock bones up high and enjoy the stretch – it should feel comfortably energizing. Come down onto your hands and knees, and sit on your heels for a few moments. Put your hands back where they were and repeat the pose twice more, coming back to sitting on your heels between each pose.
- Come back to sitting on your heels, feet and knees together. If your feet or ankles are stiff, put a folded blanket under them on your mat for this next pose.
- **BADDHA HASTASANA** - link your fingers closely and put your hands on your head. Take your elbows slightly back and feel your chest lift. (Tuck your tailbone down towards your heels, and keep checking to see it has stayed down through this sequence.)
- Keeping your elbows back, turn your hands over so your palms are facing the ceiling. Raise your arms straight up, allowing your side ribs to slowly stretch and open.
- Bring your hands down close to your head again, keeping your elbows back, opening and stretching your palms and fingers.
- Repeat twice more, finally bringing your hands back down onto your knees to allow your arms, hands and fingers to rest.
- **DANDASANA** - sit on a block with your legs stretched forward. To support your lower back and prevent it from sagging, put your fingertips on the floor either side of your hips, elbows slightly bent, shoulder blades tucked in.
- Stretch your legs straight out, feet together, pressing the backs of your knees towards the floor. Notice what your feet are doing. Do your toes point straight up? Do the outer edges of your feet swing away from you? It is hard to keep pressing your legs down and lifting your trunk up at the same time? Relax your legs for a few moments, and then start again with your fingertips pressing down, chest lifting, legs extending, thighs pressing down, stretching your heels

away from you. If you find this difficult, turn round and push your feet into the wall to help you straighten your legs and your feet. Repeat three times then cross your legs. (Sit on two blocks if it's more comfortable.)

- **PARSVA SUKHASANA** - place your right hand outside your left knee and your left hand round the back of your waist. Turn your trunk to the left, breathing steadily, keeping your head in line with your chest and your shoulders level, so you are turning your trunk and not your neck.
 - Come back to the centre and repeat to the right. Think of a cork-screw motion, lifting your spine up as you turn.
 - Change the cross of your legs. Repeat the twist to the left and right once more. Now stretch your legs forward again and remove the block.
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- **SAVASANA** – sitting in the middle of your mat with your legs bent, feet at one end, roll slowly down until you are lying on your mat, legs still bent. Remember the shape of your spine and shoulders when you stood against the wall at the beginning. The floor is doing the same thing for you, but now you can relax. Roll your shoulders down, take the backs of your hands to the floor. Stretch your legs away and let your feet fall apart. Close your eyes, and focus on your natural, steady breathing for the final minutes. To come up, bend your knees, roll over onto one side and push yourself up to sitting.

This sequence helps to relieve your body of accumulated stress. It calms your brain and nervous system and helps develop confidence. Your feet, knees and legs are invigorated; your hips, spine and shoulders are stretched. Finally, your chest is opened and your spine energized, leaving your body and mind feeling relaxed and refreshed for the day.

