

# Yoga in the Office

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Office work in the 21st century can be extremely stressful. Executives today put in more than the allotted eight hours a day. Constantly on the phone, in front of the computer screen or on their way to client meetings, they don't have the opportunity to get the kinks out of their system. For those who work in front of computers for long periods at a time, there is a chance that they may develop sore muscles, backaches and carpal tunnel syndrome. Racing about the city to meet clients, can be tiring with the heat, traffic jams and lack of rest. When we sit focussed for long periods at a time, it tends to strain the eyes and mind, leading to weariness. Tired minds, tired bodies and tired spirits can lead to frustration, short tempers and mistakes.

Many companies worldwide have been investigating ways to help their employees cope with all these problems but there are a few who are turning to a new trend, office yoga. Their ultimate aim is to help their employees increase their productivity ratings as well as cultivate job satisfaction; to improve their focus and set the creative juices flowing and to reduce accidents from happening on the job especially work that is repetitious and monotonous. With yoga, this

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becomes possible because yoga is not just a form of exercise – it is a practice that is therapeutic on three levels, that is, the body, mind and spirit. What is also beneficial about the practice of yoga is the fact that it can be practiced as a group, thus developing a sense of team spirit and increased morale from the participants. This can be accomplished with the help of a trained yoga instructor.

For the single practitioner of office yoga however, there are certain *asanas* (yoga poses), that can be adapted for practice using the desk and chair as a prop. If there is a place in the office where you can in privacy, practice a few floor based *asana*, go ahead and do that. The point is to loosen up and get rid of the negativity that is beginning to build within. Yoga breathing exercises can also be very beneficial to the process of de-stressing as well as renewing the mind and re-energizing the spirit.

A good breathing exercise to start with is the *Anuloma Viloma* or the alternate nostril breathing. This technique is practiced using a 2:8:4 ratio. Raise your right hand and place your right thumb over your right nostril. Make sure that your first and second index fingers are tucked in against your palm. When you have closed your right nostril with your thumb, inhale through your left nostril. Take a full breath for

two counts. Without releasing your right nostril, place your third index finger over your left nostril. With both nostrils covered, hold your breath for eight counts. Release your right thumb from your right nostril, exhaling for four counts. Repeat the exercise by inhaling through the right nostril this time. You can increase the ratio of the counts as you improve in the exercise. This exercise helps to relax the practitioner and encourages creative thinking.

When you sit in front of a computer for long periods at a time, your eyes can get affected. If you are experiencing discomfort in your eyes, such as dry or watery eyes, blurred vision or a burning sensation, remove the tension with eye exercises. Ideally, when sitting in front of the computer, you should give your eyes a break for about five minutes every hour. During that time try these yoga eye *asanas* to relieve the tension. When you perform these exercises keep your head still and move only your eyes. Your breathing should be at a normal pace.

First look upwards as far as your eyes can go, then look downwards. Repeat these exercises a couple of times. Make sure you blink your eyes a few times after doing the exercise. Next look up to the right hand top corner of a wall. Now look diagonally downwards to the left to the bottom corner of the wall. Again, you should perform this exercise a few times. Blink your eyes. Now reverse the direction of the exercise so that you are looking at the left hand top corner of the wall and then the bottom right hand corner of the wall. When you finish, blink your eyes again.

Imagine a clock, about the size of an empty wall in front of you. Keeping this image in your mind, lift your eyes to twelve o'clock position and circle around in a clockwise direction. Repeat the exercise a couple of times slowly. Now increase the pace of the exercise for the same number of rotations. Once you have finished repeat the entire exercise but in an anti-clockwise direction this time. The next is the palming exercise. This one is to help relax and sooth the eyes. Stating seated, rub your palms together to warm and energize them. Cover your eyes with your palms and take long deep breaths. This is also a good exercise to use to help enter into a meditative state.

Now while working on a computer, one tends to use their hands a lot. Many computer users have suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome from using the keyboard a lot. Yoga has helped people who have been suffering from this syndrome by easing their discomfort and increasing their strength and flexibility in their hands. One of the exercises you can try is to place your palms and fingers together in prayer position. Stretch your fingers and bend them. This is the *Anjali Mudra*. If possible, repeat this exercise but by placing your hands behind your back.

Another exercise you can perform to loosen your wrists and increase your range of motion is the wrist bending exercise. Raise your arm to shoulder level in front of you. Ensure that your arm is parallel to the floor. Turn your palm downward at the wrist, keeping your fingers and thumbs together, exhaling as you complete the motion. Now reverse the direction of your hand, raising your palm and fingers upward. Inhale as you complete this motion. Pay attention to your breathing while you do this exercise a few times. Repeat this exercise with your other hand. When you are ready you can do this exercise with both hands at the same time.

If you do have problems with your hands and practise yoga, try to avoid exercises that place increased pressure on your wrists. Build your ability gradually. Your wrists are connected to your shoulders and the following exercises should help you loosen not only your wrists (indirectly) but your shoulders as well. The *Dandasana* or Staff pose is a simple exercise that can be done seated on a chair. Sit on your chair, ensuring that your posture is correct. While pressing your hands into the seat of your chair, press your shoulder blades into the back of the chair. Now move your shoulders backwards and downwards. Repeat this exercise a few times.

While you are seated behind a desk and work long hours, your back and shoulders can feel stiff and sore. Prolonged hours in this position can hurt your posture. When you are in pain, it can lead to irritability and reduce your concentration. One way to overcome this is to leave your desk and walk around a bit to stretch your muscles a bit. An alternative to this is a series of exercises to counter or prevent this situation.

Try the Mountain pose, *Tadasana*, to help stretch the full length of your body and limber up a bit. It can also help maintain your posture and sense of balance. This exercise is performed standing up and if you are doing this for the first time you can use the wall as a prop to ensure that your body is properly aligned. Stand with your feet together with your hands placed at your sides. Raise your toes and spread them open. While they are spread open place them back on the floor. Make sure your heels, the outsides of your feet, the balls of your feet and toes are all touching the floor. Tilting your pubic bone forward, raise your chest up and out a little. Tuck in your stomach as well. Now raise your head so that your crown is reaching towards the ceiling and lengthen your neck. Push the floor with your feet raising your legs, the calves and the thighs. Make sure you breathe during the exercise.

From *Tadasana*, you can move into *Urdhva Hastasana*, the raised arms pose. Staying in the standing position,

raise your hands upwards. Press your palms together and keeping your arms straight, lift your eyes towards your thumbs. Remember to keep your shoulders down. To create a repetition, lower your arms and return to *Tadasana* and repeat the exercise.

The next posture is a seated one. Called *Vajrasana* or the Diamond posture, you start by sitting on the ground with your legs stretched out. Keep your hands at your sides. From here you fold your left leg backwards, with your toes as your balance point and your heel supporting your buttocks. Now you do the same with your right leg. Make sure your toes are touching and pull your heels apart so that your buttocks are no longer resting on them. Leave your hands resting upon your knees. Ensure that your spine, neck and head are properly aligned. Now reverse your movement until you are in the sitting position again with your hands at your sides. Try to increase your time in maintaining the posture when you practise it.

Flow from the *Vajrasana* to the *Bharadvajasana* which is the Seated Side Twist. Once you are in Diamond posture, instead of returning to the sitting posture, simply slide your body off your heels towards the left, so that your left buttock is on the floor and your right buttock is resting on your left foot. Ensure that your left foot is resting upon the arch of your right foot. Now place your left hand on the floor to the side and a little behind your left hip, while placing your right hand on the outside of your left thigh. Lengthen your spine while inhaling. Maintain the length of the spine, exhale and twist to your left. Repeat the exercise a few times. Remember to stay within your comfort region during this exercise. When you are ready, you can increase your pace. Pay attention to your breathing as well. Now repeat the exercise again but this time for the right side.

All these are exercises that can be practised safely in the office. There are many more but it is always advisable to start these with a yoga instructor first. Choose your own order of exercises for your practise but always pay attention to your breathing and posture.

The exercises will help to loosen and relax your muscles, decreasing the tension and pain within. Once this happens, you will be able to maintain an even minded temperament. As a way of life, yoga can be practised anywhere, at anytime. Ease your mental and physical stresses so that tough days don't leave you feeling blue. Just find a place that is quiet and private where you can be alone for short periods of time. Ensure that your cell phones are turned off so that you are not distracted. Don't forget to add meditation to your yoga regimen. It is a wonderful way to free your mind and centre yourself. The point is to re-focus, re-energize and re-new so make office yoga a part of your daily work routine. **YL**

