My first experience with Yoga was an eye opener… no mats or holding of poses – how could this be yoga? It was sometimes wild and filled with abandon, sometimes quiet and still, but students left class with a sense of peace, elation, and shared community. The goal of yoga is to connect body, mind and spirit – to loosen worries that cloud emotions and free overburdened psyches. The breath and movement form a bridge to achieve this goal, so why not do it with music, swinging arms, swaying hips and carefree laughter? Yoga Dance uses the joy of movement to tone muscles, build flexibility, endurance and cardiovascular fitness.

I was initially re-introduced to yoga at a crucial time. As a teacher, parent of pre-adolescent girls, and caregiver to parents with arthritis, Parkinson’s, and dementia, my life seemed hectic. I was initially re-introduced to yoga through Joy. Come join me in the dance!

Breathing through the Six Movements of the Spine

Many people have breathing difficulty because of a tendency to slump. By rounding shoulders and drawing ribs toward the pelvis, there is less space for the diaphragm to expand. This is common not only for the physically challenged, but among the general population, especially with so much time spent on computers, in cars and watching TV. The following exercises help strengthen the core and give awareness to breath to de-stress and relax.

1. Sitting tall with feet grounded on the floor, start by counting three full breaths. Focus on extending the exhalation, relaxing on the inhalation.

2. First two movements: forward flexion and extension. Extending hands out to your side, exhale as you cross hands on opposite knees, bow chin to chest, round the shoulders. Inhale as you bring hands back to sides and toward the back of the chair, lift the heart, look gently upward, squeeze the shoulder blades together. Repeat 3 times.

3. Second two movements: side flexion. Extend hands by sides. Inhale as you lift one arm up, bend to the opposite side (you can support yourself with other hand on the side of the chair), exhale as you bring arm back down to your side. Switch sides. Repeat 3 times.

4. Third two movements: twisting. Sit tall. Inhale. Turn to the right. Place left hand on the knee, right hand by the back of the chair, and exhale as you return to center. Inhale and turn to the other side. Repeat 3 times.

5. Complete the practice by closing the eyes, breathing fully and observing how your body feels.

Many people have breathing difficulty because of a tendency to slump. By rounding shoulders and drawing ribs toward the pelvis, there is less space for the diaphragm to expand. This is common not only for the physically challenged, but among the general population, especially with so much time spent on computers, in cars and watching TV. The following exercises help strengthen the core and give awareness to breath to de-stress and relax.

1. Sitting tall with feet grounded on the floor, start by counting three full breaths. Focus on extending the exhalation, relaxing on the inhalation.

2. First two movements: forward flexion and extension. Extending hands out to your side, exhale as you cross hands on opposite knees, bow chin to chest, round the shoulders. Inhale as you bring hands back to sides and toward the back of the chair, lift the heart, look gently upward, squeeze the shoulder blades together. Repeat 3 times.

3. Second two movements: side flexion. Extend hands by sides. Inhale as you lift one arm up, bend to the opposite side (you can support yourself with other hand on the side of the chair), exhale as you bring arm back down to your side. Switch sides. Repeat 3 times.

4. Third two movements: twisting. Sit tall. Inhale. Turn to the right. Place left hand on the knee, right hand by the back of the chair, and exhale as you return to center. Inhale and turn to the other side. Repeat 3 times.

5. Complete the practice by closing the eyes, breathing fully and observing how your body feels.

Many people have breathing difficulty because of a tendency to slump. By rounding shoulders and drawing ribs toward the pelvis, there is less space for the diaphragm to expand. This is common not only for the physically challenged, but among the general population, especially with so much time spent on computers, in cars and watching TV. The following exercises help strengthen the core and give awareness to breath to de-stress and relax.

1. Sitting tall with feet grounded on the floor, start by counting three full breaths. Focus on extending the exhalation, relaxing on the inhalation.

2. First two movements: forward flexion and extension. Extending hands out to your side, exhale as you cross hands on opposite knees, bow chin to chest, round the shoulders. Inhale as you bring hands back to sides and toward the back of the chair, lift the heart, look gently upward, squeeze the shoulder blades together. Repeat 3 times.

3. Second two movements: side flexion. Extend hands by sides. Inhale as you lift one arm up, bend to the opposite side (you can support yourself with other hand on the side of the chair), exhale as you bring arm back down to your side. Switch sides. Repeat 3 times.

4. Third two movements: twisting. Sit tall. Inhale. Turn to the right. Place left hand on the knee, right hand by the back of the chair, and exhale as you return to center. Inhale and turn to the other side. Repeat 3 times.

5. Complete the practice by closing the eyes, breathing fully and observing how your body feels.