Chair Yoga for Your Mind, Body and Spirit

For years, yoga advocates have eagerly shared their thoughts about the benefits of this type of exercise. However, you don’t have to just take your neighbor’s word for it. These first-person anecdotes are endorsed by several comprehensive research studies. This research shows that a regular yoga routine has a positive effect on a person’s mind, body and spirit. This is particularly encouraging for cancer patients who may have limited energy to dedicate to exercise.

A cancer diagnosis and the prospect of a lengthy treatment can cause stress, depression and anxiety. Cancer treatment produces symptoms that may affect your daily activities and the quality of your life. Yoga can help.

Uncontrolled stress and anxiety may affect your perception of pain, as well as your heart rate and blood pressure. Yoga’s guided breathing and gentle movements can help you regulate your stress cycles and reduce your anxiety, which, in turn, helps manage your response to pain, reduce your heart rate and lower your blood pressure.

Chair yoga adapts traditional yoga poses so you can do them while sitting in a chair. Chair yoga is a moderate exercise that promotes flexibility and strength. It also encompasses the beneficial guided breathing and gentle movement that can help you manage your stress. The following poses can be done at home or in a group setting, which produces yet another benefit. A yoga community can quickly grow into a support group you can count on throughout your journey to survivorship.

It is important for you to talk with your doctor before beginning a new exercise routine. Also, remember:

- If a pose hurts or you lose energy during the routine, stop and try again later.
- Chair yoga is meant to be gentle exercise to help you gain flexibility and strength, and manage your stress and anxiety.

(continued on the reverse)

Join a Yoga Community at Swedish

Yoga instructors at Swedish offer a variety of yoga classes in multiple locations. Talk with your doctor about whether yoga may help you on your journey to survivorship. Go to www.swedish.org/classes for more information.
Chair Yoga Poses

The following 10 poses are done one after another in the sequence they are presented. Begin by sitting in a chair with your spine very straight and your feet flat on the floor.

1. **Chair Cat-Cow Stretch.** Slowly inhale and arch your back while dropping your shoulders (cow position). Slowly exhale while rounding your spine. Let your shoulders and head come forward (cat position). Repeat the full cycle for five breaths (inhale and exhale).

2. **Chair Raised Hands.** After completing your fifth Chair Cat-Cow Stretch, inhale and raise your left arm toward the ceiling with your palm facing in. Keep your feet flat on the floor. As you continue to reach upwards, let your shoulder blade slide down your back. Exhale slowly and lower your left arm. Inhale as you slowly raise your right arm toward the ceiling with your palm facing in. Exhale and slowly lower your right arm. Continue with the Chair Forward Pose.

3. **Chair Forward Bend.** Inhale and raise both arms with your palms facing. Slowly exhale, lower your arms and bend forward over your legs. Let your hands rest on a chair in front of you. Let your head hang. For more stretch, continue to bend forward until your hands rest on the floor. Let your head hang. Slowly inhale, return to a sitting position and raise your arms over your head again. Repeat the Chair Raised Hands followed by the Chair Forward Bend five times. After the fifth time, move on to the Chair Extended Side Angle Pose.

4. **Chair Extended Side Angle.** Slowly inhale while raising your right arm toward the ceiling with your palm facing in. Point your fingertips to the ceiling. Slowly exhale and bend to the left. Hold this pose, breathing slowly several times, before exhalation and bringing your left arm down to your side. Slowly repeat five times, alternating arms.

5. **Chair Pigeon.** After completing the Chair Extended Side Angle, bring your right ankle up and rest it on your left thigh. Keep your knee in a straight line with your ankle as much as possible. Hold this pose for three to five breaths. For a stronger stretch bend forward slightly. Repeat with your left leg.

6. **Chair Eagle.** Cross your legs with your right thigh over your left thigh. Wrap your right foot around your left calf as far as possible. Cross your left arm over your right arm at the elbow. Lift your elbows while dropping your shoulders away from your ears. Hold this pose for three to five breaths. Lower your right foot to the floor and continue with the Chair Spinal Twist.

7. **Chair Spinal Twist.** Slowly inhale and lengthen your spine. Slowly exhale while twisting your torso toward the left. Hold the arm or seat of the chair. Inhale as you return to a straight spine position. Repeat the twist for five breaths. Change direction and repeat the Spinal Twist to the right for five times.

8. **Chair Warrior Poses:**
   a. **Chair Warrior I.** After completing the Chair Spinal Twist, move to the edge of the chair and gently move your left leg behind you. Try to place the sole of your left foot flat on the floor. Raise your arms to the ceiling as you inhale. Hold for three breaths. Move on to Chair Warrior II.
   b. **Chair Warrior II.** After completing the Chair Warrior I pose, slowly inhale while turning your body to the right. Your right leg is bent at the knee and pointing to the right. Your left leg is behind you to the left as straight as possible. Exhale and open your arms, so your right arm is over your right leg and your left arm is back over your left leg. Gaze out over your right fingertips and hold for three breaths. Move on to Chair Warrior II.