

Strike a yoga pose to strike down stress

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When hyperventilating sometimes seems the only option to stress, Petri Brill has a healthier suggestion: yoga.

"Yoga is not just a practice of poses, but of your breath work," says Brill, a Dallas certified yoga instructor. "The practice of slow, controlled, rhythmic breathing helps bring down blood pressure, rest the heart, clear the mind, energize the body and relax the muscles. Combine this with some relaxing yoga poses, and peace and serenity are just around the corner.

We asked her for poses to help ease stress. Yes, poses even those of us with the flexibility of a pencil can do. Here are five: Do one or two or all five poses for a deep inhale and exhale of a minute or two. Or longer.

Or, as she puts it, "You never want to stay and struggle in a pose. Feel the benefits; you don't want to feel like you're going to pass out or rip in half."

1) Bridge Pose. This is designed to calm the brain, rejuvenate tired legs and relieve spinal tension.

To do it: Lie on your back with your feet hip-width and flat on the ground. Press down with your feet; lift your glutes, hips, pelvis and back off the ground. Keeping your arms flat, with your shoulders on the floor, lock your fingers under your glutes. Inhale and exhale.

2) Standing Forward Bend. This stretches tight hamstrings and relieves

tension in the hips and lower back.

To do it: Stand straight, feet hip-distance apart. Exhale and bend, bringing the crown of your head toward the ground. You're far enough when your hamstrings are stretched, but not tight. Put your right hand on your left elbow; release and switch.

3) Seated Spinal Twist. This helps aid digestion and opens up the spine to release tightness and tension.

To do it: Sit comfortably cross-legged. Inhale, bringing arms overhead and pressing palms together. As you exhale, twist to your left. Reach your left hand behind your back to the ground. Put your right hand on the outside of your left knee. Use it to leverage the twist to your left, taking your gaze over your left shoulder. Repeat on the right side.

4) Salutation seal. This helps reduce anxiety and stress, calms the brain and clears the mind.

To do it: Sit cross-legged. Relax shoulders back and down. Draw chin slightly toward chest. Bring palms together. Take 10 deep, rhythmic inhales and exhales.

5) Seated forward bend. This brings energy to the body, improves digestion and helps insomnia.

To do it: Sit on the floor, legs extended. As you inhale, bring your arms overhead. As you exhale, reach up and out, slowly folding over your legs. Hold the position, making sure your shoulders and neck are relaxed. Deeply inhale and exhale a few times. Inhale, slowly rising up to sitting position.

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