

# Stress Management: Using Yoga to Relax

There are lots of healthy benefits from doing yoga. Yoga stretches or \*poses\* as they're called are great for deep stretching \*and\* deep breathing.

And some people do yoga as meditation. But many people just do yoga because it makes them feel great and helps reduce stress.

But you need to be careful when you start doing yoga, and stop if you have any pain. Yoga poses might be a \*little\* uncomfortable, but they should never be painful.

To make sure you're doing your poses the right way, try a beginning yoga class or watch a DVD.

If you want to give yoga a try, you can start with two simple poses. The \*puppy pose\* and the \*cat-cow pose\* are two great stretches to get you on your way with yoga. Here's how you do them.

Puppy pose is a good spine stretch: Start out on a mat or carpet on your hands and knees. Align your body so that your shoulders are directly above your wrists, and your hips are in line with your knees. Breathe in.

Breathe out, then move your hands out in front of you a little bit, and move your buttocks back about halfway to your heels. Your arms should be pressing forward, with just your hands touching the floor.

Next, drop your forehead down to the mat or carpet, and relax your neck. Press your hands down and forward into the floor, and feel the stretch in your arms. At the same time, move your hips back toward your heels.

Then bring your buttocks to rest on your heels. In this position, breathe normally and feel the stretch in your spine. Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Relax.

Now, cat-cow pose also helps your spine be more flexible. If you have neck problems or an injury, keep your neck in the original position—in line with your torso—instead of moving it with your spine. And stop if you have pain.

As you breathe out, round your spine upward like a cat. Keep your knees and shoulders in place, but allow your head to bow toward the floor. Try not to let your chin fall to your chest.

As you breathe in, arch your back, lifting up your chest and sit bones—the bones in your buttocks that you can feel when you sit on a hard chair.

When you do this, your belly will naturally move toward the floor. Your head comes up so that your gaze is straight in front of you, not looking up.

Repeat the sequence 10 to 20 times. Make sure to do the movements as you breathe in and out.

So, do these yoga poses to start. And when you're ready, learn a few more. And enjoy these good, relaxing stretches anytime you feel stressed.