

Yoga for a healthy back

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I've had back pain on and off since I was a teenager. It gets worse when I'm under stress or spend long hours sitting. I've found relief from back pain through the regular practice of yoga. Because I work with many yoga students and psychotherapy patients who suffer from back pain, I've developed a yoga workshop called **Yoga for a Healthy Back**, in which I teach a sequence designed to release tension and create healthy alignment of the hips and back.

Try the following yoga pose variations to ward off back pain. The Sanskrit name of the pose is "Sukhasana," which translates to "Happy Pose." It will help you release the outer hips while balancing and stretching the quadratus lumborum (QL) muscles that connect each side of the back of the ileum to the lumbar spine and lower back ribs. Some experts say that imbalance between the left and right QL muscles may be the most overlooked source of low back pain.

Start sitting with your buttocks elevated on the front edge of a folded blanket and your legs extended forward.

Bend your right knee outward and place your right foot under your left knee. Bend your left knee outward and place your left foot under the right knee. Align your knees directly above your feet. Use your hands to move each buttock back to enable you to sit as far forward on your sitting bones as possible. (You will be in a cross-legged position - see photo at right.)

Stretch your arms up, bend forward and place your fingertips down onto a support such as a yoga block or footstool. Stretch the chest and arms forward. Notice how the back of the sitting bones tends to lift. Press the back buttocks down as you bend forward. Remain in this position for a minute and then sit upright. (Second photo)

Turn your torso to the right and face your right knee without shifting your sitting posture. Turn your navel to the right and keep the sides of your trunk straight as you stretch forward and place your fingertips down onto a block or other support. Notice how the left buttock tends to rise up. Keep pressing it down firmly into the blanket. Straighten the sides of the trunk by drawing the right side ribs directly in toward the spine, elongating equally through both sides of your trunk. Remain in this position for a minute, noticing where you feel the stretch most intensely and breathing through the intensity to help it release. (Third photo)



Sit upright and repeat step 4, turning to the left and reversing all the left-right directions.

Extend legs forward and repeat steps 2 - 5, bringing the left foot in first to reverse the cross of the legs.

Yoga is not merely another form of physical therapy. B.K.S. Iyengar, the living master from whom my teachers and I have learned almost everything we know about yoga said: ***“The aim and culmination of yoga is the sight of the soul, but it has a lot of side effects, which are health, happiness, peace and poise.”***