



# CERTIFICATE IN THE TEACHING OF CHAIR YOGA

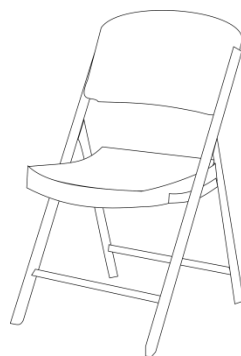


## CHAIR YOGA

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## Overview

This course is aimed at experienced yoga teachers who are looking to hold specially adapted, chair-based yoga sessions that are accessible to people with mixed mobility.

We will explore the adaptations and modifications needed to make yoga accessible to those with physical limitations and the implications for teaching this special demographic.

The course will provide you with the knowledge and information needed as an existing yoga teacher to construct and teach an effective chair-based yoga class and how specially tailored chair-based sessions can be incorporated into your existing timetable.

In this course we will look at:

- Chair yoga at a glance
- The evolution of yoga
- The UK's changing population
- Making yoga accessible
- Designing a chair yoga class
- Chair yoga postures
- Contraindications
- Evidence based research on the effectiveness of chair based yoga
- Teaching chair yoga as business, safety, the teaching environment and teacher ethics

Benefits of learning include:

- Adapting your classes for a growing demographic.
- Teach exclusive chair-based classes for seniors or people with physical limitations and expand your earning potential.
- Career progression

### Learner Requirements

This course is for experienced, certified yoga teachers who are qualified to level 3/4 and ideally currently teaching regular yoga sessions. It is part of Freestyle Yoga Modular learning and is designed to up-skill instructors in specific niches and areas of expertise. The course is for those who are looking to expand their knowledge regarding specially adapted yoga classes that are practised from a seated or supported position via the use of a chair. The Level 3 Certificate In Teaching Exercise To Older Adults is recommended to reinforce your understanding of teaching this special demographic.

## Chair Yoga at a Glance

Chair fitness classes have gained in popularity quite significantly in recent years. The UK's increasing older population is set to grow even further in the coming years, with the 65+ demographic set to make up 27% of the total population by 2072. This has meant that demand for classes is not only currently at an all-time high, but it is set to increase.

Chair yoga is a specially adapted yoga class that takes the philosophy of yoga and its practice to either a seated position, or standing with the assistance of a chair for support. It is particularly suited to those who are ordinarily unable to take part in a regular yoga session due to some kind of physical limitation and is targeted towards those who:

- Have very limited mobility or have trouble getting up and down from the floor
- Have a disability
- Are older participants/seniors who may suffer from age related mobility issues
- Have joint disease or joint replacements
- Are unsteady and at risk of falling
- Have an injury or are recovering from illness
- Are sedentary, perhaps very unfit and want to start yoga from a more supported position

The chair provides an excellent foundation for many yoga poses because the participant is fully supported. Simple modifications can make the class accessible to most people. Chair yoga has been scientifically proven to improve general mobility, strength, flexibility, balance and self-confidence, as well as creating an improved overall sense of wellbeing, reducing anxiety and an individual's fear of falling.

Chair yoga classes are structured in the normal way and comprise:

- Mobility warm up
- A series of exercises aimed at improving strength, flexibility, balance and general mobility with the appropriate counter poses
- Breathing exercises (e.g. Pranayama)
- Relaxation and meditation

The mental health benefits of partaking in any activity are also widely recognised. An individual's sense of wellbeing is dependent on various factors and the needs of one individual may not be the same as someone else's. Chair yoga offers the opportunity for a specific demographic to participate in society in a way that would otherwise be inaccessible. Simply being social and the ability to physically engage in an activity with other people, maybe all the individual requires.

## The Evolution of Yoga

Yoga has a history that spans some 5,000 years and for most of this time, was solely a philosophical and spiritual practice.

It wasn't until thousands of years after the Rig Veda (the oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text) and centuries after Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, that yoga became a physical practice. Hatha Yoga was the first form of yoga to emphasise the physical body, somewhere between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Yoga wasn't really discovered by the West until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the initial interest was largely around yoga's philosophical foundations, rather than a physical practice. It was over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that yoga evolved into the modern practice many people know today.

Whilst many styles maintain the spiritual elements, other forms of yoga focus mainly on physical postures which are performed primarily for their fitness benefits, very often in combination with various breathing techniques. It is not unusual for all the fitness, spiritual and breathing elements to be combined into one single practice.

As people become more aware of the fitness benefits of yoga, more and more people are partaking in regular sessions to improve their physical fitness. Postures to improve muscular strength, flexibility, balance and stability are performed, with some people engaging in sessions that comprise dynamic flowing sequences to challenge the heart and improve cardio vascular fitness.

Yoga is a very personal thing and different people get different things out of it. Some prefer to 'work out' their bodies, whilst others enjoy a slower practice and get more out of the accompanied mindfulness.

The remedial and therapeutic benefits of yoga are widely known and for those with mobility issues, regular, specially adapted chair yoga sessions to gently improve mobility, have been scientifically proven to be of great benefit.

When Patanjali first used the term "asana" it had a very different meaning to what it does today. The direct translation of the Sanskrit term being "a comfortable seat". From this position, practitioners sought to use the breath and deep meditation to restore the spirit to absolute purity.

“ Yoga as an ancient, spiritual practice that was performed seated thousands of years ago has evolved over centuries into a physical practice. There is a sort of irony in the fact that as it continues to evolve, we are taking yoga, the philosophy and its practice, back to a seated position ”

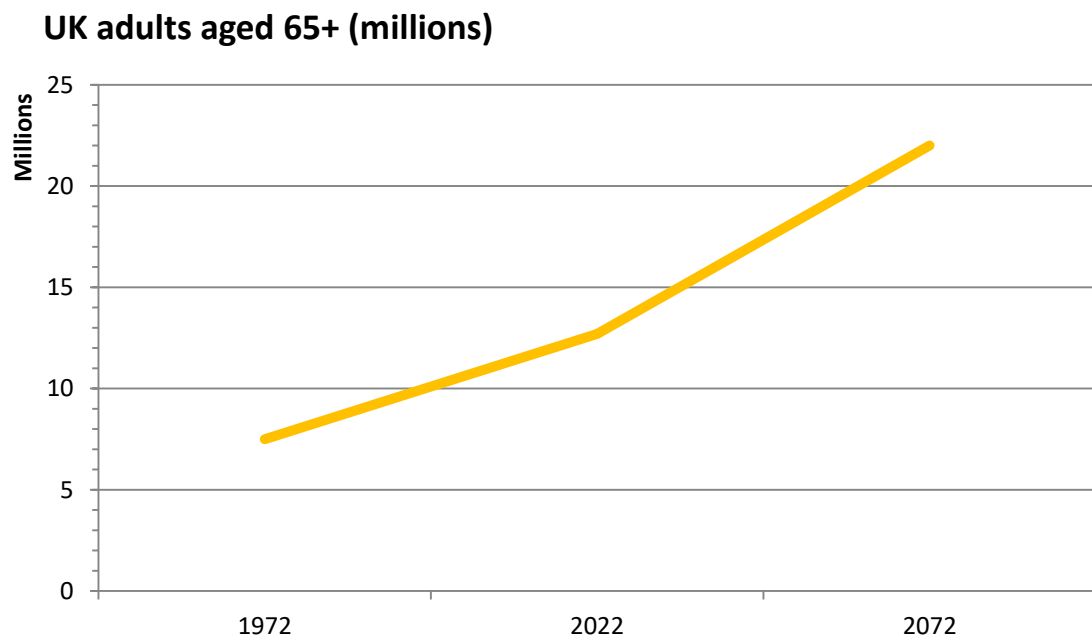
## A Changing Population

As yoga becomes more physical and its fitness benefits are recognised, there will always be those who would benefit from its practice, but are unable to do so due to some form of physical limitation. As teachers we can look at different ways of introducing some kind of yoga practice to those individuals who would ordinarily not attend because their physical limitations are such that even our normal, go to modifications are not suitable.

### Age

The UK has an ageing population. After World War II, a boom in the birth rate gave rise to those born between 1946 and 1964 being nicknamed the “Baby Boomer” generation. Baby Boomers will represent all adults aged over 65 and up to the age of 84, by the end of the 2020’s.

According to the Office of National Statistics, there were 12.7 million people aged 65 and over in the UK in 2021, making up 19% of the UK’s total population. This is set to increase to over 22 million people or 27% of the population by 2072. In contrast, just 50 years ago in 1972, 7.5 million adults over the age of 65 made up just 13% of the population.



Although we should be careful not to generalise (because many adults take care to remain physically fit well into later life) decreases in strength, flexibility, bone density and general mobility come naturally with age, along with an increased risk of degenerative bone and joint disease.

### Physical Disability

It’s not just older adults who suffer with limited mobility. There are many people in the wider population who have other physical limitations arising from either a disability, injury, or who are perhaps recovering from illness. These limitations may be preventing an individual from participating in Yoga, when in fact they would greatly benefit from a specially tailored class with the necessary adaptations and modifications to suit their abilities.

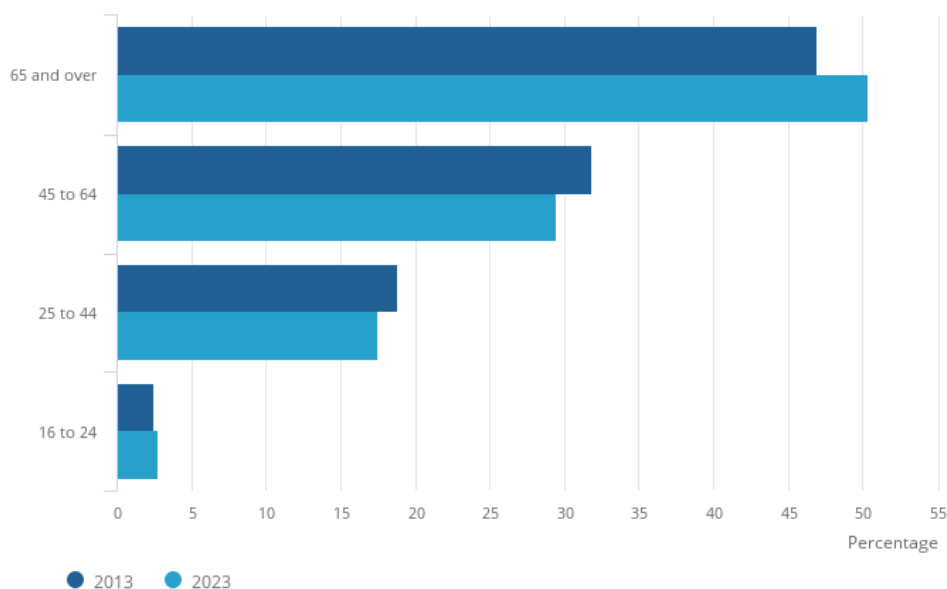
## Mental Wellbeing

It's important to remember the mental health struggles that someone living with a physical disability may have, or the general frustration that may be experienced by someone who, due to an age related condition, can no longer participate in everyday activities like they used to. Such an individual may be lacking in self-confidence and self-worth. They may feel a sense of inadequacy or feel excluded, because they are unable to participate and engage in regular daily activities that other people take for granted.

For these individuals, there is nothing more self-validating than simply being 'able' to take part. A class specially tailored to suit their needs will allow them to engage and participate, helping them improve self-confidence and cultivate feelings of self-acceptance.

## Loneliness

Loneliness can be debilitating and according to the ONS (Office of National Statistics) in 2023, over 50% of all people living alone in the UK were aged over 65.



Around 4.2 million people in the UK over the age of 65 lived alone in 2023. This is largely attributed to people living longer and becoming widowed as they go into older age.

The **mental health** benefits of social interaction are enormous. As group exercise teachers, many of us have first-hand experience of the healing effect friendship and social interaction can have on our participants. For some, weekly social groups and classes are a lifeline. As instructors, making classes more accessible in order to accommodate these special populations and watching them grow, both mentally and physically, can be hugely rewarding.

Our chair yoga participants should be treated with particular care and it's important that we remain compassionate and understanding of their personal needs and any limiting conditions at all times.



## Making Yoga Accessible

When it comes to practising yoga for physical fitness, a training effect is achieved when we routinely perform postures that put stress on the musculoskeletal system, whether it's the effect of weight-bearing on bone density, or increased muscular strength and flexibility.

Whichever posture we are in, we rely on a series of bones, ligaments, muscles and tendons to hold the joints in a certain position. When a participant is unable to hold a position for any period of time, even under their own body weight, we modify the posture to accommodate that participant's needs. But what if the modifications are unsuitable too?

What happens when in order to reduce some of the load we advise the participant to place their hand or a knee to the floor for example, but a degenerative condition in both the hand and the knee, or indeed that the participant has a disability or potentially a full knee or hip replacement, means the modification cannot be applied?

Without changing the entire format of the class, all of a sudden your options become very limited. We can inform the participant that yoga isn't suitable for them ...or, we can change the yoga.

### Take a Seat

B.K.S Iyengar was well-known for introducing the use of props such as blocks, straps, bolsters, benches and cushions into yoga practice. The idea being that these props would be used to help the yoga student get into optimal position, helping them to 'understand' the posture and achieve proper alignment, even if the student suffered with some kind of limitation such as injury or general stiffness.

One of the props that Iyengar used was a chair. The chair could be used in various ways for a variety of postures, assisting with balance and providing stability so the practitioner could focus on alignment and depth during even the most challenging postures.

“ B.K.S Iyengar once said, “The body is the prop for the soul. So why not let the body be propped by a wall or a block?” The same can be said for the chair, as we take yoga and everything it offers, and make it accessible to those who need extra support. ”

A simple chair can be an amazing tool and can open up a whole new world to people who couldn't otherwise participate in yoga. When an individual suffers with a significant mobility issue, perhaps they are unsteady on their feet or struggle getting up and down off the floor, simply being seated in a chair will support them physically and provide a great foundation for yoga.



If the participant feels confident enough to take their yoga posture to a standing position, the chair can then be on hand to provide support.

A chair allows those who are able to do so a chance to progress, gently introducing them to standing postures, balance postures, or postures that have been adapted from the floor.



**Example** – In a standing, chair supported downward facing dog, depth of posture can be easily adjusted allowing for progression or regression due to restricted mobility in the shoulders, back or hips. All of the downward pressure that would normally be experienced through the hands and wrists in a traditional floor based downward dog is removed.

## The Chair

The chair Iyengar used was of a specific design; foldable, of tubular mild steel and without a back rest. This made the chair more versatile allowing the yoga student to put their legs through the back of the chair, being able to grip the tubular steel for support and to aid seated rotations and backbends. This gave rise to the Iyengar Yoga Prop Chair which is available as a yoga prop today.



For chair yoga classes, almost any chair can be used. The chair should:

- Be of a sturdy design and strong enough to take the participant's weight
- Should not rock or have any missing feet
- Preferably be without armrests, but modifications can be made if armrests are present, such as taking arms forward, upwards or side wards above the armrests.
- Be on a non-slip, flat surface. **Place the chair on top of a yoga mat where possible**
- Wheelchairs should have the brakes applied and if the armrests are not removable, again arm postures can be modified
- Not have too high a back rest as this may impede range of movement during seated spine rotations
- Preferably have a flat seat, rather than a scooped or shaped seat (see example below) although this can be overcome by using a flat cushion to fill the recess



**Example:** It can be difficult manoeuvring in scooped, shaped plastic seats and the raised sides can dig into the thighs when positioning legs over the sides of the chair. A small flat cushion placed in the recess can help overcome this.

## The Seated Position

The seated position will vary between postures, but how participants are seated is important not only to ensure comfort and correct execution of exercises, but also to encourage correct spine alignment. An incorrect position can put unnecessary pressure on specific joints and encourage poor posture and muscular imbalance.

It's important to remember that your clientele - as people with physical disabilities and other mobility issues - may routinely spend much of their time seated. It is entirely possible that they may suffer with poor posture and have got into the habit of slouching or sitting slumped in a chair. This can result in forward head posture (FHP), characterised by a rounded upper spine which over-stretches the muscles of the upper back and shoulders and shortens and tightens the pectorals.



This not only places unnecessary strain on the neck and upper back, the muscular imbalance this creates can directly impact normal cervical spine and shoulder joint function. Shoulder problems as a result of poor posture are very common.

In addition to all this, a hunched posture can adversely affect breathing by compressing the diaphragm and preventing the lungs from inflating properly. This will negatively impact a seated workout and will inhibit any kind of specific breath practice.

Other habits include sitting cross legged or lounging on the sofa with a twisted spine or tilted pelvis. Such habits can create muscular imbalances over time and cause a lot of pain in later life if not corrected. For these reasons, encouraging correct seated posture is of utmost importance.

### **Tadasana – Seated Mountain Pose**

This foundational yoga pose and its chair yoga variant forms the perfect seated position that you will invariably start your practice with, possibly end with, but also one which you will keep coming back to between exercises.

It is fundamentally important to constantly reinforce your seated tadasana teaching points, perhaps more so than in a regular yoga class, because when an individual who already has poor posture is seated and supported in a chair, there is a greater tendency to slouch or slump.

The benefits of seated tadasana include:

- Aligns the spine and enhances posture, helping those who have a tendency to hunch or slouch when walking or sitting
- Improve lung function and promote diaphragmatic breathing
- Reduce anxiety, improve mental clarity and enhance mental awareness
- Improve balance and stability



Instructions for seated *tadasana* and the relevant teaching points are as follows:

1. Sit comfortably, but upright in a chair. Sit slightly forward towards the front edge to avoid leaning on the back rest
2. Encourage a neutral pelvis with both buttocks in contact with the chair. Avoid any tilt in the pelvis and keep weight equally distributed over both hips
3. Sit with knees hip distance apart, keeping knee joints in line with hip joints
4. Both feet should be planted firmly to the floor, weight distributed across the whole foot including the toes, ball of the foot and heels, with toes slightly spread and facing forwards
5. Elevate the rib cage, extending through the spine, lift the chest and lengthen the abdominals coming into an upright sitting position.
6. As the chest lifts, lead with the sternum and use verbal and visual cues to demonstrate this. This automatically brings the shoulder blades together and slots them naturally into place.
7. Retract the chin slightly to straighten the neck, bringing both ears over the shoulders
8. Rest both hands at the ends of your thighs or on top of your knees. Optionally close your eyes and bring awareness to the breath.

***Tadasana*** comes from the Sanskrit words *tada*, meaning 'mountain' and *asana*, meaning 'posture' or 'seat'. It is rich in symbolism, representing the mountain as something that stands tall, strong and grounded. It is the very essence of foundation and stability and as such will serve as a starting point for nearly all seated yoga postures. For chair yoga, the direct translation of 'mountain seat' very much applies, allowing your students to practice perfect posture and alignment from a seated position.



## Designing a Chair Yoga Class

When constructing a chair yoga class, we follow the same principles and philosophy as we would for a regular yoga session, working towards physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

What you include in your class will not only be determined by the needs of your participants, but also by you and the kind of session you want to deliver. Putting your own stamp on your class, perhaps playing to your own unique strengths and injecting some of your own personality is what makes for a successful teacher.

For example, you may want to construct a class that focuses largely on mindfulness, meditation and breathing technique. Breath practice can be of great benefit to this special demographic and improvements in respiratory function have been scientifically proven.

On the other hand, rather than it being a spiritual experience, you may want to focus more on the physical aspect and explore the fitness benefits more, which again will be of huge benefit to the demographic in question.

How you deliver your session is up to you. You may choose to include all of the spiritual and fitness elements into one session, or focus on one more than the other.

### Holding Space

Holding space is a term used to describe the act of creating a safe space for an individual or individuals. It specifically refers to being physically, emotionally and mentally present for someone, without judgment or distraction. It's about having empathy and creating a compassionate and supportive environment that allows individuals to be seen, heard and understood.

Some key aspects of holding space:

- **Being present** - Give your full attention to the person, putting aside distractions and focusing on their needs.
- **Active listening** - Listen attentively, without interrupting or trying to fix things. Validate their feelings and experiences.
- **Empathy** - Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand their perspective, even if you don't agree with or understand it.
- **Non-judgment** - Avoid making judgments or offering unsolicited advice. Simply be there for them without conditions.
- **Creating a safe space** - Make sure the person feels safe to express themselves without fear of judgment or criticism.
- **Setting boundaries** - While holding space is important, it's also important to set boundaries for your own well-being. Don't take on their problems as your own.

Holding space can be a transformative experience for both the person being held and the person holding space. It can help to deepen relationships, foster understanding, and promote healing.

## Adjusting Our Teaching Methods

In order to teach with empathy and compassion it is important that we embrace the feminine in our teaching methods. This may differ in intention and communication in other more result driven sessions.

Here are the key motivators for this type of teaching:

- **Receptivity** - Allow yourself to teach the benefits of this practice without striving for perfection. We encourage our groups to focus on the sensations within the body purely in the here and now letting go of goals or expectations. This will promote confidence in stepping away from historic preconceptions, pain and discomfort and build trust in yoga techniques such as breathing and mindfulness.
- **Compassion** - Teaching with empathy, kindness and compassion is so important as we are dealing with capabilities that have regressed with the aging process. There is a lot of frustration around not being able to do what we used to. Promote kindness, forgiveness and understanding.
- **Intuition** - The ability to know something without conscious reasoning. In the chair yoga practice, this means advocating awareness of the body's sensations and feelings in order to trust their inner voice and instincts once the session is over.
- **Creativity** - Explore creative movement and playfulness in the practice. We are conditioned to use a chair purely for sitting, creative play will help your group to trust the chair as a means of support to promote a greater ability.

## Class Structure

As a general rule your class will comprise the following elements:

- Mobility warm up
- A series of exercises aimed at improving strength, flexibility, balance and general mobility with the appropriate counter poses
- Breathing exercises (e.g. Pranayama)
- Relaxation and meditation

**Always** warm up before performing the physical postures. Where you put the other elements is up to you. You may wish to start the class with a short breath practice, end with breath practice, or indeed incorporate it into any one of the other sections e.g. during asana or as part of meditation or relaxation.

Pranayama can be used to invigorate and gain focus, making it perfect for preparing the mind and body for the physical practice. However, it can also be relaxing and useful at the end of a session. In chair yoga, being comfortably seated and having a moment of calm and peacefulness can work just as well at the beginning of a class as at the end.



## Mobility Warm-Up

Remember that the demographic we are catering to will benefit from gentle mobility exercises in all joints. Pay particular attention to movements (and the action at the corresponding joints) that will be performed during the class and try to include movements in all joints where possible.

- **Neck** - slowly performed **neck flexion** e.g. forward tilt/chin to chest. Slowly performed **neck extension** e.g. looking up by tilting head back. **Lateral flexion** e.g. gentle sideways tilt. **Neck rotations** e.g. looking over the shoulder. Avoid circumduction
- **Wrist and forearm** - wrist flexion and extension, circular movements, wrist abduction/adduction, palm supination and pronation (palms facing up and down)
- **Hands and fingers** - fist clenches and open splayed hands, finger flexion/extension
- **Ankle** - ankle plantar flexion e.g. heel raises, ankle dorsiflexion e.g. toe raises, and circular movements
- **Feet and Toes** - toe flexion/extension, lifting the inner toes separately to the outer toes and vice versa to encourage movement through the anterior transverse arch, and movements through the medial longitudinal arch e.g. curling the toes and pulling the ball of the foot towards the heel and vice versa
- **Shoulder** - shoulder flexion and extension e.g. arm raises, internal/external rotations, shoulder circles, abduction/adduction e.g. lateral raises
- **Elbows** - moves that flex and extend the elbow joint
- **Shoulder blades** - scapular retraction, protraction, elevation and depression e.g. shoulder rolls and shrugs
- **Spine** - spinal rotation e.g. seated twists, flexion/extension e.g. cat/cow, lateral flexion e.g. side bends
- **Pelvis** - forward, back and lateral pelvic tilts. Gently rocking forward and back, pelvic circles
- **Hips** - hip mobility will be comprised of leg lifts, circumduction and sideways leg movements. For leg lifts, place the hands beneath the thigh and lift the leg. Whilst holding the leg perform circumduction, abduction, adduction e.g. swinging knees side to side - windscreen wipers
- **Knees** - leg extension/flexion, leg crosses and a combination of the two. Some participants may benefit from holding onto the chair while they perform these.

“ There is a saying that, “motion is lotion”. It quite literally means that movement is important for joint health. That lotion is the synovial fluid that provides the joint with lubrication and nutrients. Maintaining mobility into older age is everything - “If you don’t use it, you lose it” ”

## Warming the Muscles

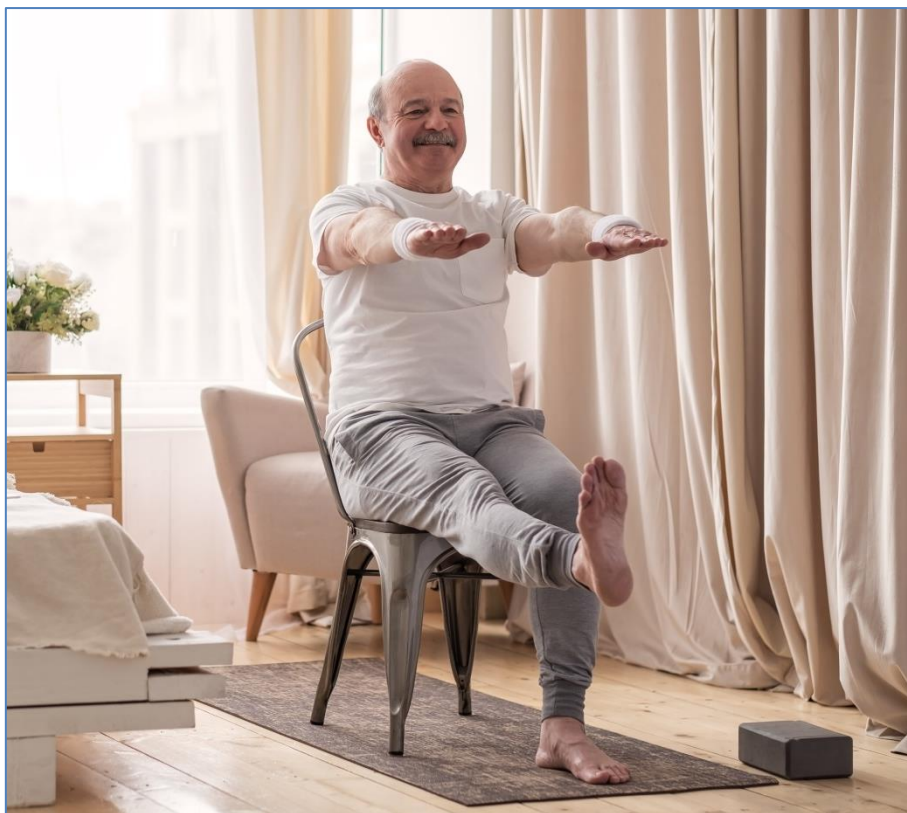
This will happen by nature of the movements performed. Movements of increasing size that utilise the larger muscle groups will gently warm the body.

- Larger, faster paced movements e.g. seated marching
- Moves that utilise larger muscles e.g. sit stand exercises
- Performing arm and leg movements both at the same time
- Seated sun salutations

Remember that any movement performed by people who live the most sedentary lifestyles will be of great benefit to them and it may not take much to get them warm or even raise their heart rate.

**Note:** Working to elevate heart rate and significantly raise body temperature is **not** the main objective of a chair yoga warm up. For seniors, those with disabilities and other mobility issues, a series of mobility exercises and movement in general is perfectly adequate to warm their bodies for a seated class. The warm up is designed to prepare the body, not exhaust it.

Always be mindful of the abilities that exist within your group. Be careful to pitch your class at the right level and keep all your content age and ability appropriate.



## Chair Sun Salutations

Seated sun salutations are a perfect example of how we can link seated postures together to make a flowing sequence. It is not dissimilar to a standing sun salutation and the principles and its execution are pretty much the same, encouraging fluidity and seamless transitions, synchronising breath to movement and using the sequence to help warm the body and bring focus to the breath.

### Seated Sun Salutation 1 – The Basic Seated Sun Salutation

1. **Sit in tadasana** – hands on knees or at heart centre
2. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head** – hands together or apart
3. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
4. **Inhale to cobra** – bringing hands to tops of shins or knees, extend spine, lifting head and chest, retract and depress shoulder blades
5. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
6. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head** - coming back to an upright seated position, hands together or apart
7. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre** or back to rest on knees.

**Note:** The first forward fold can be performed over two breaths if that better suits the abilities within your group. After the first inhale, simply exhale to a half fold. Then, take a second in-breath and complete the fold on the exhale.

### Seated Sun Salutation 2 – Adding Cat Pose For Spinal Flexion After Cobra (Extension)

1. **Sit in tadasana** – hands on knees or at heart centre
2. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head** – hands together or apart
3. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
4. **Inhale to cobra** – bringing hands to tops of shins or knees, extend spine, lifting head and chest, retract and depress shoulder blades
5. **Exhale into cat** – hands remain on tops of knees, pull abdominals in and round the spine
6. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head** - coming back to an upright seated position, hands together or apart
7. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre** or back to rest on knees.

To create a longer sun salutation and therefore a longer flow, we can add 1 & 2 together:

1. **Sit in tadasana**
2. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head**
3. **Exhale into seated forward fold**
4. **Inhale to cobra**
5. **Exhale into seated forward fold**
6. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head**
7. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre or back to rest on knees.**
8. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head**

9. **Exhale into seated forward fold**
10. **Inhale to cobra**
11. **Exhale into cat**
12. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head**
13. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre or back to rest on knees.**

### **Seated Sun Salutation 3 – Adding Knee Lifts**

1. **Sit in tadasana** – hands on knees or at heart centre
2. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head** - hands together or apart
3. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
4. **Inhale to cobra** – bringing hands to tops shins or knees, extend spine, lifting head and chest, retract and depress shoulder blades
5. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
6. **Interlace fingers beneath right thigh, inhale and lift right leg** as you come up to sitting
7. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – release leg, hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
8. **Interlace fingers beneath left thigh, inhale and lift left leg** as you come up to sitting
9. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – release leg, hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
10. **Inhale to cobra** – bringing hands to tops shins or knees, extend spine, lifting head and chest, retract and depress shoulder blades
11. **Exhale into seated forward fold** – hands to floor, blocks, shins or knees
12. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head** - coming back to an upright seated position, hands together or apart
13. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre** or back to rest on knees.

You can add variety by inserting different postures into the sun salutation. For example, try adding in some spine rotations or side bends after the final in-breath, consider a sit to stand exercise on the first in-breath, or maybe a revolved forward fold in place of the knee lifts in salutation 3:

#### **Example: Revolved forward fold variation**

- 1-5. **Repeat sun salutation 3 to second forward fold** (after cobra)
6. **Inhale and rotate the spine** reaching the right arm towards the sky.
7. **Exhale bringing the right arm back down** and into fold.
8. **Inhale and rotate the spine** reaching the left arm towards the sky.
9. **Exhale bringing the left arm back down** into the fold.
- 10-13. **Repeat ending of sun salutation 3 as above**

**Sun Salutation 4 – Standing Using The Chair as a Prop**

1. **Stand in tadasana** – in front and facing your chair a short step away
2. **Inhale taking arms forward and above the head** – hands together or apart
3. **Exhale into forward fold** – hands to seat or backrest with elbows bent
4. **Inhale to half fold** – lift chest, lengthen spine, flat back, hands still on seat or backrest
5. **Exhale forward fold with a step back** – step back as you exhale bringing feet together
6. **Inhale to upwards facing dog** – holding the seat firmly and keeping the feet where they are, shift bodyweight forward bringing hips forward and straighten arms, extending through spine to lift head and chest, depress shoulder blades
7. **Exhale to downward facing dog** – arms straight holding the chair, flex forward from the hips (take another small step back if necessary) head comes down to between the arms, extend through the lower spine with legs straight and heels pressed towards floor
8. **Inhale and stride forward to half fold** – look forward as you stride towards the chair
9. **Exhale into forward fold** – hands still on seat or backrest, elbows bent
10. **Inhale taking arms forward and above head** - coming back to a standing position, hands together or apart
11. **Exhale bringing hands to heart centre or by your sides**

The standing sun salutation, albeit supported can still be quite challenging for some people. There is room for even further progression by adding a supported plank.

5. **Exhale and step back to a supported inclined plank** – exhale as you take a large step back, extend hips bringing them forward to straighten them, straighten the arms and legs, stacking the arm joints and engaging the thighs
6. **Inhale to upwards facing dog** – in supported plank, hold the seat firmly keeping arms straight, extend through spine to lift head and chest, retract and depress shoulder blades

**NOTE:** Make absolutely sure that your chair is on a good, non-slip surface. Salutation 4 is a more advanced variation of the sun salutation and the chair is required to take more body weight. **For safety, to avoid the chair tipping over, postures where weight is bearing down on the chair should always be performed with the weight bearing on the seat, not the back rest.**

*The Sun Salutation comes from the Sanskrit term ‘Surya Namaskar’ – Surya meaning ‘sun’ and Namaskar meaning ‘greeting’ or ‘salute’. It can be traced back to the Vedic period in India where the sun was worshipped as a God. This salutation, or greeting facing the sun was to honour its energy and thank it for its power, warmth and light. The chair yoga sun salutation can be performed whenever you need to create warmth.*

## Chair Yoga Asana

When teaching asana, it's important that you take into account the various abilities that will exist within your class. In a class that includes seniors and people with varying physical limitations, ability may vary wildly. Special care must be taken to ensure all modifications are given and that participants are encouraged to stay within their limits and not work through any pain or serious discomfort.

It is also worth reminding your participants that muscle tightness and serious muscle and joint pain are two different things. While an individual should not work through any serious pain, identifying areas of muscular tightness and working to release that tightness will be beneficial in improving their overall mobility.

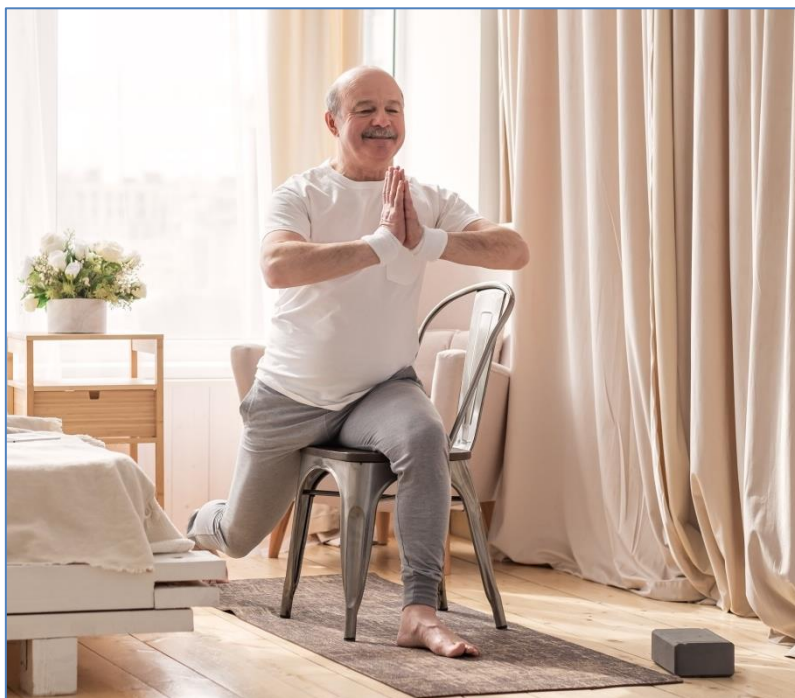
## Holding Postures

When performing yoga asana, our main objective is not to hold the posture for a specific amount of time, but rather to bring awareness to the breath, focus on correct alignment and be present in the moment.

The time it takes to perform each posture may vary from person to person, depending largely on their ability and previous experience. The average time it takes a human to complete a full breath is around 4-5 seconds. As a general guide, you may want to consider the following:

- Holding postures for 1-3 breath cycles is adequate for chair yoga beginners.
- Restorative and relaxation poses can be held for longer
- Developmental stretches (working to improve flexibility) can be held for 30-60 seconds

Developmental stretches are a great opportunity to bring focus to the breath. Encouraging proper breathing will not only assist with the stretch, it will help your participants avoid the temptation to hold their breath.





## Strength, Flexibility, Balance and Overall Mobility

Every posture serves a purpose. When designing a class, it's helpful to think about the physically limiting issues which people face as they age.

- **Sarcopenia** is the age related progressive loss of muscle mass and strength. It can begin as early as your 30's and worsens with age. It is estimated that muscle mass decreases 3-8% per decade after the age of 30. It is exacerbated by physical inactivity and poor diet. Loss of lean muscle tissue is directly linked to decreased lifespan and cognition.
- **Flexibility and mobility** decreases as we age due to several factors. Collagen levels actually decline from the age of 25, causing muscle, tendons and ligaments to lose elasticity. Synovial fluid decreases making joints even stiffer and cartilage that cushions joints also thins with age, reducing the amount of space for joints to move.
- **Bone density** changes with age. People gradually start losing bone density around age 35. After age 50, bone breakdown outpaces bone formation and bone loss accelerates, causing osteopenia and osteoporosis in some people.
- **Balance** problems and general unsteadiness can increase with age. This can be due to stiff and damaged joints, muscular imbalance or simply muscle weakening in the legs. Also, incidences of dizziness may be due to medical conditions, inner ear issues, blood pressure fluctuations or may even occur as a result of medications.
- **Breathing** is affected by age, with lung capacity declining by 20ml per year after the age 25, declining further to a loss of 38ml per year after age 65. This is largely attributed to weakening muscles and loss of lung tissue elasticity with age.

All of the above conditions can be improved with the correct training:

- Exercises that engage and use the muscles can help **maintain lean muscle tissue levels**
- Weight bearing exercises can help to **maintain and improve bone density**
- Stretching can **increase flexibility and improve mobility**
- Challenging balance can help to build new neural pathways, helping to **improve balance** and reduce fear of falling.
- Chair yoga also **improved respiratory function** during a 12 week study

When designing your class, try and include as many functional exercises as possible. You could practice each pose individually, focusing your attention on a particular muscle group, or create flowing sequences that will use multiple muscle groups and train your participants in multiple ways.

## Counter poses

Counter poses are important for restoring balance to the body. When muscles have been worked hard, or postures have been held for a long time on one side, any tension can be released by simply performing an opposite movement. Counter poses are particularly important in chair yoga for restoring balance in the spine and pelvis. Moves that allow for the gradual recovery of muscles after they've been worked should be carefully planned into your session, particularly where certain muscle groups are being repeatedly engaged and have been held under tension for a long time.

## Utilising The Breath

Incorporating some kind of breath practice into your chair yoga class can offer great benefits for your participants. You should encourage proper breathing at all times and be aware that some people, especially those who are not used to exercise, may routinely hold their breath when performing the yoga postures.

It is likely that the breathing capacity of some of your chair yoga participants will have diminished naturally with age, or may even be compromised due to a medical condition. Breathing through the belly and inflating the lungs down into the abdomen will help to work the diaphragm which becomes weaker with age. Allowing the rib cage to expand and lift will also utilise the intercostal and upper thoracic muscles. Focussing on and routinely practising these movements will help to condition the muscles associated with breathing and help to improve lung capacity.

## Pranayama

Pranayama is a great way of creating a deeper awareness of the body. It can be used to invigorate and gain focus, but also to calm and relax the mind and body. You may want to review the pranayama techniques that were studied during your yoga certification and consider which ones will be of most use in the chair yoga session you have planned.

Here are three examples:

### 1. Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nasal Breathing)

Nadi meaning “channel”, Shodhana meaning “cleaning or purifying”, alternate nostril breathing is said to balance the emotional and logical sides of the brain. It can help calm the mind, reduce anxiety and improve mood and memory. It can be practised at the beginning or end of a chair yoga class.

**Contraindications:** Pregnant women, people with high blood pressure or heart conditions should avoid breath retention. You may advise individuals to practice without the retention. In addition, people with low blood pressure may practice this pranayama with retention, but only after inhalation.

### 2. Ujayii Pranayama (Victorious Breath)

Ujayii breath is said to help regulate body temperature, create inner heat, improve endurance and provide strength and power. It is also said to reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation. Because you make a sound and can hear the breath, it’s particularly good for improving focus, helping you concentrate on both the breath and the posture. Making a noise when breathing requires effort, which is said to improve lung capacity and strengthen the muscles around the lungs and rib cage.

**Contraindications:** Pregnant women, people with low blood pressure or heart conditions should avoid this breath practice.

### 3. Dirga Pranayama (Three-Part Breath)

This breath practice could be particularly beneficial to your chair yoga students as it creates excellent awareness of the breath, helps to deepen and expand the breath, whilst at the same working the muscles responsible for full and complete breathing. There are three parts to the breath: the belly, the rib cage and the clavicular area. As we discussed earlier, the muscles used during breathing can weaken with age. From your yoga training you will recall how complete yogic breathing incorporates three types of partial respiration. Dirga Pranayama brings focus to each part.



You can practice Dirga Pranayama in the following way:



1. Sit comfortably in seated tadasana
2. Place one hand on your lower belly and one hand on your chest
3. As you inhale, breathe down into the abdomen and allow your belly to expand
4. As you continue to inhale, allow the rib cage to expand
5. As you continue to inhale, allow the air to fill the upper chest, raising the collar bones and shoulders
6. Exhale slowly using the reverse process, emptying the air from the upper chest first, then the rib cage, then finally the belly, making sure to exhale fully.

Repeat the process, breathing slowly and steady, noticing the movement through the chest and belly, via your hand placements.

**Contraindications:** Dirga Pranayama has no specific contraindications as it focusses on normal, steady, smooth breathing. Exercise caution with any participant suffering with cardiac or serious breathing conditions. As long as the practice is steady and smooth, it can be considered as safe.

## Bandhas

From your yoga certification training, you will recall how Bandhas can be applied during asana to give strength and support to a posture. The use of Bandhas may, or may not be suitable for your chair yoga participants, but we can discuss their validity and whether they can form part of a more advanced practice.

First of all, Bandhas can increase internal abdominal pressure and affect blood pressure. Of the three main Bandhas, two affect abdominal pressure (Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha) and the third (Jalandhara Bandha) involves excessive forward flexion of the neck, compressing the throat by forcefully pressing the chin into the upper chest.

Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha should always be avoided by people who are pregnant, but also those with blood pressure disorders, heart conditions and those suffering from abdominal conditions such as intestinal disorders or hernia. Jalandhara Bandha should be avoided by anyone with neck problems, such as degenerative spine conditions that affect the neck, and those already experiencing issues brought about by forward head posture.

However, we may be able to take some physiological aspects of the Mula and Uddiyana Bandhas and apply them to our chair yoga practice.

Physiologically, the **Mula Bandha** refers to the muscles of the perineum - the space between the bones of the pubis at the front and the sit bones either side of the coccyx - and form part of the pelvic floor. It is practised by contracting both the anal sphincter and the urethra (as if you were stopping a pee) and lastly creating an upwards pull through the perineum.

The muscles of the pelvic floor weaken with age and this can contribute towards incontinence. So, encouraging your students to gently practice this movement could help to strengthen the muscles and may provide sufferers with some relief.

In **Uddiyana Bandha**, the navel is sucked right in and upwards into the ribcage, after a forceful breath out to empty the lungs completely. Although we would be unlikely to encourage this in a chair yoga class, a subtler version that involves pulling the navel in towards the spine and practising slow, long deep breaths to utilise the abdominals and muscles responsible for respiratory function, could form part of more advanced chair yoga breath practice.

### Applying Mudras

Mudras or hand “gestures” are to be encouraged during your chair yoga sessions, not just because they are said to be “seals” which complete circuits of energy, but because they encourage dexterity.

After the age of 60, there is a rapid decline in hand grip strength and dexterity, accompanied by decreases in bone density, muscle fibre and a decrease in muscle fibre length. In addition to this, there is an increased prevalence of pathological conditions such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis and Parkinson’s disease, which all affect the use of the hands.

You are advised to use as much movement through the hands as possible. A review carried out in 2019 called, *“Grip Strength: An Indispensable Biomarker For Older Adults”* found that all of the 11 included studies confirmed a relationship between decreased hand grip strength and the incidence of hip fractures.

Examples of suitable mudras are:

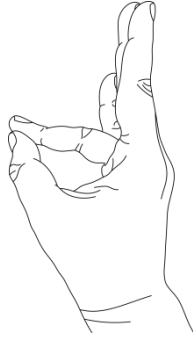
- Anjali Mudra – Prayer Seal
- Jnana Mudra or Gyan Mudra
- Padma Mudra – Lotus Flower
- Kali Mudra (sometimes called Ksepana Mudra) – Steeple
- Shunya mudra
- Prana Mudra



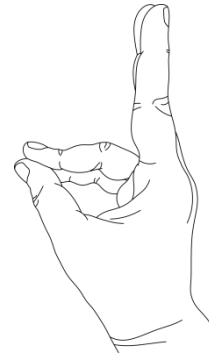
Make sure to incorporate finger dexterity exercises into your mobility warm up. Try touching the tip of each finger with the tip of the thumb on the same hand, going through each finger individually. This is great for preparing the hands for the Gyan, Shunya and Prana mudras, as each mudra is a variation of the other, having different fingers pressed towards the thumb.



Gyan Mudra

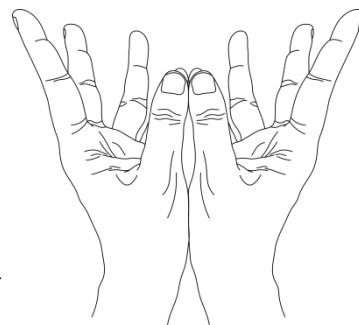


Shunya Mudra



Prana Mudra

The Lotus Flower is also of particular benefit for hand dexterity as it encourages extension through the wrists and fingers.



Padma Mudra or Lotus Flower

### Contraindications of Mudras

Conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and other conditions that impact dexterity, may affect your participant's ability to perform the mudras. Advise those who are affected to perform the hand gestures to the best of their ability and not work through any pain.

### Teaching Position

As a general rule, you will practice mirroring when teaching a chair yoga class. Mirroring your group is quite a skill. Your left, being their right and vice versa can be quite confusing at first for some teachers, but you need to be able to see your students in order to engage with them. Facing your group allows you to observe their form, make corrections and suggest modifications.

Make eye contact with your participants, smile to create positive energy and put them at ease. Be chatty, don't be a robot. The demographic we are teaching get a huge amount of satisfaction out of social interaction and it can be incredibly healing. Your class will form part of their regular weekly social activities. For some, it may be the only social interaction they have all week.

## Other Exercises

When designing your chair yoga class, try to include a wide variety of movements. Your exercises should not be just limited to specifically named yoga postures. Perform lots of movement, including stretches and movements that mimic everyday tasks and activities, such as reaching and sitting to standing exercises.

**Sit to stand** is a great exercise for your chair yoga demographic because it emulates the action of getting up out of a chair – something they may ordinarily have difficulty with. Controlled sitting to standing exercises will not only utilise the muscles of the lower body, it also challenges balance. The benefits of such an exercise are huge and include:

- Weight bearing and therefore good for promoting bone density
- Primarily works the muscles of the thighs and buttocks and improves leg strength
- Helps combat age related sarcopenia by promoting lean tissue levels
- Improves balance and self-confidence, reducing risk and fear of falling



When practising sit to stand, participants should be encouraged to perform the movement to their best of their ability, even if that means being unable to complete the movement and failing to come into a full standing position.

### Incorporating a sit to stand exercise into the seated sun salutation

Sit to standing can easily be incorporated into the seated sun salutation by including a sit to stand on the first in-breath and then exhaling into the first seated forward fold.

Alternatively, you can add the sit to stand as a separate element, coming to a standing position on the first in-breath, then back to a normal seated position on the out-breath. Then, perform the seated sun salutation from the seated position as normal, taking an in-breath and exhaling into the first seated forward fold.

### Contraindications of sit to stand

There will be times when sit to stand will not be suitable for individuals within your group. This is something you will have to carefully gauge as an instructor. Contraindications include:

- Severe osteoporosis or bone fragility
- Severe arthritis or joint stability
- Recent surgery or injury the hips, knees or spine
- Uncontrolled blood pressure, particularly low blood pressure
- Balance or coordination issues

## Using Props

Props can be used in various ways to modify postures, either helping to make the posture more accessible, promoting correct alignment or to deepen a stretch. Whilst various props can be used in a class, including straps, blocks, bolsters and cushions etc. you may find that having blocks on hand will be the most beneficial item when starting out teaching chair yoga.

### Blocks

The simple yoga block can be positioned in a way that you can achieve 3 different heights. This can be of great benefit when a participant wants to improve on their forward folds but can't quite reach the floor for example. Similarly, a block can be used to elevate a foot during postures that require holding the leg in a lifted position or keeping a foot off the floor when a participant is unable to do so on their own.



### Straps

Straps can also be very useful and are of particular use when performing leg extensions, or to help raise a leg off the floor during balancing postures, such as in dancer's pose for example. Straps can also assist with upper body asana such as cow face, which a participant with restricted upper body mobility may find difficult.

### Blankets, bolsters and cushions

Blankets, bolsters and cushions can be useful for restorative and relaxation elements of a chair yoga class. For example, for the chair version of balasana (child's pose) a large cushion can be placed on the participant's lap, allowing them to fold forward and rest on the cushion. If you have access to additional chairs, participants can put a large bolster or cushions on the seat of another chair facing in front of them. From the seated position, they can fold forward and lie on the bolsters, turning their head and resting the whole upper body and head on the cushions to perform a restorative forward fold.

Folded blankets and cushions can also be useful if you have participants who feel confident enough to take a posture to the floor. In the chair version of viparita karani or legs up the wall pose, the participant can lie on the floor and place the backs of their lower legs on the seat of the chair, with a folded blanket underneath their legs for comfort. Blankets can also be warming and provide comfort during a chair yoga class, helping to prevent your participants from getting cold during any still, relaxation elements.

## Chair Yoga Postures

### Seated Postures

#### ***Tadasana***

##### ***Mountain Pose***

Grounding, stabilising, calming. Reduces stress, improves lung function, promotes alignment, focus and concentration.

##### Progressions

- Maintain correct upright posture and close eyes. Come to standing if confident

##### Regressions

- Cushion placed between middle back and chair back-rest if present. Keep eyes open. Hold onto chair seat for support



#### ***Upavistha Marjaryasana***

##### ***Seated Cat Pose***

Strengthen, stretches, relaxes. Calms the mind, improves spine flexibility, strengthens abdominals, reduces stress and tension

##### Progressions

- Increase posterior tilt in pelvis, extending knees slightly and sliding hands down towards shins. Perform from table top position on a mat

##### Regressions

- Bring hands further up thighs and closer to hips. Sit on back of a cushion placed towards front of seat to assist posterior pelvic tilt. Keep head up and eyes forward to decrease pressure on cervical spine





***Upavistha Bitilasana Marjaryasana***  
***Seated Cow Pose***

Stretches and strengthens. Improves posture, spine flexibility, relieves stress and tension

Progressions

- Rock forward on sit bones whilst taking hands behind you, towards back of chair to increase extension through spine. Perform from table top position on a mat

Regressions

- Keep hands further forward towards knees to decrease posterior deltoid and shoulder blade engagement. Sit on front edge of a cushion to assist anterior pelvic tilt. Keep eyes forward to decrease pressure on cervical spine



***Upavistha Uttanasana***  
***Seated Forward Fold***

Stretches, strengthens and calms. Lengthens hamstrings, and lower back muscles. Stimulates internal organs and reduces stress.

Progressions

- Place hands to floor or blocks. Sit further back in the chair

Regressions

- Place hands on tops of thighs, knees or shins. Fold arms and rest on thighs. Fold forward onto a cushion or bolster placed on the lap.



***Upavistha Parivrtta Uttanasana***  
***Revolved Seated Forward Fold***

Stretches, strengthens, stimulates and balances. Promotes mobility, hamstring and lower back flexibility, increases range of movement and aids digestion

Progressions

- Place hand to floor. Bring hand or block closer to, or beyond midline of body to encourage increased rotation

Regressions

- Place hands on tops of thighs, fronts of knees or shins. Bring raised arm down, bend elbow and place hand on shoulder



***Prasarita Padottanasana***  
***Seated Wide Forward Fold***

Stretches, strengthens, calms, stimulates and balances. Improves mobility, stretches inner thighs, lower back and hamstrings, reduces stress and tension

Progressions

- Place hands to floor or blocks. Widen stance

Regressions

- Place hands on tops of thighs, fronts of knees or shins. Sit on front of edge of a cushion to assist the movement by tilting the pelvis forward. Rest the arms and upper body on a bolster placed across thighs





***Upavistha Ardha Uttanasana***  
***Seated Half Forward Fold***

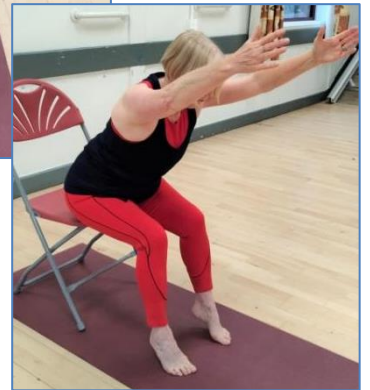
Stretches, strengthens, boosts energy and creates awareness. Engages abdominals and back muscles

Progressions

- Increased forward flexion from hips, keeping back straight and arms raised. Lift up onto tip toes, raising heels, engaging calves

Regressions

- Place hands on tops of thighs, fronts of knees or shins. Sit on front of edge of a cushion placed towards the back of the seat to assist the movement by tilting the pelvis forward. Hold onto to seat of chair for support



***Urdhva Hastasana***  
***Seated Upward Stretch***

Stretches, strengthens, calms. Improves posture, balance and breathing. Stimulates the internal organs, calms the mind to reduce stress and anxiety.

Progressions

- Bring to standing if confident. Change hand position

Regressions

- Lower arms, bringing them forward instead. Arms by side or holding onto chair, lifting through top of head, focussing more on upwards stretch through torso without raising arms



## ***Parsva Sukhasana (chair variation)***

### ***Seated Side Bend***

Stretches, lengthens, calming, creates awareness. Improves spine flexibility, mobility and range of movement. Promotes symmetry and balance. Alleviates tension and tightness

#### Progressions

- Bring to standing if confident. Use both arms

#### Regressions

- Hold chair with other hand for support. Widen stance for additional lateral support



## ***Upavistha Parsva Bhanga***

### ***Seated Palm Tree Side Bend***

Stretches, strengthens, calms. Improves balance, stability, spine flexibility and range of movement. Relieves tension from back, neck, arms and shoulders

#### Progressions

- Bring to standing if confident. Close eyes to challenge balance

#### Regressions

- Use one arm only and hold chair with other hand for support. Widen stance for additional lateral support



## ***Ardha Matsyendrasana***

### ***Seated Twist Pose***

Stretches, strengthens, lengthens, stimulates internal organs. Reduces tension in neck and shoulders, improves posture, circulation and breathing

#### Progressions

- Grip chair with one hand to increase rotation through the spine and deepen the stretch. Create a lock with the other arm and use as lever, pushing against the thigh to increase rotation further

#### Regressions

- Apply twist while keeping both arms in front. Reduce or remove rotation through either the neck or the spine individually, rotating one or the other if neck or back problems present



## ***Bhujangasana Chair***

### ***Seated Cobra Pose***

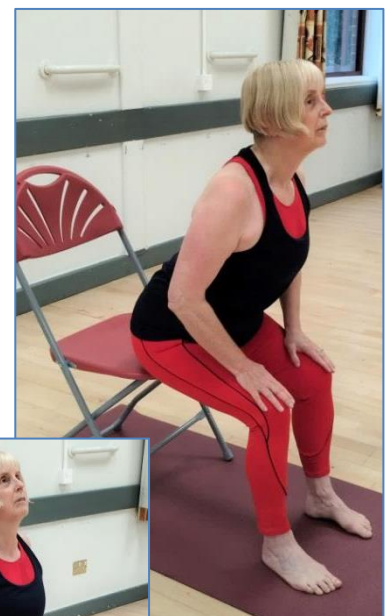
Stretches, strengthens, increases energy, reduces stress. Improves posture and spine flexibility

#### Progressions

- Maintaining hip flexion and slight anterior tilt in pelvis, straighten arms more to increase spine extension. Grip back of chair to help retract shoulder blades and increase spine extension

#### Regressions

- Half cobra, bent arms, reduced spine extension. Sit on front edge of cushion placed towards rear of seat



## ***Virabhadrasana I***

### ***Warrior I Chair Variation***

Strengthens, stretches. Improves balance, flexibility, circulation and respiration. Reduces anxiety, improves mental focus and mobility in shoulder and hips.

#### Progressions

- Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load. With arms raised, hold posture for longer. Bring focus to the breath and apply pranayama or other breath practice

#### Regressions

- Bring hands lower e.g. Anjali Mudra. Come further back into chair, bringing whole back thigh of front leg onto seat for support. Bend back knee, bringing leg forward and more to the side, in front of seat of chair.



## ***Baddha Virabhadrasana***

### ***Seated Humble Warrior***

Stretches, strengthens, calming. Improves mobility, balance and stability

#### Progressions

- Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load. Add humble arms: clasp hands behind back or hold a strap or towel with hands behind you, then fold forward over front leg

#### Regressions

- Place hands on front thigh, decreasing fold. Come further back into chair, bringing whole back thigh of front leg onto seat for support. Bend back knee, bringing leg forward and more to the side.





**Virabhadrasana II**  
**Warrior II Chair Variation**

Stretches, strengthens, creates energy, relieves stress. Improves mobility, balance and stability

Progressions

- Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load. Try adding a bandha, mudra, a wrap or pranayama technique to enhance focus

Regressions

- Come further back into chair, bringing whole back thigh of front leg onto seat for support. Bring back leg round and more in front of chair with knee bent. Bring arms lower



**Viparita Virabhadrasana**  
**Seated Reverse Warrior**

Stretches, strengthens, creates energy. Improves spine flexibility, mobility, balance and lung capacity

Progressions

- Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load. Try adding a wrap or bind

Regressions

- Come further back into chair, bringing whole back thigh of front leg onto seat for support. Bend back knee, bringing leg round more in front of chair. Bring raised arm lower or shorten the arm by bending the elbow and bringing hand to shoulder



## ***Anjaneyasana***

### ***Seated Low Lunge***

Stretches, strengthens, creates energy. Relieves stress and improves balance and stability.

#### Progressions

- With arms lifted, hold posture for longer and bring awareness to the breath. Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load

#### Regressions

- Untuck toes on back leg to rest top of foot to floor. Bring arms lower e.g Anjali mudra, thumbs to sternum



## ***Parsvottanasana (chair variation)***

### ***Seated Pyramid Pose***

Stretches, lengthens and relieves tension. Improves flexibility in hips, thighs and back

#### Progressions

- Take hands further down leg towards shins. Take hands to block or to the floor

#### Regressions

- Apply bend to the knee. Bring hands further up and reduce amount of forward flexion



***Ashta Chandrasana***  
***Seated High Lunge***

Stretches and strengthens. Creates energy, builds focus, improves posture, balance and stability

Progressions

- Take arms above head and hold posture for longer. Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, decreasing support and increasing load

Regressions

- Apply bend to the knee. Bring hands further up and reduce amount of forward flexion



***Parivrtta Ashta Chandrasana***  
***Seated Revolved High Lunge***

Stretches and strengthens. Boosts energy, builds focus, stimulates internal organs. Improves spine strength and flexibility

Progressions

- Grip side support of chair with one hand to increase rotation through the spine and deepen the stretch. Create a lock with the other arm and use as lever, pushing against the thigh to increase rotation further

Regressions

- Apply bend to back knee. Keep hands together, arms straight, apply lock across front thigh and reduce amount of rotation



***Utthita Parsvakonasana***  
***Seated Extended Side Angle***

Stretches, strengthens and stimulates internal organs. Increases hip and spine flexibility, improves balance and stability

Progressions

- Take bottom hand lower to floor or a block. Come towards edge of chair so there is less seat under the back thigh of front leg, increasing load in legs

Regressions

- Rest lower elbow/forearm on thigh. Reduce load by bringing top arm more perpendicular to floor, pointing fingers straight to the ceiling rather than overhead. Bend back knee and bring leg round more in front of chair.



***Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (chair variation)***  
***Seated Pigeon Pose***

Stretches, calming, grounding. Improves posture and flexibility in hips, thighs and back. Alleviates stress

Progressions

- Raise bottom leg by placing foot on a block. Increase stretch by leaning further forward

Regressions

- Reduce amount of forward flexion by sitting up straighter. In the event of limited hip and knee mobility, cross legs over shins/ankles, then flex forward from the hips





## ***Parighāsana***

### ***Seated Gate Pose***

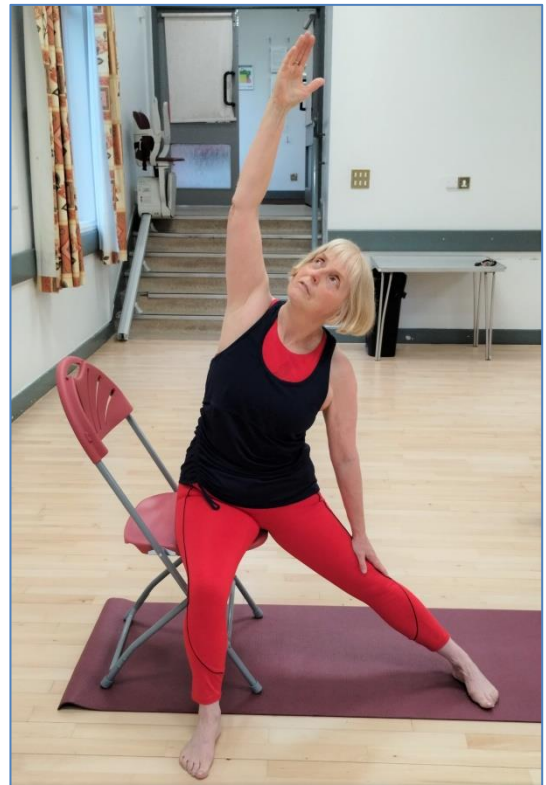
Stretches, strengthens, relieves tension. Improves posture, balance and spine flexibility

#### Progressions

- Take bottom hand further down leg to increase lateral flexion through spine. If confident, rather than sit, kneel on the seat with the front leg

#### Regressions

- Reduce amount of lateral flexion through spine by bringing bottom hand further up leg towards hip. Put bend in knee of straight leg, bringing leg more in front. Change seated position to face front and perform a side bend holding the chair seat with other hand for support



## ***Utkata Konasana***

### ***Seated Horse Stance or Goddess Pose***

Strong, calming, grounding. De-stresses, strengthens hips, thighs, improves posture, balance and stability

#### Progressions

- Come further forward in chair to reduce amount of support and increase load through legs. Take arms above head, apply mudra or breath practice

#### Regressions

- Bring feet closer together and reduce amount of external rotation through hips. Bring arms lower, Bring hands to heart or place on thighs



***Parivrtta Utkata Konasana***  
***Revolved Seated Horse Stance / Goddess Pose***

Stretches, strengthens, energises. Stimulates internal organs and improves mood. Improves balance, stability, circulation, spinal rotation and flexibility

Progressions

- Raise one arm, rest the other elbow/forearm on the thigh of the same leg and look up towards fingers of raised hand. Raise one arm, taking lower hand to the floor or a block. Bring hand or block closer to, or beyond midline of body to encourage increased rotation

Regressions

- Bring feet closer together and reduce amount of external rotation through hips. Keep hands on thighs and apply rotation without the use of arms



## ***Upavistha Vrksasana***

### ***Seated Tree Pose***

Strengthens, calms, creates focus. Stretches hips, inner thighs and improves balance and stability

#### Progressions

- Come to a standing chair supported version of tree pose. Take arms above head, apply mudra e.g. Kali Mudra – steeple

#### Regressions

- Lower ball of raised foot to floor. Place raised foot on a block and work on external rotation through hip



## ***Garudasana***

### ***Seated Eagle Pose***

Strengthens, calms, creates focus. Increases shoulder and hip mobility, reduces stress and improves balance and stability

#### Progressions

- Cross arms hooking one elbow under the other, rotating forearms to bring palms together. Cross the legs, hooking the foot of the crossed leg behind the calf of the other. Gently raise arms upwards

#### Regressions

- Cross lower legs - over shins or ankle. With elbows bent, simply cross arms bringing tips of fingers of each hand to rest on the opposite shoulder, then work to lift the elbows forward and upwards

With elbows bent, raise arms in front of you keeping palms and forearms together.





## Standing Chair Supported Postures

### ***Uttanasana***

#### ***Supported Standing Forward Fold***

Stretches, grounds, calms and balances. Improves flexibility in hamstrings and lower back. Reduces stress, improves balance and posture

#### Progressions

- Step further away from chair, fold further, allowing head to go lower and increasing flexion through hips. Come round and face seated side of chair, fold forward taking hands to the seat rather than holding the back rest

#### Regressions

- Put a bend in the knees to decrease stretch through hamstrings. Stand closer to the chair and perform a half fold



### ***Ardha Prasarita Padottanasana***

#### ***Supported Half Wide Forward Fold***

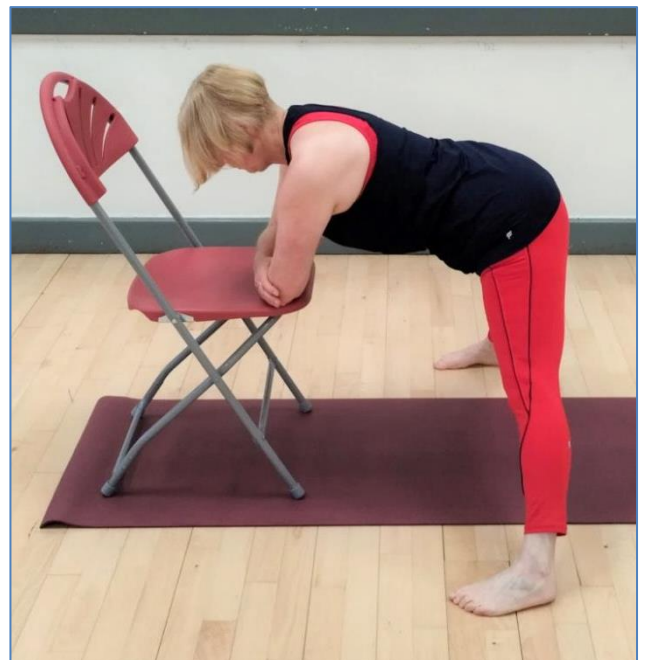
Stretches, calms and balances. Improves flexibility in hamstrings, calves, inner thighs and lower back. Stimulates internal organs, reduces stress, improves balance and alignment

#### Progressions

- Stepping away from the chair and taking hands to the floor or blocks. Wider stance with straighter legs to increase stretch

#### Regressions

- Put a bend in the knees to decrease stretch through hamstrings. Reduce amount of hip flexion by placing hands to the chair with straight arms to raise torso, reducing degree of fold



***Virabhadrasana III***  
***Supported Warrior III***

Stretches, strengthens and balances. Boosts energy, improves focus and flexibility in hamstrings, back and shoulders. Reduces stress, improves balance

Progressions

- Practice the balance posture without the assistance of a chair
- Hold posture for longer while incorporating pranayama technique e.g. ujayii breath



Regressions

- Put a bend in the supporting knee to decrease stretch through hamstrings. Bring lifted lower to floor or even toes to floor to reduce balance challenge

***Trikonasana***  
***Supported Triangle Pose***

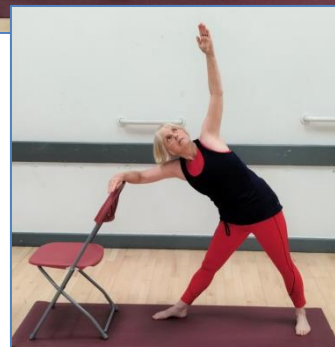
Stretches, strengthens, energises, balances and improves focus. Stretches hips, thighs, shoulders, chest and spine

Progressions

- Practice the balance posture without the assistance of a chair. Hold posture for longer while incorporating pranayama technique

Regressions

- Hold back of chair with hand rather than rest forearm, keeping arm straight and coming up to reduce amount of stretch. Bend elbow of raised arm and place hand to hip, keeping elbow pointing towards sky



**Adho Mukha Svanasana**  
**Supported Downward Facing Dog**

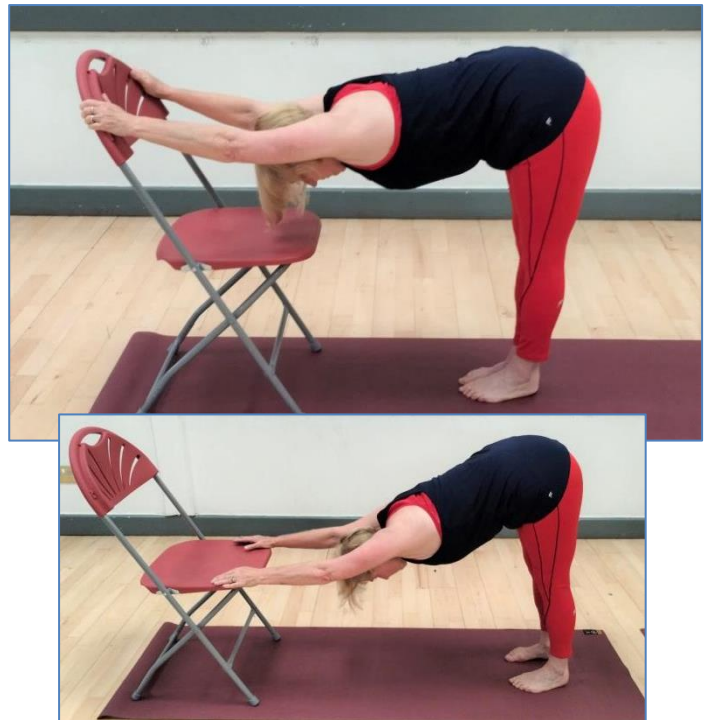
Stretches, strengthens, calms. Improves posture, spinal alignment, balance and stability. Lengthens hamstrings, calves and back muscles. Reduces stress.

Progressions

- Bring hands lower, onto seat to deepen posture

Regressions

- Bring hands higher, reduce amount of hip flexion, bend knees



**Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**  
**Supported Upwards Facing Dog**

Stretches, strengthens, energises. Stretches the entire front of the body whilst improving strength in hands, wrists, arms shoulders and back. Improves posture, circulation and calms the nervous system

Progressions

- Perform lower to the floor

Regressions

- Come to a more upright, standing position behind chair, take a small step away, hands on backrest, lift onto toes and press hips forward towards backrest, extending hips and spine lifting chest to sky. Seated cobra



**NOTE:** For safety, to avoid the chair tipping over, postures where weight is bearing down on the chair, should always be performed with the weight bearing on the seat, not the back rest.

## ***Parsvottanasana***

### ***Chair Supported Pyramid***

Stretches, strengthens, balances. Increases flexibility in hamstrings, lower back and glutes. Improves circulation, balance, stability and relaxes nervous system

#### Progressions

- Place hands on front thigh or shin. Increase forward fold and press backward on stretching leg

#### Regressions

- Place hands on chair and come up with straight arms to decrease the amount of fold forward. Take the posture to a seated position – seated pyramid pose



## ***Vrksasana***

### ***Supported Tree Pose***

Strengthens, calms, creates focus. Stretches hips, inner thighs and improves balance and stability

#### Progressions

- Perform posture without the assistance of a chair. Take arms above head, bring foot higher up inner thigh. Increase external rotation through hip, Close eyes

#### Regressions

- Lower the leg by taking sole of foot to inside calf. Take foot all the way down, bringing toes to touch floor to decrease balance challenge. Remove arm movement completely, face the back of chair with hold backrest with both hands. Keep eyes open. Take posture to a seated position – seated tree pose





## ***Phalakasana Chair***

### ***Chair Supported Plank Pose***

Strengthens whole body. Improves spinal stability, improves posture and overall physical stability

#### Progressions

- Decrease incline by using a lower chair, or taking posture to the floor. Hold plank for longer. Extend one hip to raise one foot off the floor

#### Regressions

- Apply some flexion through hip joints. Bring posture to a more upright position with a higher chair or take the posture to a wall.



**NOTE:** For safety, to avoid the chair tipping over, postures where weight is bearing down on the chair, should always be performed with the weight bearing on the seat, not the back rest.

## ***Utthita Parsvakonasana***

### ***Supported Extended Side Angle***

Stretches and strengthens. Lengthens whole side of the body. Opens chest and shoulder, stimulates internal organs, improves posture, balance and flexibility.

#### Progressions

- Take forearm off chair and rest on top of thigh. Lock the arm inside the thigh. Take hand to ankle, shin or floor. Take foot of back straight leg further back

#### Regressions

- Apply some flexion through hip joints. Bring posture to a more upright position with a higher chair or take the posture to a wall.





***Tada Parighasana Pada Chair***  
***Standing Chair Half Split***

Stretches, strengthens, calms. Improves flexibility in hamstrings, hips and lower back. Improves balance, stability, relieves stress and tension

Progressions

- Take hands further down leg towards shins, increasing forward flexion to increase stretch. Increase stretch further by taking hands further down leg towards foot or even to the seat of the chair. Raise leg even higher with the addition of a cushion or bolster under the elevated foot.

Regressions

- Bend the knee of the stretching leg. Bring hands further up leg towards thigh or even hands on hips. Lose some flexion at the hips by keeping foot on the chair but coming to a standing upright position. Bend the knee of the supporting leg.



***Ardha Chandrasana***  
***Supported Half Moon***

Stretches, strengthens, calms. Improves circulation, focus and concentration, as well as balance, breathing and stability. Reduces stress and anxiety

Progressions

- Take hand on chair towards a block on the floor. Straighten supporting leg and close eyes to challenge balance

Regressions

- Reduce depth of posture by holding back rest behind chair. Take lifted leg towards floor. Bend knee of supporting leg. Lower raised arm.



## ***Parighasana***

### ***Standing Gate Pose***

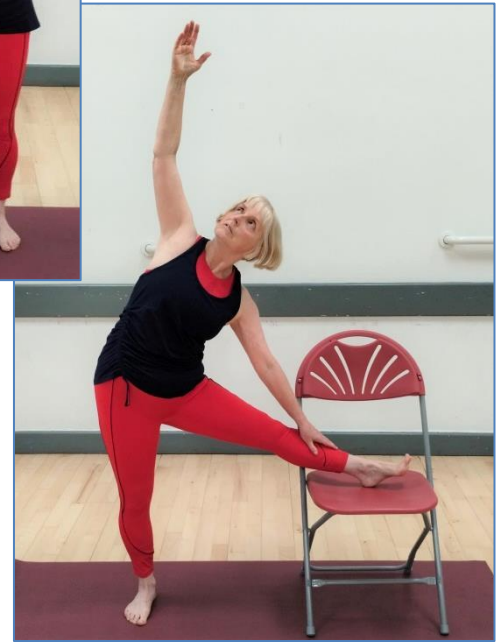
Stretches, strengthens, relieves tension. Improves posture, balance and spine flexibility

#### Progressions

- Raise foot of lifted leg by placing a cushion or bolster onto the seat of the chair. Slide hand further down the lifted leg, increasing lateral flexion in spine and increasing stretch

#### Regressions

- Place knee on chair. Bring hand higher up the lifted leg towards thigh or hip, reducing side stretch. Lower the raised arm. Using a lower chair to lower the lifted leg



## ***Natarajasana***

### ***Supported Dancer's Pose***

Stretches, strengthens. Improves flexibility, opens chest and shoulders, stimulates internal organs and promotes well-being

#### Progressions

- Increase forward flexion by placing hand to seat of chair rather than back rest. Lift back foot higher towards the sky and increase extension through spine

#### Regressions

- Use a strap around the foot to hold the leg up. Lower the lifted leg. Hold the outside of the ankle, rather than inside the foot. Come up higher, reducing forward flexion, performing more of standing quad stretch. Bend the supporting knee



## ***Vasisthasana***

### ***Chair Supported Side Plank***

Stretches, strengthens, energises, balances. Opens chest, strengthens arms, shoulders, legs and core - including obliques. Stimulates internal organs and balances emotions.

#### Progressions

- Stack feet, rather than split stance. When stacked, raise top leg. Look up towards hand to challenge balance

#### Regressions

- Bring arm down, Look forward rather than upwards to decrease balance challenge. Come closer to the mat and place bottom knee to the floor. Come to a higher standing position – take it to a wall.



**NOTE:** For safety, to avoid the chair tipping over, postures where weight is bearing down on the chair, should always be performed with the weight bearing on the seat, not the back rest.

## Contraindications for Chair Yoga

Chair yoga is generally considered safe and effective and is usually well-suited to individuals with limited mobility. However, there are some contraindications that need to be considered. In the presence of any of the following conditions, chair yoga may not be suitable or should be modified to ensure the safety of your participants.

### 1. Degenerative Bone Disease

Individuals with severe osteoporosis or weakened bones may be at risk of fracture. For these participants, avoid deep twisting poses, forward bends, or any movements that put stress on the spine. Focus on gentle stretches and postures that promote balance and stability without adding strain.

### 2. Conditions of the Spine

Individuals with severe spinal conditions such as herniated discs, spondylolisthesis (vertebral slippage) or spondylosis, should avoid any involve deep spinal movements, particularly twisting or bending. Seated postures that keep the spine neutral are advised. You should focus on gentle stretching and strengthening exercises that will not aggravate the condition. You may want to refer any participant with a severe spinal condition to their GP to seek advice before participating.

### 3. Degenerative or inflammatory Joint Disease with Joint Instability

For individuals with advanced arthritis, joint inflammation, or instability, avoid excessive movement or weight-bearing on the affected joints. Modify postures where possible to reduce pressure on the joints and keep movements slow and controlled.

### 4. Individuals Recovering from Surgery or Injury

Individuals recovering from surgery or injury should avoid any movement that could affect healing or cause further damage. If in doubt, advise the participant to contact their consultant or GP before participating. Individuals who have had knee or hip replacements may be looking to chair yoga as a form of rehabilitation. A chair yoga class could be very beneficial for such individuals, as long as they have had their scheduled check-ups and are exercising as advised by their consultant. Be sure to modify postures for individuals recovering from surgery or injury, and tell the participant to avoid any movements that cause discomfort or pain.

### 5. Uncontrolled Blood Pressure

Certain movements may affect blood pressure. Intense forward bends, holding the breath, or taking arms above the head for extended periods may raise blood pressure, even while seated. For individuals suffering with hypertension (high blood pressure), avoid exercises that significantly raise heart rate or involve breath retentions. Focus on postures that promote relaxation and deep breathing. Standing too quickly after being seated may cause light headedness or even fainting in hypotensive participants (those with low blood pressure) and this should be avoided. Remember that many participants may be on medication for such conditions and as result this can be considered as blood pressure that is under medical control.

## 6. Balance or Coordination Issues, Including Vertigo and Inner Ear Disorders

Although being seated largely reduces the need for standing balance, certain movements such as sit and stand exercises, or standing supported balance postures will still challenge balance skills and may increase risk of falling in those susceptible. Avoid rapid transitions and make sure the chair is perfectly stable. Place it against a wall if necessary. In addition, people with inner ear issues may experience dizziness or disorientation when moving their head during some transitions. Avoid movements that could cause dizziness in vertigo sufferers, such as rapid changes in position (particularly the head), excessive bending forwards and ensure to keep all movements slow and controlled.

## 7. Respiratory Conditions such as COPD and Asthma

Individuals with breathing difficulties may struggle with certain exercises or breathing techniques. Exercise and breath practice in general may help to improve such conditions, but it has to be carefully considered. Exercises that involve holding the breath or exerting effort, may be too much. In these individuals, avoid techniques that involve breath retentions or rapid breathing. Practice gentle, diaphragmatic breathing and avoid overly strenuous movements.

## 8. Heart Conditions

Special care should be taken when working with individuals with diagnosed heart conditions. Dynamic sequences and pranayama that includes breath retentions may challenge their cardiovascular system. For these participants, avoid vigorous movements and sequences that raise the heart rate. Restorative poses and calming, relaxed breathing should be your focus. If you're really unsure, it's not unreasonable for you to ask them to speak to their health provider prior to taking part.

## 9. Severe Mental Health Disorders

It's widely recognised that yoga can offer mental health benefits. However, individuals with certain mental health conditions, such as severe anxiety or psychosis, may find certain practices triggering, particularly breath control exercises or poses that induce heightened bodily awareness. With such individuals, it is advisable to avoid practices that focus on intense inner awareness or breath retention. Use calming, grounding poses and create a supportive environment to reduce anxiety or overstimulation.

## 10. Peripheral Neuropathy or Nerve Damage

It's worth noting that individuals with diabetes may suffer with some kind of peripheral neuropathy or nerve damage. This can result in reduced sensation or control over certain parts of their body. With these participants, focus on controlled movements and encourage correct alignment to reduce the risk of injury. Avoid exercises that put stress on areas where reduced sensation is present.

### Guidelines

Taking all the contraindications into account, additional modifications may be required or even a medical referral – if in doubt, check it out!

As a general guideline, your participant should stop exercising immediately if they feel any pain or severe discomfort. In the event that they experience chest pains, shortness of breath, feel lightheaded, faint or dizzy, they should stop immediately and seek medical advice.



## Evidence Based Research Into The Effectiveness of Chair Yoga

There are several studies which have explored the effectiveness of chair yoga for older adults or those with physical limitations. Here are some evidence-based research findings that highlight the positive outcomes from chair yoga interventions:

### 1. Chair Yoga and Elderly Individuals at Risk for Falls

A 2012 study published in the *International Journal of Yoga* and included in the *National Library of Medicine* called, “*Safety and feasibility of modified chair-yoga on functional outcome among elderly at risk for falls*”, specifically looked at 16 seniors with a median age of 88 years and a previous history of falls. Over an 8 week period, subjects were given chair yoga classes twice per week and positive outcomes including improved functional reach, lower depression and sit to stand time.

Key outcomes:

- Lower depression, reduced anxiety and fear of falling
- Improvements in mobility and less reliance on assistive devices
- Improved balance, functional reach and increased quality of life

This pilot study is the first to demonstrate that yoga is a feasible and safe intervention for elderly seniors who may be at risk for falls in their ninth and tenth decades of life. The study showed improvements in virtually all physiological and psychology areas. However, a randomized clinical trial is needed to establish the definitive efficacy of yoga for objective functional improvement in seniors with fall risk.

### 2. Improvement in Physical Function and Pain Reduction

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) published in *The Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (2017)* examined the effects of chair yoga on older adults with osteoarthritis. The study included 131 participants with a mean age of 72 years, who practiced chair yoga twice a week for 8 weeks. The results showed significant reductions in pain and improvements in physical function.

Key outcomes:

- Reduced pain intensity and pain interference in daily life
- Reductions in fatigue and improved gait speed
- Greater ability to perform activities of daily living (ADL)

This study demonstrated that chair yoga could offer an accessible alternative to traditional yoga for people with mobility challenges or chronic pain.

### 3. Effect of Chair Yoga Therapy on Functional Fitness in Adults with Osteoarthritis

A 2023 study that can be found on the *National Library of Medicine* and published in *MDPI Open Access Journals*, found that chair yoga improved functional fitness in 85 Taiwanese women suffering with knee arthritis. 110 minute sessions were held twice a week for 12 weeks. It found improvements in both upper and lower body muscle strength, flexibility agility and balance.

Key outcomes:

- Significant increases in upper limb, lower limb and hand grip strength
- Improvements in agility and dynamic and static balance
- Improvements in upper and lower limb flexibility and daily life activities

The study suggested that chair yoga can result in physical fitness in all areas, including strength, flexibility, balance and agility

### 4. Chair Yoga for Patients with Dementia

Research published in *The American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias (2019)* studied the effects of chair yoga on patients with mild-to-moderate dementia. Over a 12-week period, participants engaged in seated yoga sessions, and the study found positive effects on both behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD).

Key outcomes:

- Lower depression and reduced agitation during the sessions
- Enhanced engagement in the activity
- Increased quality of life

Results showed that participants with moderate-to-severe dementia could safely adhere to non-pharmacological interventions and that chair yoga showed significant improvements in quality of life compared to a music intervention group. Both the chair yoga and a chair-exercise group showed improvement over time, while a music intervention group declined. These results are significant because they show that chair yoga can be an effective, intervention for individuals with cognitive impairment, offering both physical activity and psychological benefits.

### Conclusion to Evidence Based Research

The body of evidence from these studies suggests that chair yoga can lead to significant improvements in physical function, mental health, and quality of life, particularly among older adults or individuals with limited mobility. The benefits include pain reduction, improved balance and flexibility, and enhanced mental well-being. These positive outcomes show that chair yoga is a safe, accessible, and effective intervention for populations with diverse health needs.

## Teaching Chair Yoga as a Career

Teaching chair yoga can be incredibly rewarding, but with a changing UK population, it could also be very lucrative. The 65+ demographic is at an all-time high and is set to increase even more over the coming years. Seniors can be some of the most regular and loyal customers, and many are looking for activities that cater to their abilities and physical limitations.

It's worth remembering that such a demographic are likely to be retired and many are looking for activities that can form part of their regular weekly schedule. Social interaction may be at the top of their list of priorities, possibly above any benefits of physical exercise. Ultimately, chair yoga provides accessibility and gives people an opportunity to partake in yoga – an activity they may have previously felt was beyond their abilities.

Ideas for running a chair yoga business:

- **Community classes** – Hiring a village hall, community centre or school hall and charging a fee per person. This can be one of the most lucrative ways to run classes. Remember, you will need to have access to suitable chairs and you will have to provide any additional equipment yourself. You will also need to advertise and market your sessions along with adequate public liability insurance. Promoting social inclusion is a key policy of most local authorities. They may have activity programs that your group could be part of, or may even be able to provide funding.
- **Working with your local authority** – Most local authorities have some kind of Sports Development Unit which will invariably hold weekly activity sessions as part of a Governmental initiative to keep the population healthy. Approaching your local authority and selling yourself with the suggestion of holding chair yoga classes for them, could be a great way of getting classes off the ground. The Sports Development Unit, sports centre or public facility in question would advertise and market the classes for you and provide all the equipment. You would of course be employed by the local authority, or you may charge them a flat fee on a self-employed basis.
- **A private gym or health club** – Private gyms and health clubs may be looking to put some specialist classes on their timetables. You could approach local gyms asking them if they may be interested in some chair yoga sessions. The gym will be responsible for all marketing and will provide equipment. The disadvantage here being that working for private gyms is not usually very lucrative and is quite possible that they may not have access to a large enough number of suitable chairs.
- **Residential care homes** – Residential care homes are always looking for new activities for their residents. Chair yoga is an excellent activity and could benefit residents in so many ways. Care homes may agree to pay you a flat fee to hold classes on a self-employed basis, or they may get each resident to pay you individually out of their own money. If the residents pay you themselves, you would normally charge a reduced fee, as the care home will be providing you with a ready-made class in the form of many willing participants and will not be charging you a room hire fee. All these things can be negotiated at the point of contact.



- **NHS health centres and GP surgeries** – Many GP surgeries these days hold remedial sessions in small groups for special populations. It could be worth getting in touch with your local surgery to see if they have any sessions or whether they might consider some small sessions for their patients. Alternatively, you could always mail-shot your local GP surgery, advertising that you are holding chair yoga sessions at a local venue, so that the surgery can refer any patients who may benefit from the classes, along to your session.



As a professional yoga teacher, you may require some of the following:

- **Public Liability Insurance** – Many venues available for hire these days require a copy of your current public liability insurance certificate. Public liability insurance is absolutely essential in today's teaching environment and is generally inexpensive for the extent to which you are covered.
- **Public Performance License** – If you plan to use music, you may need a license. As a general rule, any commercially bought, licensed music requires a PPL license. However PPL Free (usually non-original artists/cover versions) music is available. License free music is also now widely available and is highly recommended. The music is inexpensive, requires no additional licenses and can even be used in your online programs.
- **First Aid or CPR Certificate** – There is no legal requirement to have a first aid or CPR certificate, but it is knowledge worth having. Courses are usually only a few hours long and provide you with potentially life-saving information. Some insurers require it, so you may want to check your policy

## Safety and the Teaching Environment

When holding chair yoga classes, you should be looking to create a safe, positive and effective teaching environment. Build positive relationships with your participants and create a safe and inclusive space where everyone feels welcomed.

Get to know people and refer to them by name. Be chatty, smile, help distract people from their day-to-day worries and try to build a community that people want to be a part of.

### Safety

Health and safety is paramount. Make sure the room is set out accordingly. Things to consider are:

- **Set up** – set mats and chairs out at the correct distance apart. Remember to allow enough room for two people sat side-by-side to extend their arms outwards.
- **Chairs** – Chairs should be suitable for chair yoga as discussed earlier in the course. Generally they should be on a flat, non-slip surface (preferably a mat), should be strong enough to take the participant's weight, should have all its feet and should not rock.
- **Mats** – Mats are preferable but not 100% necessary, as long as the chair will not slide or move around during exercise. For example, chairs on carpets tend to be more stable and chairs with good, clean rubber feet also tend to be adequate. A mat offers a clean and comfortable area for your participant to work bare footed, as well as provide extra non-slip protection. Beware of curled up corners as these can be a trip hazard. Mats should ideally be sanitised between sessions and can be easily cleaned with a disposable wipe.
- **Trip Hazards** – Trip hazards can come in many forms:
  - Curled up corners of mats. For minimal curls, turn them over so curled side is down
  - Trailing cables from sound equipment
  - Water bottles
  - Coats, bags, footwear and other clothing that has been removed
  - Slippery or wet floors
- **Fire Precautions** – Make sure you know the fire procedure at the facility you are working at. Fire extinguishers should be visible and on hand and fire exits should be unobstructed. Be aware of this as many people do not consider fire exit obstruction when putting coats, bags and drinks bottles on the floor.
- **Ventilation** – Ensure adequate ventilation. Windows and doors can be opened if required, particularly during hot weather. Remember that when working with seniors, they are unlikely to get very hot and sweaty and will possibly feel the cold. There is a fine line between opening windows for ventilation and making the room too chilly. Always be aware of this.
- **Health Questionnaire** – A health PAR Q should be filled out by every participant on their first visit. This is a declaration made by the participant and is designed to make you aware of any health conditions. From this information, you can gauge whether chair yoga is suitable for them, or if additional modifications or medical referral will be required. If you're utilising an online booking system, the health PAR Q can be easily incorporated into the booking system and most online platforms offer this. If not, a simple paper questionnaire will suffice. Make sure you have enough forms printed off and pens.

## Teacher Ethics

As professional yoga teachers, we set ourselves various standards and guidelines for teaching and it's important that we adhere to them at all times. In a class situation, our participants become our responsibility. We must be respectful and careful to maintain integrity and professionalism when dealing with our customers and treat each individual with fairness and dignity.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

Remember your participants have a right to privacy. Any details shared between your participant and you should be treated confidentially and respectfully. In the UK the Data Protection Act controls how organisations use personal information. It requires that personal data is used fairly, lawfully, and transparently, and that it is kept secure. There is also 'common law duty of confidentiality' which states that information given in confidence should not be disclosed without the individual's consent, and this extends beyond death. Laws aside, it is just good practice to respect people's privacy, within the class environment or out of it. It's good to build a rapport with your chair yoga students and know that people WILL confide in you.

## To Conclude...

Remember that your chair yoga participants may be struggling with any number of physical limitations and what is difficult to them, may seem incredibly easy to you or the average person. Coming along to your chair yoga session could be a big deal for them, they may even feel slightly nervous first time. For this reason we must treat this special demographic with particular compassion and understanding. Good teachers adapt their teaching to meet the needs and strengths of all their students. When you go into a session exuding positive energy, with the intention of making a positive impact on someone else's day, you will always be a teacher that is very much in demand.

