

Beginner Yoga after Concussion

Why yoga?

We used to recommend that people rest after a concussion, until their symptoms completely subsided. We now know that activity is an important part of concussion rehabilitation, and gradual entry back into an active lifestyle is critical. Exercise has been shown to have an incredible range of effects on the human body, including improved oxygen delivery to the brain. However, an elevated heart rate is typically a symptom inducing for someone with Post Concussion Syndrome, and creates a barrier to exercise.

Yoga has been shown to be very beneficial as a concussion rehabilitation tool. Through yoga, you can gain the benefits of exercise without elevating your heart rate too much. It promotes strength and flexibility, while being mindful of your heart and brain. The meditative aspect of yoga helps to improve memory and concentration, as well as helps to decrease stress, anxiety and frustration.

How do I do it?

There are a few things to keep in mind when you start doing yoga:

- Do not push yourself too hard! You do not need to achieve the standard posture on the first, second or hundredth time
- You are allowed to stretch to mild discomfort, but do not go into pain
- You are allowed to take breaks!
- You can do it on a yoga mat, thick mat, towel or carpeted floor – somewhere solid but comfortable, with a little give, and where you won't slip
- Shoes and socks off
- **Breathing is critical –**
 - **Full inhale and exhale** with each breath, right down into your belly
 - Breathing should be **easy** – smooth, soft and uninterrupted
 - Try to **exhale 1-2 seconds longer** than you inhale

What do I do?

There are five series – Sitting, Lying, Four Point, Balance and Final Series. Each pose should be held for 5-10 breaths – there is no timing, just breathing with each pose.

When you start, start with the Sitting Series. As you get better and feel more comfortable, add more series to your daily routine. Always finish with the Final Series.

If you go to a class, talk to the instructor beforehand and tell them you have been recovering from a concussion. Make sure you don't do any posture you aren't comfortable with, and avoid any postures where your head is lower than your heart.

Do I have to do yoga?

Nope – but it's a great option.

I. ***Sitting Series***

1. Breathe in Sitting

Sit on the floor with crossed legs and tall posture. Place your hands on your knees, allowing your shoulders to relax. Close your eyes. Fully breathe in slowly and deeply, focusing on breathing into your belly. Remember, the breath should be smooth and easy. Then, fully exhale, thinking about making your exhale 1-2 seconds longer than your inhale.

Do this for 10 breaths.



2. Seated Butterfly

This posture can be done with or without a pillow under your buttocks, depending on how tight the muscle group is.

Sit tall and place the soles of your feet together, letting your knees drop out to the sides. Place your hands on your knees or ankles, dropping your shoulders and letting them relax into the pose.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths.



3. Rolling Spine

Sit in a butterfly position or crossed legs. Inhale and slowly arch your back, starting from your tailbone and working your way up until your head is tipped back.

Then, exhale and curl your spine back in, starting from your neck and working all the way down to your lower back.

Do this for 5 breaths.



4. Seated Twist

Sit in a tall posture with crossed legs. Twist your spine, starting from the bottom and moving to the top. Focus on rotating through your ribs; you may choose to include your neck or not. Place your hand on your opposite knee and reach your other hand behind you. Use your arms to help stabilize you in your posture, but try to avoid pulling through your arms.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths on each side.



II. *Lying Down Series*

5. Wind Relieving Pose Series

- A. Knee to Chest – bring one knee to your chest. Place your hands on your knee, bringing your knee gently into your chest and feeling a stretch and the front of your hip.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths on each side.



- B. Two knees to chest – bring both knees to your chest. Feel a stretch at your lower back.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths.



- C. Spinal Twist – keep one leg straight and down on the ground. With the other leg, bend your knee and bring it across your body, allowing your buttock to lift off the floor.

Turn your head so you are looking the opposite direction, twisting your spine as you go.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths on each side.



III. *Four Point Series*

6. Child's Pose

Kneel, allowing the tops of your feet to rest on the mat. Keep your toes together and your knees apart. Let your upper body sink to the floor so that your forehead is touching the ground.

You can either place your arms at your sides or stretch them out above your head.

Hold this pose for 5-10 breaths.



7. Cat/Cow

Keep your hands and knees firmly on the ground, arms straight and hands under your shoulders. Lift your buttocks so your knees are directly under your hips. Inhale and sink your back, starting from the tailbone and working your way up to your neck, lifting your chin so you are looking forward.

Then, slowly exhale, arching your spine, again going from tailbone to neck. Tuck your chin under your body.

Do this for 5 breaths.



8. Pointed Dog

Keep your spine neutral and lift an arm and opposite leg. Try not to let your spine twist – keep your back level and reach with your arm and leg.

If you are having difficulty with this, try just doing an arm or a leg.

Hold this pose for 5 breaths on each side.



IV. **Balance Series**

9. Low Lunge

Place one foot ahead and lower your body into a lunge position, resting your knee and top of your foot on the mat. Stretch your back leg out behind you. Bend your front knee, keeping your knee over your toes. You should feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your thigh and groin.

There are four levels of difficulty with this pose – pick the pose that is challenging but one that you can accomplish.

A. Hands on the ground – place your hands on either side of your forward leg.



- B. Hands on your knee – Let your shoulders relax, use your core and keep your posture tall.



- C. Hands above your head, eyes looking straight ahead.



- D. Hands above your head, eyes looking at your hands.



Hold your pose of choice for 5 breaths on each side.

10. Tree Pose

Stand tall and gently engage your core. Fix your gaze on a stable point. Shift all your weight to one foot, keeping your pelvis square. Place your hands in the prayer position in front of your chest with your shoulders relaxed.

There are four levels of difficulty with this pose – pick the pose that is challenging but one that you can accomplish. Each pose can also be challenged by placing your arms above your head.

- A. Foot away, on tip toe – place your non-weight bearing foot a little bit away from your weight bearing leg. Use your tip toe to help you balance.

- B. Foot at ankle – turn your knee out to the side and place your foot on your ankle, with the toes pointing down.
- C. Foot at lower leg – turn your knee out to the side and place your foot against your calf, with the toes pointing down.
- D. Foot at thigh – turn your knee out to the side and place your foot against your thigh, with the toes pointing down.



Hold your pose of choice for 5 breaths on each foot.

V. *Final Series*

11. Savasana

Lie on your back with your feet as wide as the mat, arms by your side and your palms up. Round your shoulders in to the mat, turn your feet out to the sides and close your eyes. Feel your body sink into the mat and focus on your breath.



Hold this pose for 10 breaths.