



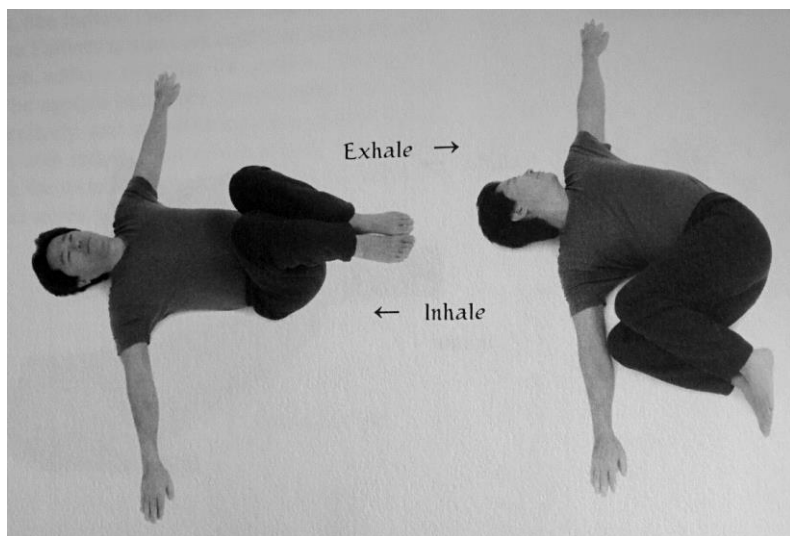
A simple Practice to prepare for Meditation

By Ruth Knight

Even a short yoga practice can set you up nicely for meditation by releasing tension from your muscles, waking up the flow of energy in your body, and building the necessary strength and flexibility for sitting comfortably during meditation. The power of asana to prepare us for sitting is enlivened when we align our mind deeply into the rhythm of our breath throughout each movement.

It's a simple recipe! Practice a handful of asanas specifically chosen to support your body. Focus your mind within the breath by "breathing" into your body, and voila! You have a perfect meditation warm-up practice.

Here is a basic practice done lying down that nearly everyone can do to get ready for meditation.



TWIST

What it does for your body: builds abdominal strength, opens your side body, shoulders, and chest to receive the breath, and gives your back a nice "squeeze" to release tension.

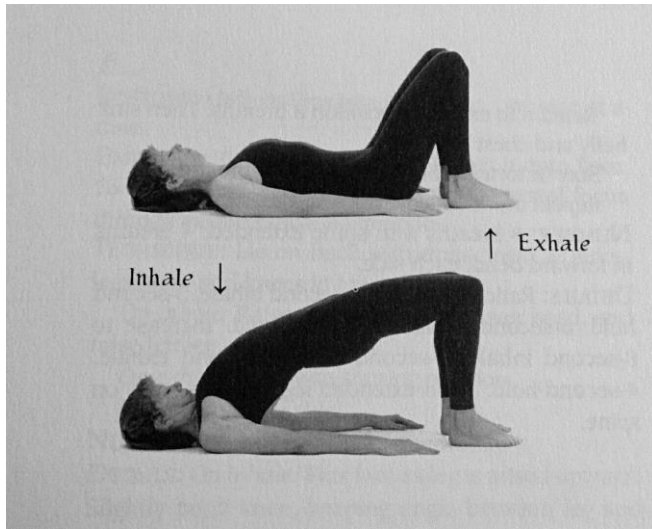
How to do it: Lie down on your back. Open your arms out from your shoulders at slightly less than a right angle. Roll shoulders outward, hug them to the floor. Roll lower arms inward from elbow to wrist and spread palms and fingers to the floor.

Bend your knees with thighs lifted toward the chest enough to form an angle slightly less than 90 degrees.

Draw your lower belly in gently to stabilize your lower core.

Exhaling, bring both knees toward floor and turn head in opposite direction. Inhaling, return to starting position. Repeat to the other direction.

Do this twist to each side 6 times. When you finish, hug your knees into your chest and then stretch your legs out a bit.



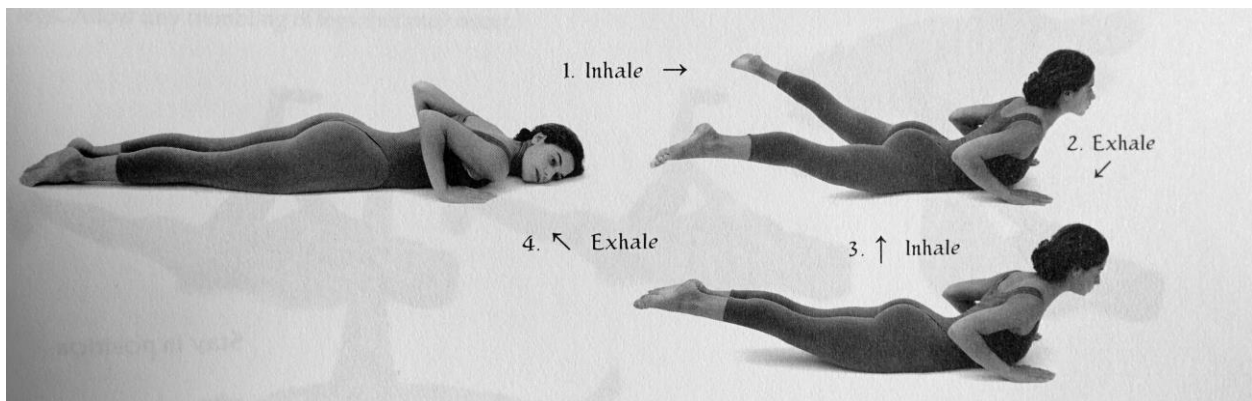
DESK POSE

What it does for your body: stretches the front of your hips, thighs, and abdomen; strengthens spinal muscles, stretches the neck, opens the upper chest and front ribs.

How to do it: Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor about hips width apart and comfortably close to your buttocks. Place your arms along your sides.

As you inhale, press down on your feet, and keeping your chin down, raise your pelvis until your neck is gently stretched to the floor.

Repeat this entire movement 6 times and then stretch your legs out.



LOCUST POSE VARIATION

What it does for your body: strengthens the large muscles of the back, buttocks, and the musculature supporting the sacroiliac joint.

How to do it: Lie on your stomach, with your head turned to one side, palms on floor by your chest (elbows bent), and legs together.

As you inhale lift your chest, turning head to center and lift your legs, bringing them as far apart as possible

As you exhale, keep your chest and legs up and keeping legs straight, bring your knees together.

Then inhale and open your legs wide.

Exhale and return to the starting position.

Repeat this entire movement 6 times, and then rest against the floor with your head turned to the right, arms along your sides, toes turned inward and heels outward.

Breathe into your back ribs to encourage release for your lower back.

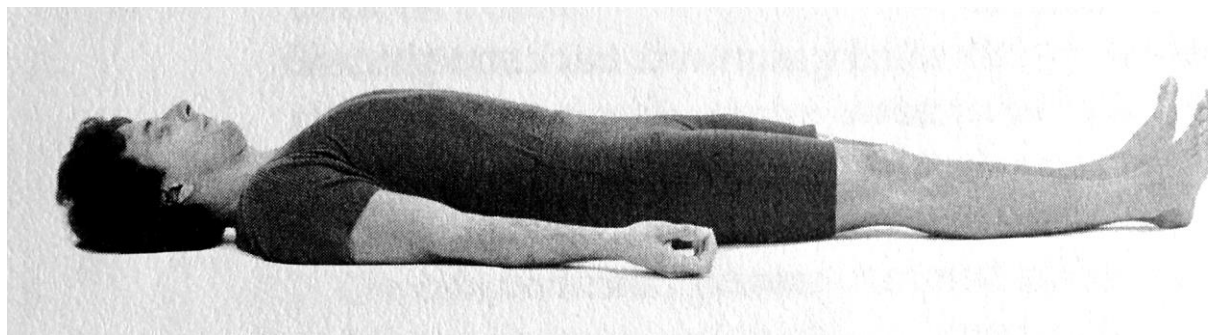
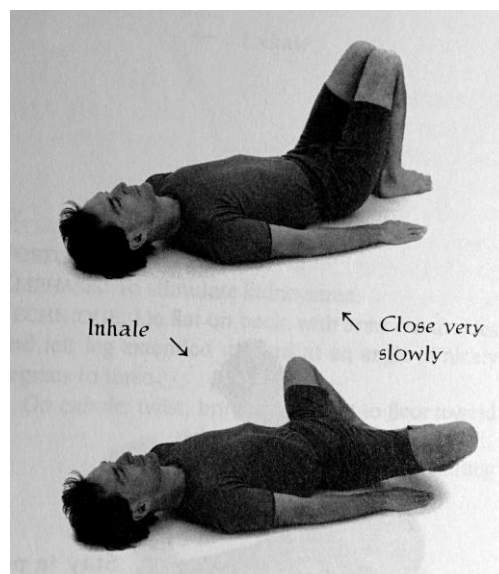
BOUND ANGLE POSE

What it does for your body: Stretches the inner thighs and increases circulation to perineal floor.

How to do it: Turn onto your back again with arms on the floor angled slightly outward from shoulders.

Bend your knees with feet on the floor near buttocks. Anchor your sacrum firmly to the floor, bring the soles of your feet together, and open knees wide. Very slowly close knees together – take up to one minute. Allow any shaking of the legs to happen. Open legs again and repeat. Do this up to 6 times. When you finish, bring your knees together and hold them comfortably into your chest.

Stretch your legs toward the ceiling to release back of legs.



SAVASANA

What it does for your body: Supports a deeply relaxed and integrated state for your body and mind.

How to do it: Come into a comfortable supine position with arms and legs relaxed and open on the floor, and your head and neck comfortable supported on top of a folded blanket.

Take a deeper breath into the center of your body, and as you exhale ask your body to soften against the floor. Do this once or twice more, and then settle in.

Place one hand on your upper abdomen just below your rib cage and the other hand on your lower belly. Feel your breath moving softly under your hands.

With no thought of trying to control your breathing, connect with the wave-like motion of inhalation and exhalation. See if you can give up any impulse to control your breath, and instead, feel yourself being breathed by your body.

As you go deeper into the experience, notice a state of both stillness and expansiveness within your breath. Allow yourself to become completely captivated by the rhythm of your breathing and the feeling of “being breathed”. Stay here for as long as you want.

When you stretch out and end this practice, continue to hold your awareness within the stillness and openness of your Savasana experience, and enjoy your meditation!

