

YOGA CALM TOP 10

Another excellent learning-preparedness process, this 10-minute flow emphasizes more standing and balancing poses, which have an energizing and grounding effect. It's a good flow for those afternoon lulls and to help develop the calm-yet-energized state necessary for test-taking. Volcano Breath can be especially helpful in determining and releasing emotions that may inhibit the learning process.

CALM



Seated Belly Breathing



Seated Pulse Count



Volcano Breath

ACTIVE



Woodchopper



Mountain



Roots



Crescent Moon



Modified Dancer

CALM



Twist



One-Minute Exploration

BENEFITS

Calms, focuses, and helps to self-regulate. Oxygenates the body. Teaches healthy, diaphragmatic breathing and draws awareness inward.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Students lie on their backs, stand, or sit in a chair with feet on the ground, hip-width apart. Hands are placed on the belly.
- Breathe into your belly so that hands go up and down with the breath like waves in the ocean.
- Relax all muscles to slow the breath even further.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

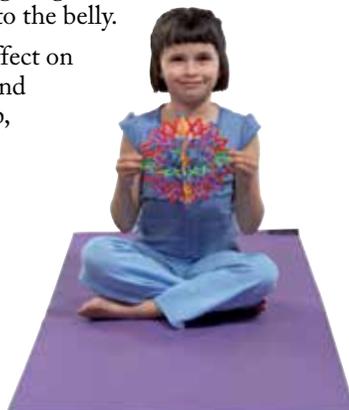
- Have a student demonstrate deep breathing while expanding and contracting the Hoberman Sphere as the class follows. This also develops group awareness and students' sensitivity to each other.
- Keeping one hand on the belly, bring the other hand up to the chest. Breathe from belly hand to heart hand.
- From seated position, place both palms on low back above hips. Breathe into the low back and hands (similar to Back Breathing, p. 61).
- From supine position, place a small flat stone or object on the belly. Move the object up and down with the breath.
- Take Pulse Count (p. 83) before and after Belly Breathing, and then do both at the same time to notice the relationship between breath and pulse.
- Use in health lessons on stress. Have students notice what happens to their breath during daily activities and when they are under stress.
- Use the imagery or sounds of slow-moving waves or wind to help slow the mind and breathing.
- Use slow, relaxing music (50 to 60 beats per minute).
- Teach a lesson or read a story about oxygen and why it is so important to the body.
- Anatomy inquiry: "Do you know what your lungs look like? Do you know where they are? What bones protect the lungs? What is your diaphragm?" Expand inquiry into the importance of clean air and protecting the environment.

NOTES

Even though the lungs physically extend only from under the collarbones to the lowest ribs, the abdominal organs move down and out with the diaphragm's action to help draw air into the body, giving the appearance and the sense that we are breathing into the belly.

Relaxed, diaphragmatic breathing has a positive effect on the cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, and muscular systems, and has a general effect on sleep, memory, energy levels, and concentration.

For more information, see chapter 4.



BELLY BREATHING: SEATED, STANDING, OR PRONE



PULSE COUNT



BENEFITS

Quiets and calms. Develops inner listening and personal awareness. Educates about the heart and circulatory system. Teaches about bodily rhythms and cycles of nature. Develops awareness that we do have control over our bodies.

TIME

2 to 20 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Take two fingers to the side of the mouth.
- Tip head slightly back and draw a line down with fingers into groove along the neck.
- Press gently to find pulse.
- Raise other hand when pulse is found.
- Count pulse beats silently to self.
- Now, count the pulse for 15 seconds. Later, expand to 30 seconds, and then 1 minute.
- Ask students what their count was. (*Note: Counts will vary and some students may have trouble counting or may make up exceptionally low or high counts.*)

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Run in place for one minute, then take pulse again. Discuss the reasons the pulse is different after running. Then try the opposite. Relax the muscles, slow the breathing, and concentrate on “thinking” your heart rate lower. Try playing relaxing music. What happens to the pulse?
- Time the group for 30 seconds, then have them do the math to calculate their pulse rate per minute.
- Older students can track their pulse and daily activities. Graph results, determine averages, and explore the relationships between activities and pulse.
- Take the pulse when students come in from recess and again after a 5-minute relaxation.
- Take the pulse when students are watching television, playing video games, and so on.
- Use as an introduction to a health lesson on the heart or stress. Include information on healthy resting and active heart rates.
- Show physical education charts for healthy aerobic heart training rates. Calculate each student’s optimal training heart rate for their age.

NOTES

Pulse Count and breath awareness are simple biofeedback tools for determining healthy activities and for training the sympathetic nervous system to be less reactive to stressors. Athletes use pulse and breathing rate information to set their workout difficulty levels, and to gauge their condition and recovery rates.

An 8- to 10-year-old child’s resting pulse rate is usually about 90 beats per minute, with rates varying from 60 to 110. Resting pulse rates much above 120 or much below 50 are uncommon and should be checked by a doctor (Lawrence Hall of Science, Family Health Program, 2001). Children’s maximal heart rate is much higher than adults, and is generally 200 to 205 contractions per minute (Riner & Sabath, 2003).



VOLCANO BREATH

BENEFITS

Calms and centers. Develops inner imagery. Develops group movement and awareness. Releases tension, regulates breath, and develops compassion and sensitivity.

TIME

2 to 5 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, or sit in a chair or cross-legged on the floor.
- Place palms together at the heart.
- Take a slow, deep breath through the nose and pause when the lungs are full.
- Hold the pause and bring the arms up over the head.
- Exhale and slowly “explode the volcano,” moving arms out to the side and then back together at heart.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Think of someone or something you would like to send your heart thoughts to. Get the image of that person, animal, or place strongly in mind. On the next Volcano Breath, send your thoughts out to that person. Allow students to share who they sent their thoughts to.
- Ask students to think of something they would like to bring into their life. As they exhale, they can shower this image around them.
- Use stories of children sending positive thoughts to one another.

NOTES

Volcano breath with “heart thoughts” can also help to access and release underlying emotions that might inhibit the learning process (see p. 141).



WOODCHOPPER



BENEFITS

Releases tension. Energizes and stimulates the nervous system. Develops focus and strengthens breathing (diaphragm) muscles. Combined with use of voice, helps students find their personal power.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet a little wider than hip-width apart and knees slightly bent.
- Take arms overhead with hands together as if holding an ax.
- Imagine a piece of wood on the ground in front of you.
- On a count of three, swing hands down to chop the imaginary piece of wood.
- Make a loud “Huh!” sound as your ax hits the imaginary wood.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Make the “Huh” sound come from the deepest part of the belly. Ask if students feel a difference doing it this way.
- When students picture the piece of wood on the floor in front of them, encourage them to really keep their focus on the wood as they chop down so they don’t miss it.
- Have individual students lead the pose in front of the classroom.
- Ask students to Activate (p. 54) their body before the activity and observe the difference.
- Combine with Pulse Count activity (p. 83) before and after to check the effect of the pose.
- Combine with Strong Voice activity (p. 122) to develop students’ personal power.
- Use before a test to make students more alert and/or to reduce anxiety and tension.

NOTES

Exercise empties lungs completely, creating a slight vacuum that pulls in fresh air.

Use before a test to increase alertness and reduce anxiety and tension.



MOUNTAIN

BENEFITS

Grounds, strengthens, and centers. Develops focus and postural awareness. Good beginning pose for new students.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, pointing straight ahead, and press them down into the earth. Hands can be alongside the body, or palms together at heart.
- Lift belly, head, and heart. Shoulders are back and down.
- Look straight ahead.
- Body is Activated (firmed toward the centerline).

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Ask students to press their feet into the ground in order to lift the top of their head toward the sky: “Feel the strength and stability of the mountain inside.”
- Have students stand with head and shoulders slumped versus standing in Mountain. Discuss how these different postures feel and what they communicate to others.
- Have students test the difference in stability between a feet-together stance versus hip-width Activated stance by gently pressing each other’s shoulders from the side.
- Combine with Strong Voice activity (p. 122).
- Encourage students to close their eyes while performing the pose and think of someone they are strong for. Then invite students to share their thoughts.
- Provide photos of famous mountains to help students develop imagery and connect them to places in the world. Try being Mount Everest or Mount Fuji, then find those mountains on the map.
- Use the mountain theme through a sequence of standing poses. End with a Guided Relaxation (chapter 7) that includes visiting a mountaintop.

NOTES

Mountain is traditionally taught as one of the first yoga poses.

See Alignment (p. 54).

Over time, poor posture, with head and shoulders slumped forward, can result in neck, shoulder, and low back problems. Mountain supports good posture.



ROOTS

BENEFITS

Grounds, calms, and centers students. Strengthens ankles, feet, and postural muscles. Develops balance, personal awareness, and a sense of competence. Excellent activity for focusing students before a lesson.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart and pointing straight ahead (Mountain, p. 79).
- Rock forward and back with body Activated (firm and straight) and feet firmly on the floor.
- Make the rocking movement smaller and smaller until you balance on the center of your feet.
- Now rock side to side and then slowly return to center.
- Begin making big circles to the right. Notice how your weight shifts to the four edges of each foot as you circle. Notice how the foot muscles work to keep you upright.
- Make the circles smaller and smaller until you again come back to center.
- Make big circles to the left now. Then make circles smaller until back at center.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Try the same activity with eyes closed.
- Invite students who snowboard, ski, or skateboard to share what they know about using the muscles in their feet to do these sports.
- Ask students to think about what it is that they are circling around, then share their responses.
- Use as a precursor to class lesson on gravity.
- Ask students to discuss what it means to be “centered.”

NOTES

Roots is a terrific activity for teaching the alignment principle of grounding the four corners of the feet (p. 56) and is good preparation for teaching Mountain (p. 79) and standing balance poses such as Tree (p. 91) and Dancer (p. 72).



UPWARD MOUNTAIN AND CRESCENT MOON



BENEFITS

Grounds and energizes. Stretches and strengthens shoulders. Opens side ribs for a fuller breath. Wakes students up. Good after long periods of sitting and in preparation for testing.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

UPWARD MOUNTAIN

- Stand with feet hip-width apart and arms straight up overhead.
- Palms face each other and fingers extend up.
- Press feet down and lift belly, head, and heart; shoulders back and down.
- Looks like football touchdown!

CRESCENT MOON

- From Upward Mountain, breathe in, press feet down, and stretch to the right slightly, curving into the shape of a crescent moon.
- Lengthen both sides of body.
- On an exhale, come back to center.
- Now stretch into Crescent Moon to the left.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Imagine sending laser beams out through your fingertips.
- As you reach up to the sky, imagine sending energy from the center of the earth to the sun.

NOTES

Upward Mountain and Crescent Moon teach the basic alignment principles of Activating, Expanding, and pressing out through the four corners of the feet (p. 56). They are also excellent preparation for Tree (p. 91) and other standing balance poses.



DANCER MODIFIED



BENEFITS

Calms, clears, and focuses the mind. Develops concentration, stability, strength, and grounding. Good after sitting for long periods and in preparation for tests. A balance pose that can be done by almost everyone.

TIME

10 seconds to 1 minute

ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart.
- Shift weight to the right foot. Lift the left foot behind and hold it with left hand.
- When in balance, raise the right arm.
- Look straight ahead. Focus on a spot on the wall to help with balance.
- Repeat on other side.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- To prepare for Dancer, balance on one foot at a time with eyes open and with eyes closed.
- Time students. Lengthen holding time as they grow stronger.
- Imagine a loved one holding your standing foot to the ground.
- Use positive self-talk: “I am strong. I am in control. I can do it.”
- Have students visualize themselves as superheroes as they balance.
- Have students close their eyes in the pose.
- Good pose to practice before more challenging balance activities like Block Creek (p. 64) or Tree Challenge (p. 92).
- Ask students to “Activate” and “Relax” (see p. 58) while they’re in the pose, then share their experiences.
- Have students practice changing images in their minds—visualizing a tall tree, a rock, and so on—and notice whether it has an effect on their balance.

NOTES

Prolonged sitting can tighten the thigh and hip flexor muscles. This pose counteracts that, while also providing quiet and deep proprioceptive stimulation.

By age 5, most children should be able to balance on one foot for 10 seconds.

TWIST

BENEFITS

Grounds, energizes, and calms. Balances the nervous system. Improves digestion and organ tone.

TIME

10 to 20 seconds each side

ACTIVITY

CHAIR TWIST

- Sit in a chair with feet on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Press down through feet and sitting bones, and stretch up through top of head.
- Take left hand across the right knee and place right hand on the back of the chair.
- Slowly and gently turn belly, heart, and head toward the back of the chair.
- Inhale and lengthen the spine; exhale and twist.
- Shoulders stay back and down.
- Repeat on the other side.



FLOOR TWIST

- Lie on back.
- Pull knees up toward the chest, then over to the right and all the way to the floor.
- Stretch arms out to the sides and look to the left.
- Stretch your breath out to your fingertips.
- Bring knees back to center.
- Repeat on left side.

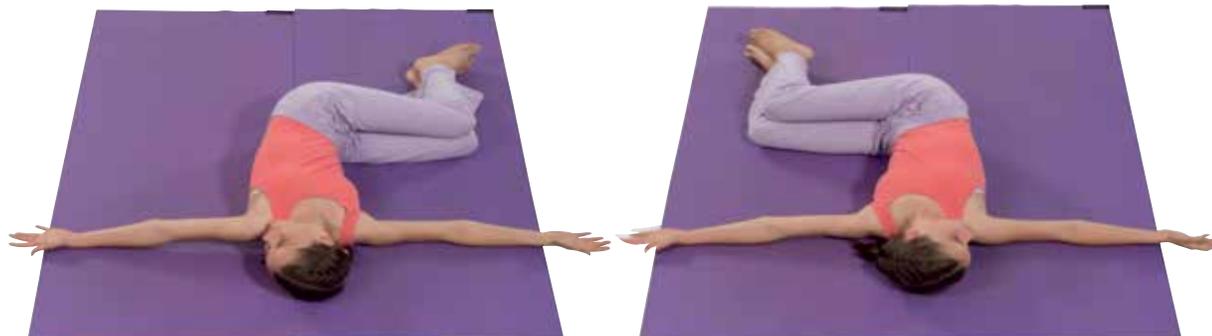
VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Practice Belly Breathing (p. 63) while in the pose.
- Use with Calm Voice process (p. 106).

NOTES

Twists massage the abdominal organs, help with digestion, and maintain the normal length and resilience of the soft tissues. They also help to maintain the health of the vertebral discs and facet joints.

Twists can be used before or after any yoga sequence as a warm-up or cool-down. They are particularly effective as a transition to a relaxation or storytelling process.



One-Minute Explorations

These short explorations—which can actually run as long as five minutes, as students’ concentration and relaxation skills improve—not only enable students to be silent and relaxed, but also give them a focus for their quiet time. In classrooms, it can be nice to start the day with the positive thoughts that this activity encourages.

We usually begin with a one-minute vacation. Before starting, though, we turn off the lights and turn on quiet, soothing music. The students rest their heads on their desks or lie on their mats and can take themselves on vacation anywhere they want for one minute. Initially, you can help spark their imagination by offering several ideas about where they might go, what they could do, and so on. As the children get better at stillness, you can increase the time.

Below, you’ll find more ideas for subjects to use for their imagination explorations.

Some Subjects for Imagination Exploration

- Remember a favorite time with a friend or family member.
- Imagine an invention that you can create.
- Go to your favorite vacation spot.
- Plan a party for yourself and your friends. What would you do? Where would you go?
- Think of three things you have done very well.
- Imagine creating a ride or game in an amusement park. What would it be like?
- Remember a sunny day when you were able to play outdoors with a friend.
- Think of three compliments you can give your class.
- Imagine the kind of day you would like to have today.
- Do you have a special place in nature or at your home? Imagine yourself there and picture what you like to do there.

Such explorations help students focus their minds on positive thoughts and can elicit positive emotions. They can also be used prior to specific lessons or writing assignments. For instance, before a history lesson, you could ask students to imagine traveling backward in time. Before a writing assignment in which they are to profile a friend, students might be asked to think of the person and the things he or she does. Before an art lesson, students could be asked to picture a flower or object in their mind’s eye—or before an astronomy lesson, to travel to outer space and explore the planets.

By using the imagination, students prepare to learn prior to a lesson, and the class is calmer and more manageable. When children practice this kind of exploration regularly, they enjoy it and look forward to the few minutes of silence.

Scripted Relaxations

Scripted relaxations are guided relaxations that can be read to the class. One excellent resource for such relaxations is the book *Ready...Set...R.E.L.A.X.* We also include a sample script of our own at the end of this chapter.

When using scripted imagery, we recommend reading over the story before using it with children. Sometimes the scripts may have something questionable in them, or they may lead the students in a direction you had not intended.

When reading the script, it is important to go slowly enough to give students time to process the images and concepts presented. This “body time” is a little slower than the pace of reading a story aloud. Pause after the imagery and tune in to students’ timing by watching their breathing, their bodies, and their facial expressions.