

## Yoga for Menopause

© Susan M. Lark M.D.

(Excerpted from *The Estrogen Decision Self Help Book*, Celestial Arts)

Source: <http://www.healthy.net>

Yoga stretches can benefit both the body and the mind, bringing energy and balance. This is particularly helpful to women who are currently in menopause or in menopause transition because their hormonal levels and body chemistry may be fluctuating rapidly. This can leave women feeling out of balance and truly victims of their changing bodies. Yoga exercises level out this physiological instability by relaxing and gently stretching every muscle in the body, promoting better blood circulation and oxygenation to all cells and tissues. This helps optimize the function of the endocrine glands and the organs of the female reproductive tract. Yoga exercises also improve the health and well-being of the digestive tract, nervous system, and all other organ systems.

The yoga exercises included in this chapter address many specific menopause related symptoms and issues, such as bone strength, cardiovascular and breast health, of concern to all women past midlife. You may want to begin by trying all the stretches, then practicing on a regular basis those exercises that bring you the most symptom relief and general health benefits. If you prefer, begin with the exercises that offer relief for the specific symptoms of greatest concern.

### General Techniques for Yoga

When doing yoga exercises, it is important that you focus and concentrate on the positions. First, let your mind visualize how the exercise is to look, and then follow with the correct body placement in the pose. The exercises are done through slow, controlled stretching movements. This slowness allows you to have greater control over your body movements. You minimize the possibility of injury and maximize the benefit to the particular area of the body where your attention is being focused. Pay close attention to the initial instructions. Look at the placement of the body in the photographs. This is very important, for if the pose is practiced properly, you are much more likely to have relief from your symptoms. In summary, as you begin these exercises:

- Visualize the pose in your mind, then follow with proper placement of the body.
- Move slowly through the pose. This will help promote flexibility of the muscles and prevent injury.
- Follow the breathing instructions provided in the exercise. Most important, do not hold your breath. Allow your breath to flow in and out easily and effortlessly.

Practicing yoga stretches regularly in a slow, unhurried fashion will gradually loosen your muscles, ligaments and joints. You may be surprised at how supple you can become over time. If you experience any pain or discomfort, you have probably overreached your current ability and should immediately reduce the amount of the stretching until you can proceed without discomfort. Be careful, as muscular injuries take time to heal. If you do strain a muscle, immediately apply ice to the injured area for ten minutes. Use the ice pack two to three times a day for several days. If

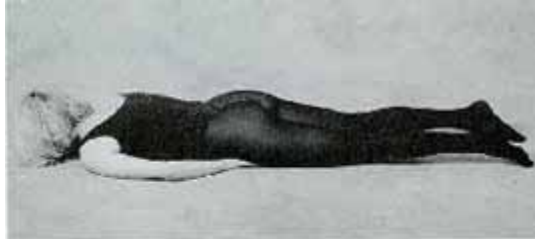
the pain persists, see your doctor. If you wish more background and information on yoga, refer to the books listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

---

### **Stretch 1: The Locust**

This exercise energizes the entire female reproductive tract, thyroid, liver, intestines and kidneys. It is helpful for premenopausal women with dysfunctional bleeding, as well as women with menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, because it improves circulation and oxygenation to the pelvic region, thereby promoting healthier ovarian function. This exercise also strengthens the lower back, abdomen, buttocks, and legs, and prevents lower back pain and cramps.

- Lie face down on the floor. Make fists with both your hands and place them under your hips. This prevents compression of the lumbar spine while doing the exercise.



- Straighten your body and raise your right leg with an upward thrust as high as you can, keeping your hips on your fists. Hold for 5 to 20 seconds if possible.



- Lower the leg and slowly return to your original position. Repeat on the left side. Remember to keep your hips resting on your fists. Repeat 10 times.
- Repeat 10 times with both legs together.

---

### **Stretch 2: The Pump**

This exercise improves blood circulation through the pelvis, thereby promoting healthier ovarian function. It helps relieve menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and controls excessive bleeding in premenopausal women. The exercise helps calm anxiety and also strengthens the back and abdominal muscles.

- Lie down and press the small of your back into the floor. This permits you to use your abdominal muscles without straining your lower back.



- Raise your right leg slowly while breathing in. Keep your back flat on the floor and let the rest of your body remain relaxed. Move your leg very slowly; imagine your leg being pulled up smoothly by a spring. Do not move your leg in a jerky manner. Hold for a few breaths. Lower your leg and breathe out.



- Repeat the same exercise on your left side. Then alternate legs, repeating the exercise 5 to 10 times.

---

### Stretch 3: Wide Angle Pose

This exercise opens the entire pelvic region and energizes the female reproductive tract, improving ovarian function as well as normalizing excessive or irregular menstrual flow; diminution of menopausal symptoms may also occur. It is helpful for varicose veins and improves circulation in the legs.

- Lie on your back with your legs against the wall and extended out in a V or an arc, and your arms extended to the side.



- Hips should be as close to the wall as possible, buttocks on the floor. Legs should be spread apart as far as they can and still remain comfortable. Breathing easily, hold for 1 minute, allowing the inner thighs to relax.
- Bring legs together and hold for 1 minute.

---

### Stretch 4: Spinal Flex

This exercise energizes and rejuvenates the female reproductive tract and tones the abdominal organs (pancreas, liver and adrenals). It emphasizes freer pelvic movement with controlled breathing.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor close to your buttocks.



- Exhale and press the lower back into the floor, raising the buttocks slightly.
- Arch your back slightly.



- Inhale and lift your lower back off the floor. This stretches the region from the sternum to the pelvis.



- Repeat this exercise 10 times. Always lift your navel up on the in breath. Always elongate your spine and press the lower back down on the outbreath.

---

### **Stretch 5: Pelvic Arch**

This is an excellent exercise for stretching the abdominal and pelvic muscles. Menopause related vaginal and bladder symptoms are reduced by promoting better circulation and relaxation in the pelvic region. It is also helpful in reducing pelvic congestion.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Spread your feet apart, flat on the floor.
- Place your hands around your ankles, holding them firmly.



- As you inhale, arch your pelvis up and hold for a few seconds. As you exhale, relax and lower your pelvis several times.
- Repeat this exercise several times.

---

### **Stretch 6: The Bow**

This exercise helps relieve menopause-related fatigue and lack of vitality, elevating your mood and improving stamina. The exercise also stretches the entire spine and helps relieve lower back pain and cramps. It stretches the abdominal muscles and strengthens the back, hips and thighs. It also stimulates the digestive organs and endocrine glands.

- Lie face down on the floor, arms at your sides.
- Slowly bend your legs at the knees and bring your feet up toward your buttocks.
- Reach back with your arms and carefully take hold of first one foot and then the other. Flex your feet to make grasping them easier.



- Inhale and raise your trunk from the floor as far as possible and lift your head. Bring your knees as close together as possible.



- Squeeze the buttocks while raising them off the floor. Imagine your body looking like a gently curved bow. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds.

- Slowly release the posture. Allow your chin to touch the floor and finally release your feet and return them slowly to the floor. Return to your original position. Repeat 5 times.

---

### **Stretch 7: Child's Pose**

Excellent for calming anxiety and stress due to emotional causes, this exercise will also relieve menopause related anxiety and irritability. The exercise gently stretches the lower back and is one of the most effective exercises for relieving menstrual cramps and low back pain.

- Sit on your heels. Bring your forehead to the floor, stretching the spine as far over your head as possible.



- Close your eyes.
- Hold for as long as comfortable.

---

### **Stretch 8: The Sponge**

This exercise relieves anxiety and stress due to emotional causes or menopause related anxiety and tension. It relieves menstrual cramps and low back pain as well as reducing eye tension and swelling in the face.

- Lie on your back with a rolled towel placed under your knees. Your arms should be at your sides, palms up.



- Close your eyes and relax your whole body. Inhale slowly, breathing from the diaphragm. As you inhale, visualize the energy in the air around you being drawn in through your entire body. Imagine your body is porous and open like a sponge, drawing in this energy and revitalizing every cell of your body.
- Exhale slowly and deeply, allowing all tension to drain from your body.

---

### **Stretch 9: Dollar Pose**

This pose reduces anxiety and nervous tension and will help eliminate tension headaches and insomnia. It improves flexibility of the spine, reducing stiffness and back pain.

- Lie on your back with your legs bent and your feet together. Place your hands on the sides of both ankles to keep your legs together.



- As you inhale, raise your legs up over your head. Make sure that the posture is comfortable by adjusting the angle of your legs. To do this, bend your knees to apply pressure between the shoulder blades.



- Hold this posture for one minute, breathing slowly and deeply.
- Return to the original position, lying flat on your back with your eyes closed. Relax in this position for several minutes.

---

### **Stretch 10: Tree**

If your goal is to strengthen bone mass by increasing weight bearing on the legs, hips and spine, this exercise will help you accomplish increasing bone mass. It also improves balance and posture.

- Standing erect, focus your eyes on a stationary point. Place one foot against the opposite thigh, so that one leg is bearing your weight.
- Slowly raise your arms over your head. Hold for a count of 5.



Reverse sides.

Repeat 3 times.

Note: You may place one hand on the wall for support if needed.

---

### **Stretch 11: Chest Expander**

This exercise increases circulation to the upper half of the body, energizing and stimulating the body. It also loosens and stretches tense muscles in the upper body, especially the shoulder and back, and expands the lungs.

- Stand easily. Arms should be at your sides; feet are hip distance apart.
- Extend your arms forward until your palms touch.
- Bring your arms slowly and gracefully back until you can clasp them behind your back.
- Exhale, then straighten your clasped hands and arms as far as you can without discomfort. Remember to stand upright; body should not bend forward. Breathe deeply into chest.



- Inhale deeply and bend backward from the waist. Keep your hands clasped and your arms held high.
- Drop your head backward a few inches and look upward as you relax your shoulders and the back of your neck.



- Hold this position for a few seconds.
- As you hold your breath, bend forward at the waist, bringing your clasped hands and arms up over your back.



- Relax your neck muscles and keep your knees straight.
- Hold for a few seconds.
- Exhale as you return to the upright position. Unclasp your hands and allow your arms to rest easily at your sides.
- Repeat entire sequence 3 times.

### **Choosing the Right Yoga Technique**

From among the many specific yoga poses in this chapter, you can choose the best exercises to provide relief for your personal menopausal symptoms by using the accompanying chart. Try all the poses that pertain to your specific symptoms to see

which ones bring you the most relief and practice those poses on a regular basis along with your exercise program. The combination of yoga stretches plus a good aerobic and strength-building program should help relieve and delay menopause-related symptoms and improve your general state of health.

<b><i>Symptoms</i></b>	<b><i>Exercise</i></b>
Entire female reproductive tract	Locust, Pump, Wide Angle Pose Spinal Flex, Pelvic Arcg, Bow
Excessive or irregular menstrual bleeding	Locust, Pump, Wide Angle Pose
Hot flashes	Locust, Pump, Wide Angle Pose Spinal Flex, Pelvic Arcg, Bow
Insomnia	Child's Pose, Sponge, Dollar Pose
Psychological symptoms- anxiety, depression, fatigue	Bow, Child's Pose, Sponge, Dollar Pose
Vaginal atrophy and bladder symptoms	Locust, Pump, Wide Angle Pose Spinal Flex, Pelvic Arcg, Bow
Osteoporosis	Tree
Cardiovascular health	Chest Expander
Breast health	Chest Expander