

YOGA FOR EQUESTRIANS



Why Yoga?

The word yoga comes from Sanskrit (scriptural language of ancient India) and it means “to yoke” or “to unite.” By using the breath in yoga practice we unite the body and the mind. We can bring balance, flexibility, awareness, and focus to our lives and our riding. We develop a conscious awareness of our bodies and our minds which allows us to communicate and move in harmony with our equine partners. A rider who is balanced and confidently in control of her body, mind and spirit will instill confidence, symmetry and focus in her horse. When we transition the fundamental concepts of yoga poses from our mats to our saddle, we are enhancing ourselves and our equine partners.

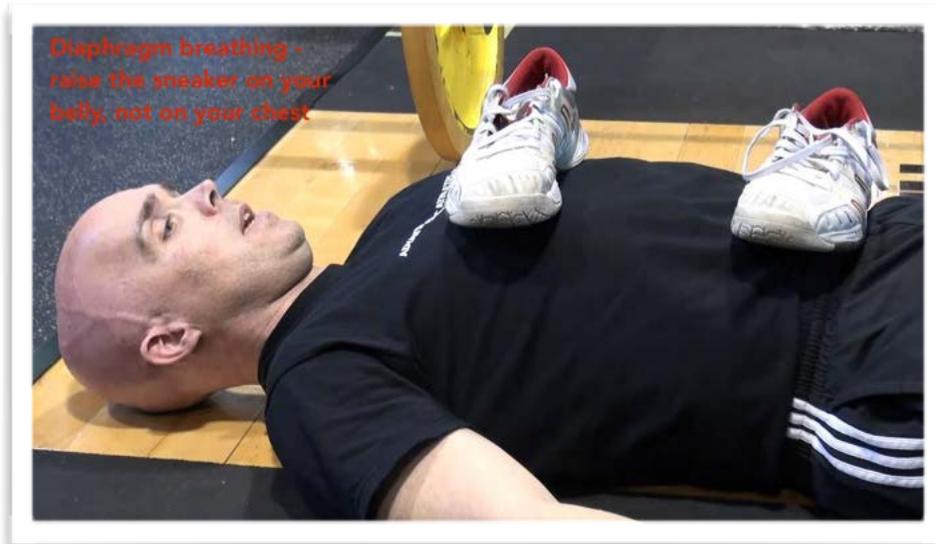
Through the physical practice of yoga postures, we learn how to relax and become more aware of our bodies and how we move them. Practicing yoga increases balance, flexibility, and strength, including core strength.

Through the practice of yogic breathing, we become more aware of our breathing. Yogic breathing increases focus, and with better focus, communication with the horse becomes easier and more clear.

Horses are masters at reading body language. Being attuned to our own bodies greatly improves our ability to communicate and partner with the horse, whether we are on the ground or in the saddle.

The following pages introduce a yoga practice designed specifically for the equestrian.

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing...finding your Power Center

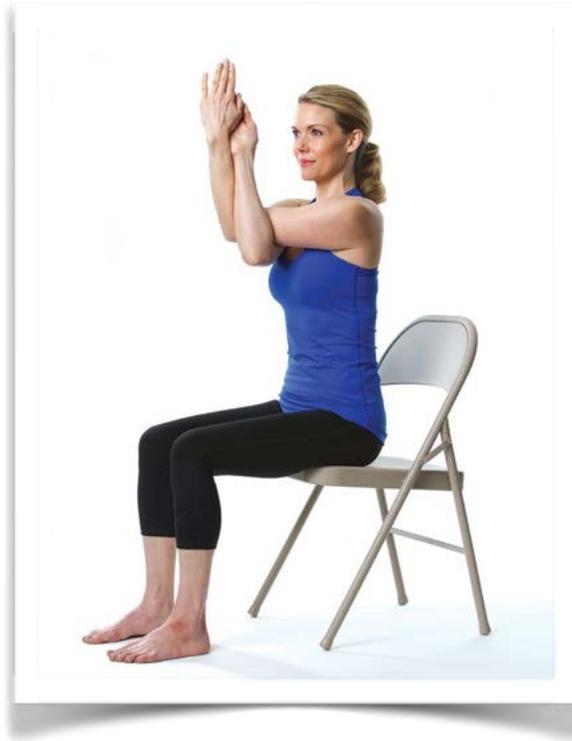


Rider Benefits:

This type of breathing brings your breath to the center of your body and when mounted on your horse, will deepen your seat and give you more stability in the saddle. Can be practiced lying down, sitting or mounted.

1. Lie on your back with your knees up and feet flat on the ground. Using 2 lightweight sneakers will help you visualize this....put one on your chest and one on your lower abdomen. As you breath, gently push your breath to your lower abdomen using your diaphragm muscles. If you are doing this correctly, you will see the sneaker on your abdomen rise and fall as you breath. THIS MAY TAKE PRACTICE.
2. Repeat several time slowly with your eyes closed. Breath in through your nose imagining lightness and joy. Breath out by gently blowing through your mouth like gently deflating a balloon.

2. Half Eagle Pose

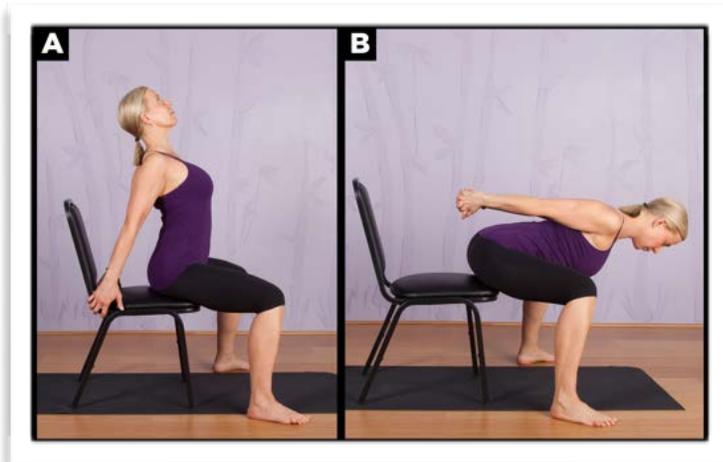


Rider Benefits:

Loosens the joint of the elbows and shoulders and brings a deep stretch to the upper torso. Also provides isometric strengthening of forearms, wrist and hands. Ideal for riders who carry tension in their upper or middle back; helps break up muscle knots and tightness.

1. Begin in a comfortable seated or standing position (can also be done at a standstill while mounted). Take a few deep diaphragmatic breaths growing tall and light through your upper body, while deepening your seat. Choose a focal point in front of you.
2. Bring your left arm in front of you, bending your elbow. Point your forearm straight up with a flat palm facing right.
3. Wrap your right arm under your left elbow, bringing it straight up on the right side, palm facing left.
4. Bring the fingers of your right hand to rest on the palm of your left hand. If this is difficult for you, try linking a finger with your thumb. Adjust the degree of stretch by raising or lowering your elbows.
5. Face straight ahead, relax your arms and breathe deeply into your Power Center. Direct your breathe into the space between your shoulder blades, consciously releasing tension there with each exhalation. Hold for at least 4 deep breaths. Gradually work your way up to 8 breaths or more.
6. Release your arms slowly and consciously, stretching them in any way that feels good. **REVERSE ARM POSITION AND REPEAT.**

3. Chest Expansion - Can be done either seated or standing

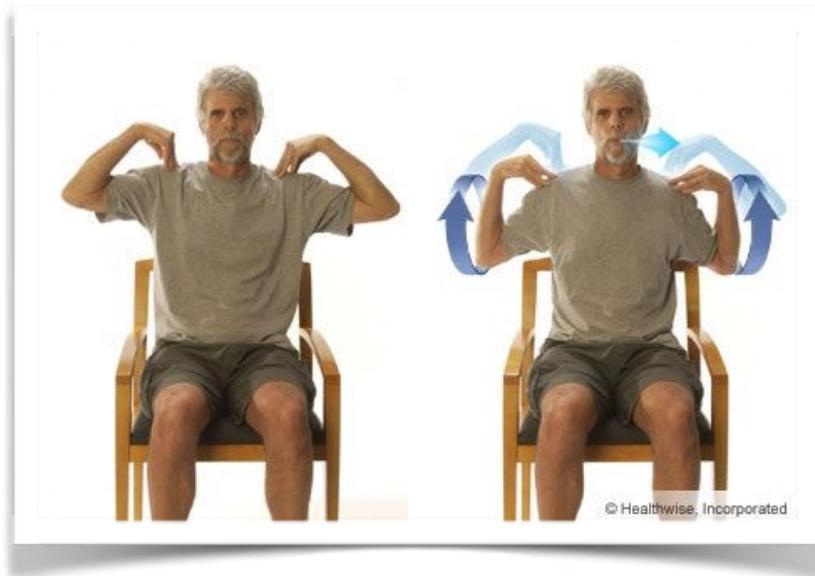


Rider Benefits:

Counteracts a rider's collapsed chest and rounded shoulders and releases tension throughout the upper torso. Eliminates energy blocks and increases mobility in the shoulder joints, permitting them to rotate back and down. A strengthening and toning practice for the upper back muscles, it promises a more upright, vertical alignment, facilitating the rider's self-carriage. Creates openness in the chest, liberating the breath, and encouraging deeper breathing. A beneficial forward bend. When done standing it also stretches the hamstrings and encourages the spine to lengthen.

- SEATED:** Begin on the edge of a chair, sitting tall and breathe into your Center
STANDING: Begin in a mountain-like pose, feet about shoulder width apart, standing tall and breathing into your Center.
- SEATED:** Place your hands on the back of chair seat and raise your chest to the sky, allowing it to open
STANDING: Clasp your hands behind your back and straighten your arms. Open your chest with a deep, centered breath and roll your shoulders back and down, reaching your knuckles downward.
- SEATED:** Fold forward at the hips as you relax your head and neck, letting gravity take the weight of your upper body forward, keeping your back as straight as possible.
STANDING: Fold forward at the hips as you relax your head and neck, letting gravity take the weight of your upper body down.
- SEATED AND STANDING:** Raise your arms up and away from your lower back as far as you can. Consciously relax the muscles of your neck, chest, and shoulders. Bring your shoulder blades closer together as you breathe deeply. Stay here for at least 4 deep breaths, or longer if you like, releasing tightness with each exhalation.
- SEATED:** To finish, let your hands come to rest on your lower back and come up slowly to an upright position. Release your arms to your sides, and center for a few breaths.
STANDING: To finish, let your hands come to rest on your lower back, bend your knees slightly, and roll your torso up thinking of doing this one vertebra at a time, until you are upright. Release your arms to your sides, and center for a few breaths.

4. Shoulder Circle



Rider Benefits:

Releases tension in shoulders and upper back and can be done both mounted and unmounted. It helps the area to move more fluidly and breaks up energy blocks through the upper body. This will strengthen the rider's connection to the horse and is a building block to having "conversational" arms and hands.

1. Begin standing or seated in a comfortable upright position.
2. Rest your fingers on your shoulders and make a full circle front to back, first with one elbow, then with the other, creating a windmill motion.
3. Continue making circles as you keep your breathing soft and fluid, exploring the range of motion in your shoulders. Continue for at least 8 full rotations, then switch the direction of your circles.
4. To finish, release your arms and return to the starting position. Rest for a moment to enjoy the new energy circulating through your shoulders.

5. Triangle Pose



Rider benefits:

Triangle energizes the entire body and increases awareness and control of the rider's Power Center to direct energy through the arms, legs, and spine. It also strengthens the legs and torso, opening the hips and chest, while providing a wonderful stretch.

1. Begin in a tall standing pose, then step your feet about 3-4 feet apart. With a deep inhalation, sweep your arms straight out from your sides to shoulder level, palm down. Energize your arms, legs and spine from your Center to make your body symmetrical.
2. Pivot your right foot 90° to the right and your left foot pointing forward, keeping your torso and hips facing forward. Feel as though your hips are opening outward. Feel both feet solidly in contact with the floor, pressing down through both heels. Throughout the pose, imagine that your body is between two panes of glass so that your head, shoulders, hips and feet remain aligned on the same plane.
3. Look out over your right fingertips as you reach through your arm and shift your hips to the left, stretching out through your spine.
4. **At this stage you may use a chair to help you.** Let your right hand float to rest as far down as possible on your right leg (or rest it on a chair), maintaining the stretch through your spine. Make sure to keep your hips and shoulder in alignment. **If your torso has rotated forward, move your right hand higher on your leg until you can bring your hips back into alignment.**
5. Extend your left arm up and look past your fingertips, keeping the back of your neck lengthened. Energize your legs, arms and spine with your breath flowing from your Center throughout your body. Enjoy this opening stretch and breath powerfully and deeply here for at least 4 breaths.
6. To release, press down through your feet as you lift up through the top of your head and left arm on an inhalation, bringing your torso to center again. Release your arms and straighten your feet, relaxing with some deep breaths. **Reverse and repeat in the other direction.**

6. Seated spinal twist - Can be done on the floor or in a chair

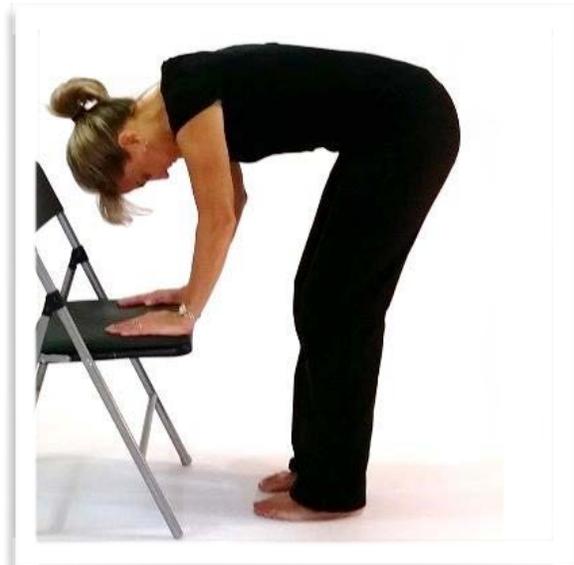
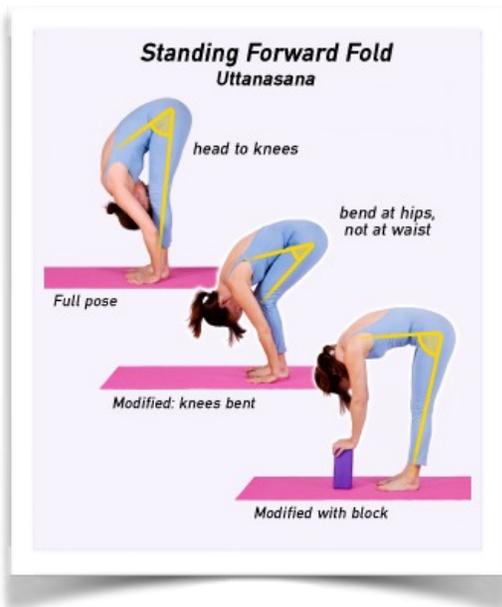


Rider benefits:

Encourages suppleness through the lower and middle back. Provides a valuable stretch to hips and outer thighs. Improves elasticity and lateral flexibility of the back, enhancing the rider's ability to receive the horse.

- 1. On floor mat:** Begin by sitting on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Draw your right knee toward your chest and place your chest and place your right foot against the outside of your left knee.
In a chair: Begin by sitting straight on the edge of a chair with upper body tall and light and feet placed on the floor. Turn your body to the right and set your right arm on the back of the chair seat.
- 2. On floor mat:** Wrap your left arm around your right knee and hug it toward your chest. Inhale deeply and extend tall through your spine.
In a chair: Bring your left arm around and hold your right thigh with your hand. Turn and stretch as much as possible to the right, feeling the stretch extend through your spine.
- 3. On floor mat:** On your next inhalation, stretch your right arm up above your head and sweep your hand around and down to rest on the floor about 8 inches behind your sacrum. Notice how you have already begun to come into the twist to your right. Allow your neck and head to follow the rotation of your spine.
In a chair: On your next inhalation, stretch your right arm above up above your head and sweep your hand around to hold onto the back of the chair. Notice how you have already begun to come into the twist to your right. Allow your neck and head to follow the rotation of your spine.
- 4.** On each exhalation, feel your spine rotating from your sacrum all the way to your head like a long spiral. **Allow your body to open at its own pace.** Continue for at least 4 breaths.
- 5.** Release your hands and arms slowly, unwinding and facing forward. Rest and breathe, relaxing and feel the new energy and stretch. Repeat on the other side.

7. Forward Standing Fold



Rider Benefits:

Increases elasticity of the rider's leg joint, softening the hip, knees and ankles. Provides a deep stretch for hamstrings and helps lengthen the rider's spine and release the back muscles through the natural pull of gravity. This partially inverted position is rejuvenating and increases blood flow to the brain, sharpening mental focus.

1. Begin in a tall, uplifting, standing pose. Inhale deeply and stretch up through your torso. Feel tall and light as you ground down through your legs and feet.
2. As you exhale, in one, slow, sweeping motion, fold at the hips, keeping your back flat as your torso reaches forward and down. Let your arms float down as your torso hands freely. Place your palms on the ground if you can **OR** bend your knees slightly to touch the ground **OR** use blocks or a chair to rest your hands on.
3. Let gravity take the weight of your upper body; breathe deeply and softly. Gently roll your head side to side to help your neck and upper back release. Allow the muscles throughout your back and hips to relax as much as possible. Let your breath help you release more with each exhalation.
4. Walk your hands to your right foot, keeping your left foot solidly on the ground. Then walk your hands to your left foot, keeping your right foot solidly on the ground. Then come back to center.
5. To finish, bend your knees slightly and **slowly** come back to standing position. **Imagine stacking one vertebra at a time until you are in an upright position. This will protect your back and prevent any dizziness as you return to standing.**
6. Open your chest to the sky and feel the renewed lightness and symmetry in your whole body.