



A Bit of Yoga You Can
do Right Now

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A free column by Jinjer Stanton

Surviving the Furnace

by Jinjer Stanton

Minnesota Summer days can be too hot for even the most fervent devotees of the sun. Those of us who prefer cooler less humid summers don't often get them. But yoga has offerings that can mitigate the misery.

The yoga associated with handling heat well works subtly. It's not as though the temperature feels 15 degrees cooler. It's more like your body (and mind, and emotions) are less adversely affected by the heat.

This first technique is called the cooling breath. It's easy and accessible to everyone. Before you begin, take a moment to pay attention to how your body feels right now and take several full breaths.

Sit (or stand) up straight with your shoulders and belly relaxed and your chest lifted. Make an O shape with your mouth. If you are genetically gifted, form a tube with your tongue that fills the opening. This will increase the benefit but don't worry if you can't shape your tongue that way. The cooling breath will still do you good. Inhale through your mouth and exhale through your nose. Take long deep breaths that fill your lungs completely and empty them completely when you exhale. Repeat at least five and up to ten times. When you are done, pay attention to any changes in how your body feels.

There is a mudra (hand position that channels energy) you can use in conjunction with the cooling breath. It is called the Shunya mudra (or the Heaven mudra). It eases nausea and helps with hearing problems, and regulates the thyroid gland as well as having a cooling affect. Hold your hands out, palms up, elbows bent. Bend the tallest finger (the center finger) of each hand to touch the cushion at the base of your thumb. Hold it in place with the thumb

on the same hand while keeping the other fingers extended as best you can. Hold this position for at least five minutes.

I need to point out here that in order for these techniques to work you need to cultivate a relaxation into the breath or into the mudra. Anxiety about anything is counterproductive and, for me, generates heat.

In addition to these specialty practices there are yoga postures that are part of our regular yoga workouts that can have a cooling affect. They concentrate on the belly or the core where heat is concentrated.

First, try a twisted pose. An easy one to do any time is the chair twist. Sit at the front edge of your chair. Place your right hand on the outside of your left knee. Extend your spine up while you twist to the left (keeping your spine straight). Reach behind with your left hand as far as you can reach. Grab the back of the chair if you can. Use your hands for leverage to help you turn gently in that direction and turn your head in the same direction as far as possible. Hold the position for two or three deep breaths. Relax and turn back to face the front. Do the same thing in the opposite direction.

Twist poses massage your insides and increase flexibility in the spine and release heat. Other kinds of poses are said to be cooling are: back bends, forward bends, and shoulder stands. Remember, yoga is about keeping in balance so if you do something on one side, do it on the other. If you bend forward, be sure to bend back as well (and vice versa). See which poses work for you, stay hydrated and keep cool!

The spirit in me salutes the spirit in you.
We're all in bodies together.

Jinjer Stanton teaches yoga in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Visit her website at www.jinjerstanton.com.

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Student Marcia Thomas on Her Yoga Experience

When I started yoga my 2nd child was four months old and my mother had just passed away. I was hoping yoga would help me re-connect with my post-pregnancy body and help me find a sense of calm.

The little successes have inspired me to continue. Things like being able to spread my toes and having to adjust the mirror after yoga class because I sit up straighter than I was able to before class.

I have greater focus now than before I began yoga. Yoga allows me to settle my mind. I also have better flexibility and appreciation for my body. I can recognize when I am slouching and am able to correct my posture. I'm much more in tune with my body than I was before I began taking yoga. I'm also much more aware of my breathing and how it's connected to my emotional state. I can concentrate for longer periods of time and am better able to filter out the mental clutter.

I'm more relaxed and clearheaded when I'm able to do yoga regularly.

I have two favorite poses. The shoulder stand has been a long term favorite. I love the immediate head clearing benefits. I also enjoy the stretch along my spine.



The palm tree is a more recent favorite. This balance pose difficult at first but it quickly became easier as my feet have gotten stronger. I also can now put the backs of my hands together.

The hamstring stretch is my most challenging pose. My hamstrings are one of the least flexible parts of my body so this pose I find the most difficult.

About 5 years ago I discovered I had been doing the hamstring stretch incorrectly. I was compensating for a lack of flexibility in my hamstrings by incorporating my hips into the stretch. With Jinjer's help I was able to adjust the way I was doing the pose. I now appreciate that the hamstring area is something I need to give more attention to.

My husband is very supportive of my practice. He says I'm more relaxed and stress free after yoga.

Marcia is married and has two children. She's been studying yoga for nine years. She just completed a Bachelor's degree majoring in Child Psychology. Her favorite colors are green, pink and blue. She is a fan of all desserts and her favorite actress is Susan Sarandon. Her hobbies include gardening, spending time with her family playing board games, baseball, and biking. She'd like to have coffee with Eleanor Roosevelt.

Yoga Classes:

7 to 8:30 Monday evenings

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2nd floor)

<http://www.htlcmpls.org/>

(generally in the Mary/Martha room)

612/722-9703 .

10:30 am to 11:30 pm

Saturday mornings in August

Hiawatha Lake Park

1 block east of 28th Ave. on 45th Street
(612/370-4930) No Class Aug. 30 and Sept. 6

This gentle, mindful approach honors where your body is right now. These yoga classes are fun and beneficial. Wear easy to move in clothes and if you have a mat, bring it. Also helpful are a bath towel and a woven fabric belt. We look forward to meeting you. FMI call me at 612/722-9703.



Yoga Bytes:

Yoga Bytes is a message intended to bring yoga to your consciousness regularly by suggesting a little something you can work on right now. For more information and additional Yoga Bytes go to www.jinjerstanton.com. *Yoga Bytes is published in cooperation with Lake Hiawatha Park.*