

It's a Dog's Life

by Jinjer Stanton

My dog, Skippy, wagged her tail a lot. Not only did she wag her tail when she wanted to play, she lowered her front quarters right down on the floor with her head between her forelegs and gave an excited little yip. How could anybody focus on schoolwork with such contagious exuberance filling the room? How could it hurt to take fifteen minutes for a game of fetch?

An hour and a half later, Skippy curled up in her bed, yawned an enormous yawn and fell asleep while I went back to my schoolwork with a clearer head. A long while later, my mind was starting to wander again and Skippy was done with her nap. In an unconscious echo of her invitation to play, she stuck her hind end up into the air while stretching her front half by pressing it into the floor. The difference between the play posture and the stretch was a matter of degree, not kind. You could see the effort behind the stretch. Her eyes were closed and it was followed by a big yawn.

Afterward she gave a happy little yip and pranced over to the cupboard where her treats were stored, her tail wagging for all it was worth.

When I try to wag my tail, my entire tush wags. It doesn't communicate joy and excitement, just an element of madness. What the ancient yogi's discovered that the human form *could* do is imitate that wake up stretch of Skippy's that she repeats when she's ready to play. It's harder for us to do, but really good for us. It's called the downward facing dog (oddly enough) and it has some of the benefits of an inverted pose (clear head, age reversal), stretches the hamstrings and strengthens the upper body.

Try it out and see how it feels. Begin by getting down on the floor (or the grass) in a table like position with your hands directly under your shoulders and your knees directly under your hips. Tuck your toes under and press your hips up toward the sky (or the ceiling) while rotating your pelvis toward your thighs. Press your heels toward the floor and extend your arms so that your head comes right in between them. Someone standing to one side should think you look like an upside down V. (Since each of us is built differently, you may want to play with the distance between your knees and hands to find what's right for you.)

Hold the position for several long deep breaths. Come back to earth by bending your knees and bringing your shoulders back over your hands.

This is an exercise that can cause trembling in various muscle groups the first few times you try it. That's okay. It's a sign that tensions are being released. As always, if it's scary, stop. Try again later. Be gentle with yourself. Laughing and playing with your dog are good for you too.

If using your legs this way is not an option for you, there are wall-mounted hip swings that can offer you many of these benefits. You can also sit in your chair (without arms) with your knees spread so that when you bend forward your chest fits between them. With the chair far enough away from a table or desk that when you rest your hands on its edge, the chair and table to support your torso's weight.

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

Student Cherie Olausen on Her Yoga Experience

I started practicing with Jinjer in the spring of this year. This is my first experience with yoga, I wanted to try yoga because I was having some problems with my back and neck and just over all stiffness in my joints. I was also interested in meditation as a way to better handle stress.

After just one class I knew this was something I would do for life. I have noticed a great improvement in my back pain and general well being. I am calmer and better able to cope with the stressful situations in my life.

If I had to pick my favorite pose I would say that it is the warrior, I also like the triangle because it is a great stretching pose. I have enjoyed yoga so much that I have purchased several dvd's and have been practicing on a regular basis. I have found that if I do a gentle yoga routine before bed I sleep much better.



My family has been very supportive and my daughter's have told me that I seem happier and calmer, I have even been able to get my oldest daughter to come to a class with me and she is practicing at home with one of my yoga dvd's.

The one thing I would say to some one who is thinking of trying yoga would be, it is simply the best form of exercise for both the body and the mind.

I am so glad that I found Jinjer and her wonderful class, she is a great teacher and I look forward to practicing with her for years to come.

Cherie has been married for twenty years to Jim. She has three children: Meghan, Hannah and Brad. She owns a residential cleaning business. Her hobbies are gardening, reading, and yoga!! She hosts the lives of two cat's and would most like to have coffee with Ralph Waldo Emerson.



Suggested Reading:

The New Yoga for People Over 50, by Suza Francina. This book addresses many of the issues older beginners may need help with like arthritis, menopause and heart health. It is friendly and accessible.

Yoga Classes:

7 to 8:30 Wednesday evenings
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2nd floor)
<http://www.htlcmpls.org/>
(generally in the Mary/Martha room)
612/722-9703.

11:15 am to 12:15 pm
Saturday mornings
Lake Hiawatha Park
1 block east of 28th Ave. on 45th Street
(612/370-4930) No Class 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.*