

## The Lion's Pose

by Jinjer Stanton

Germes are everywhere. You can't avoid them even with the elaborate germophobic habits of Monk. They on every doorknob, every faucet handle and every hand you shake, they are already in your body as well, eager to proliferate and diminish your enjoyment of life — or even to knock you out of commission for a week.

I acknowledge the right of germes to exist. It's a right I claim for myself, after all. I even acknowledge their right to do what they have to do to survive. That doesn't mean I need to make it easy for them any more than a mouse has to make it easy for the fox. Like arms proliferation, any protection anti-bacterial defenses they appear to provide is illusion.

The trick is to cultivate health within oneself just as a monk (not *Monk*) cultivates peace within him or her self as a response to conflict. We cannot control others (people or germes), but we can enhance our own strength, health and general well-being to a point where the dangers in the world (whether from other people or from microbes) have the smallest possible impact on our lives.

Good strategies are: get plenty of sleep; laugh daily; hang out with supportive, positive people; eat healthy, real foods (preferably while laughing and hanging out with positive people); pump fresh air through your lungs several times a week; and do yoga regularly. Ongoing yoga practice enhances the immune system automatically (my hay fever, once a yearly ordeal, is gone now) but there are a few exercises that are specifics for the immune system.

The lion's pose enhances the immune system, drives dogs wild and embarrasses, or amuses, children (depending on their ages). The laughter it provokes around the office or among your friends is an additional immune enhancer.

Sit toward the front edge of your chair (or

kneel on the floor) with your hands resting lightly on your knees. If your chair rolls around, brace its back against something steady.

Take a deep, deep breath. Inhale, inhale, inhale.

When your lungs are full enough that they feel like they might explode, spring forward like a jungle cat with your hands extended like ravening claws as you forcibly exhale every molecule of air in your lungs. Pretend any weird sounds that come out are your fierce roar. *Even if you are not physically capable of leaping forward, do as much of the rest as is possible. Remember, you can always laugh!*

As you do this, stick your tongue out as far as it will go, open your eyes as wide as you can and turn them to look at the spot on your forehead right between your eyebrows. Yes, you look cross-eyed.

If you're just not ready for the lion's pose, try spending five minutes a day laughing. If you think that doesn't sound like yoga, I assure you, there is a guru straight out of India who promotes laughter meditation. You don't even need something to laugh at. The physiological effect of pretending to laugh is the same as genuine laughter, and it can inspire genuine laughter. Every time the bug du jour is going around, I make my yoga students laugh for a few moments during class. Some experience acute embarrassment. If that is you, get over it! If others laugh at you, you've enhanced their immune systems as well as your own. If they look down their noses at you, they've made an unconscious choice to compromise their immune systems.

Your truest obligation is to keep yourself healthy both for your own sake and for the sakes of those who depend on you, from goldfish, to family, to employer.

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



## Breathing Reminder:

One of the most powerful things we can do to minimize the impact of stress on our bodies is to become conscious of what's going on with our breath and learn to breathe properly using the entire lung.

A healthy set of human lungs has a potential lung capacity of between six and eight quarts. Many of us actually inhale only about two quarts.

We can lose vital lung capacity through ongoing stress, disease, and inactivity. (Lack of activity also decreases the heart's ability to pump blood back to the lungs, which also affects *its* function.)

Healthy respiration increases longevity and helps many medical conditions like asthma, poor digestion, insomnia, high blood pressure, heart disease, etc.

It is paramount to learn to breathe properly and fill the lungs completely. This is something you don't even need to stand up for though you do need to keep your spine straight, whether you choose to stand or sit.

Inhale slowly and deeply while consciously expanding your belly. Imagine your chest cannot expand until your belly is full and tight with air. You may feel slight discomfort from being so full of air. Exhale slowly from top to bottom so that your chest empties first, then your abdomen. When you think your lungs are empty, keep on exhaling anyway as you round your shoulders to squeeze out any stale air hiding in the corners. Repeat several times. You only need to squeeze the stale corners once a day, not every breath.

Many of us are so unaccustomed to this deep breathing we can't tell, at first, whether we're breathing deeply enough to push the abdomen out. The first few times you try this, place your hands on your upper belly with just the tips of the longest finger on each hand touching the corresponding finger on the other. As you inhale, you should see a gap appear between your fingertips. As you exhale, that gap should disappear again.

If you get light-headed, stop. Try again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Keep it up and one day you'll realize that you breathe well automatically!



## Yoga Classes:

**7 to 8:30 Monday evenings**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2nd floor)

<http://www.htlcmpls.org>, 612/722-9703

(Call to confirm classes will meet on Mondays.)

**11:15 am to 12:15 pm**

**Saturday mornings**

**Lake Hiawatha Park**

1 block east of 28th Ave. on 45th Street

(612/370-4930)

This gentle, mindful approach honors where your body is right now. These yoga classes are fun and beneficial. Wear easy-to-move in clothes. 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 Jinjer 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](http://www.jinjerstanton.com). *Yoga Bytes is published in cooperation with Lake Hiawatha Park.*