



A Bit of Yoga You Can  
do Right Now

November  
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A free column by Jinjer Stanton ©2008

## Holiday Yoga

by Jinjer Stanton

This is the season. Snow is falling. Holiday social commitments are filling up the calendar and somehow, in the tiny cracks of time between them and work, there is gift shopping to do and a life to run.

Whatever holidays you're celebrating in the next couple months, there is likely to be an element of stress utterly contrary to the spirit of the season. A lot of that stress comes from struggling to keep everything perfect. It comes from the fear that if we, individually, don't do it all, it might not get done. Most of us will be celebrating thanksgiving. Tradition can weigh heavy on that holiday. I remember the year my aunt tried to get away with cooking duck instead of turkey. Everybody freaked out.

I wish I could have been kinder to her at the time. She worked hard at every holiday to make sure everything was perfect and I know her stress level was high. I wish I could have suggested to her that perfection is not attainable while living in these fleshly bodies. I wish I'd had the wisdom to tell her that "The best you can do is good enough. Let go of perfection and surrender to the moment. Trust that others can pick up the slack."

With, in addition to Thanksgiving, Chanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and other celebrations with high expectations coming up, I'd like to suggest two poses in particular that help with trust and surrender. Forward bends are all about surrender and back bends are emblematic of trust.

A handy variation of the forward bend you can do anywhere, anytime is the supported forward bend. Face the counter, the table, or your desk, place your hands on its edge with the fingers pointing away from you. Walk backwards away from the counter (leaving your hands in place) until you are leaning against your hand support. Push away until your legs are vertical. With your body supported by your hips and hands, let it relax toward the floor.

Hold this position for several deep breaths.

This pose opens the shoulders, stretches the back and counteracts the slump that some of us develop over the years. It also stretches the hips.

Whenever you do a forward bend, you need to balance it with a backbend.

Standing with your back to the counter (or, if the counter is too high for you, a table) place your hands on the edge of the counter with your thumbs toward your body. Leaning on your hands, take a step away from the counter and press your hips toward the opposite wall. Allow your head to drop back as far as is comfortable. Hold this position for several deep breaths.

This pose opens the chest, strengthens the abdominal muscles and stretches the front of the hips. Since, metaphysically, backbends are about trust and trust is something a lot of us have trouble with, be gentle with yourself.

Keep in mind with every yoga pose that each of us is built a little different and we all have different habits of body.

*If standing is not an option for you, you can sit on the edge of your bed or the front edge of your chair. Plant your feet solidly on the floor and spread your feet and knees far enough apart that your chest can fit between your knees. Inhaling, lift your arms up over your head. Exhaling, bend forward from the hips keeping your back straight as long as possible. Then, let everything relax and hang down. Breathe. When you're ready to come back up, place your hands on your knees and push up as you inhale.*

*For the backbend place your hands at your waist with the fingers pointing back. Inhale, lift your chest toward the ceiling and tilt your head back. Breathe deeply for several breaths.*

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](http://www.jinjerstanton.com).

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## Reminders for Your Yoga Practice:

1. **Don't beat yourself up** if you can't do all of the poses as easily as others seem to. If you do the best you are capable of, you still receive the benefits. Also, it is inevitable that you will improve over time. Be gentle with yourself. Keep in mind that our bodies are as individual as our personalities.
2. **Pay attention to your own body and emotions.** If something seems scary, don't do it. If something is painful, either back off until it doesn't hurt anymore or don't do it at all. This is particularly important if you are practicing without a teacher. Even if you are practicing with a teacher, that teacher may not know what's going on with you. Every body is different. Respect yours and trust your own experience.

Also, paying attention to how your body feels through all the exercises increases the benefit you get from them and increases your awareness of what's going on with your body at other times.

3. **Remember to integrate your breathing with the exercise.** There's more room for the lungs whenever your chest is opening as in backbends. That's the time to be inhaling. When you're bending forward is when it's best to be exhaling. Integrating breath with movement maximizes the benefit of all the poses.



## Suggested Reading:

**Light on Yoga**, by BKS Iyengar: This is a classic. Iyengar is the founder of one of the major schools of yoga in the United States. It is a demanding and strenuous variety of yoga that stresses the use of props for perfect alignment. This book contains a good discription of the finer points of yoga tradition. But, unless you are remarkably flexible and strong already, look at the poses illustrated as examples of human potential or as entertainment — at least until you have built up your own strength and flexibility.

**Babar's Yoga for Elephants**, by Laurent de Brunhoff, Harry N. Abrams, 2002: This is a nice bit of nostalgia for those who loved Babar as children. A child in your life might be inspired by it and it makes a good basic reference of poses with clear illustrations for adults (just remember to use a belt when the elephant recommends a trunk).

## Yoga Classes:

### 7 to 8:30 Wednesday evenings

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2nd floor)

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

(The week of Thanksgiving class will be Monday. Call for dates in December.)

### 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.*