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YOGA

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REFLECT & REJOICE

THE POWER
of **CHAIR
YOGA**

DR JORDAN ASHLEY

SOULJOURN
YOGA

STILLNESS IN
Motion

Ageless
ON THE MAT

**YOGA IN
ISOLATION**



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REDISCOVERING

Savasana



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Founder and Executive Director
Souljourn Yoga Foundation
Website: souljournyoga.com

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THE POWER OF CHAIR YOGA

Author: Richard Kravetz,
BWY Special Yoga Tutor

When I first came to yoga, I didn't imagine it would shape the next three decades of my life or give purpose to some of my deepest challenges. My journey into chair yoga began not from theory but from lived experience, adapting yoga to meet people exactly where they are.

Back in 1988, when my son was born with Global Developmental Delay, I found myself devoting every moment to his care. Those early years were a mix of love, exhaustion and emotional turmoil. Yoga became my anchor. It offered space to breathe, refocus and reconnect with something steady inside me. I began to understand that yoga isn't all about what the body looks like in a pose but also about the internal benefits at a deeper level, alongside the relationship between breath, awareness and movement.

As my teaching evolved, I realised that many people, not only those with additional needs, were missing out on yoga because they couldn't, or didn't think they could, get down onto the floor. I wanted to change that. What began as a few improvisations around a kitchen chair became a lifelong passion to make yoga accessible to everyone, regardless of physical ability or age.



THE ORIGINS OF CHAIR YOGA

When I started teaching in this way, there were very few resources for yoga teachers interested in working with students who had limited mobility. Most teaching materials cater to the able-bodied practitioner, those flexible and athletic bodies we still too often see pictured on yoga posters and social media.

That idea never resonated with me. Yoga wasn't designed to be exclusive; its very philosophy invites inclusivity and unity. Recognising that gap, I began developing teaching practices and training programmes through the BWY to help teachers bring yoga to their communities in safer, more accessible ways.

It has been humbling to watch this work spread. Chair yoga is now taught in community halls, hospitals, care homes, dementia centres and health clubs throughout the UK. Each class looks different but they all share the same spirit of joy, acceptance and willingness to move in whatever way the body can manage that day.

WHY CHAIR YOGA MATTERS

Chair yoga is a wonderfully adaptable form of yoga that allows people with restricted mobility, whether through injury, chronic illness, age or lack of confidence, to experience the benefits of yoga without fear or strain.

All you need is a sturdy chair. From there, postures can be modified to meet each person's needs. Movements that would normally be done standing or on the mat, such as forward folds, side bends, spinal rotations, and gentle backbends, can sometimes be practised seated or with light support.

The focus is the same as in traditional yoga: staying present with the

breath, coordinating movement and awareness, and finishing the class feeling calmer, clearer and more connected. The real flexibility, you might say, is not in the body but in the mind and in the willingness to adapt.

CHAIR YOGA AND PARKINSON'S

According to recent figures from *Parkinson's UK*, more than 166,000 people in the UK are currently living with the condition, a number expected to rise as the population ages. For many, Parkinson's can make everyday activities more difficult and exhausting, sometimes leading to reduced mobility and confidence. Here, yoga has an important role to play. A growing body of research highlights its positive impact: yoga has been found to improve motor function, posture, balance, emotional wellbeing and quality of life for those with Parkinson's. Gentle, breath-led movement can help reduce anxiety and stiffness while yoga's meditative aspects nurture mental focus and resilience.

Chair yoga embraces these principles beautifully. The chair provides both support and freedom, allowing participants to explore movement in safety without fear of falling or overexertion.

A PRACTICE FOR EVERY BODY

Chair yoga supports wellbeing in many ways. Beyond Parkinson's, it can benefit people living with similar neurological conditions like multiple sclerosis, dementia and stroke as well as age-related conditions like high blood pressure, arthritis, chronic fatigue, anxiety or depression.

Age, injury or health conditions often leave people feeling excluded from traditional yoga classes. Many older

adults assume yoga is no longer for them, picturing challenging shapes that demand youthful flexibility and stamina.

Yet yoga has never been about appearance or ability. It is a lifelong practice that gently adapts to meet you where you are. For those with limited balance, strength or mobility, the chair becomes a bridge – a steady, supportive prop that restores confidence and encourages movement without pain or strain.

Breathwork alone brings immense benefits, working on a cellular level and exploring respiratory patterns it helps to soften the nervous system, improving focus and creating a sense of inner space. Over time, subtle movements gently strengthen muscles, improve circulation and enhance posture.

When teaching chair yoga, I often remind students that yoga begins with awareness, not with stretch or shape. Even small mindful actions, such as lifting an arm with intention, rolling the shoulders or inhaling deeply, can awaken energy and create meaningful change.



WHAT A CHAIR YOGA CLASS LOOKS LIKE

A chair yoga class is structured much like any other yoga session, but every pose is adapted to meet participants where they are. It begins with centring: feet grounded, spine tall, attention on the breath. We might visualise *Sitting Mountain* – steady, rooted and open at the crown.

From there, we warm up with gentle joint mobilisation, small stretches and rotations. Cat-cow movements awaken the spine, shoulder and neck rolls ease tension and side bends create space in the ribs for deeper breathing. We may add gentle twists or standing sequences using the chair for support. Some classes include a modified Chair Sun Salutation. The emphasis is always on comfort, stability and mindful awareness, feeling how each movement begins and ends with the breath.

As people practise over time, many discover noticeable improvements in strength, flexibility and confidence. Joints become less stiff, posture improves and breathing feels lighter. Most importantly, there's a sense of empowerment – the recognition that the body can still move, adapt and feel alive.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

A good teacher's job is to make yoga possible for everyone in the room. That means understanding health issues, knowing how to adjust for joint replacements, osteoporosis, vertigo or injury and always keeping safety in mind. For those with Parkinson's or other neurological conditions, this includes cultivating patience and compassionate encouragement.

My approach is to create an atmosphere where every student feels welcome, comfortable and capable. I encourage them to listen inwardly,

to move within their range and to celebrate each small progression. Transformation often happens not in the poses themselves but in the growing sense of trust – both in the body and in the present moment.

BEYOND THE PHYSICAL

Yoga offers far more than physical benefit. Its philosophy reminds us that wholeness exists even when the body feels fragmented. Breath becomes a bridge between body and mind; awareness becomes a form of liberation.

For those living with chronic conditions, pain or disability, this outlook can be deeply healing. It is not about fixing the body but about reconnecting to its intelligence and compassion. In chair yoga, that often shows through quiet smiles, shared laughter and visible relaxation as tension slowly dissolves.

PRACTICE: CHAIR YOGA SUN SALUTATION

This gentle seated version of Surya Namaskar can be done at home using a sturdy chair. Move with slow, steady breaths and focus on warmth, balance and release.

1. Mountain (*Tadasana*)

Sit tall with feet flat on the floor. Inhale and bring palms together at the heart. Pause for a breath to find stillness.



2. Upward Salute (*Urdhva Hastasana*)

Inhale, stretch the arms overhead, palms facing each other. Reach up through the fingertips and lengthen the spine.



3. Forward Bend (*Uttanasana*)

Exhale, hinge at the hips and fold forward, hands resting on the thighs or toward the floor. Let the head relax.



4. Lunge (*Ashwa Sanchalanasana*)

Inhale, lift the chest and raise arms overhead, stretch one leg forward, pressing the heel gently away. Open the heart.





5. Plank (*Chaturanga Dandasana*)

Exhale, draw the navel gently back and lean forward slightly, pressing hands into the thighs to engage the core.



6. Eight Point Pose (*Ashtanga Namaskara*)

Inhale, place hands on the knees and lift the chest, visualising chin and heart moving towards the light ahead.



7. Cobra (*Bhujangasana*)

Exhale, gently slide hands behind the head, inhale and open the chest. Let the shoulders soften back. Head should be centred or can be lifted slightly if there are no contraindications.



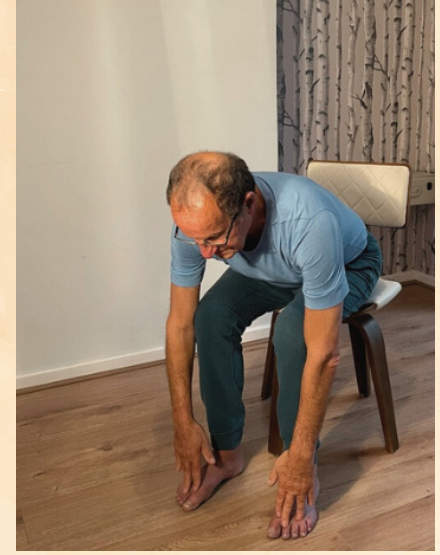
8. Downward Facing Dog (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*)

Exhale, extend the arms forward, lengthen through the spine and legs, pressing through the heels.



9. Lunge (*Ashwa Sanchalanasana*)

Inhale, lift the heart again as you reverse the movement, switching legs if desired.



10. Forward Bend (*Uttanasana*)

Exhale, fold forward once more, remembering to move slowly with softness.



11. Upward Salute (Urdhva Hastasana)

Inhale, lift the arms overhead again, feeling the spine lengthen with the breath.

12. Mountain (Tadasana)

Exhale, bring palms back to the heart, eyes closed if comfortable, and rest in your seated mountain pose. Take a few quiet breaths before rising or continuing your day.

A CLOSING REFLECTION

Chair yoga reminds us that yoga's purpose is not performance but connection. When we move, breathe and notice, we realign body and mind with compassion. Whether someone is living with Parkinson's, recovering from injury or simply seeking a gentler practice, yoga offers empowerment, presence and possibility.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Richard Kravetz trains yoga teachers in teaching chair yoga and yoga for adults with specific physical and learning difficulties. He has been teaching yoga for over 30 years to adults, children and people with special needs. He holds a BWY Diploma for teaching adults and children.

FREE ONLINE CHAIR YOGA FOR PARKINSON'S

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