

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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FROM WITHIN, WE HEAL

WORKPLACE
YOGA

EMBRACING
THE YEAR
of **THE FIRE
HORSE**

AYURVEDIC

Detox

NAAD
YOGA

MAHĀVIDYĀS



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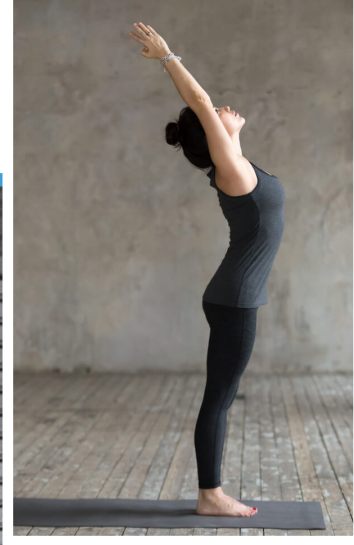
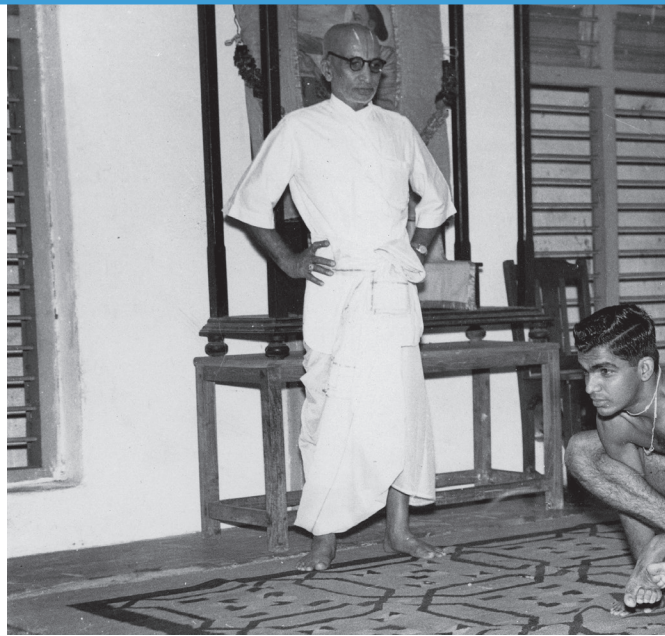
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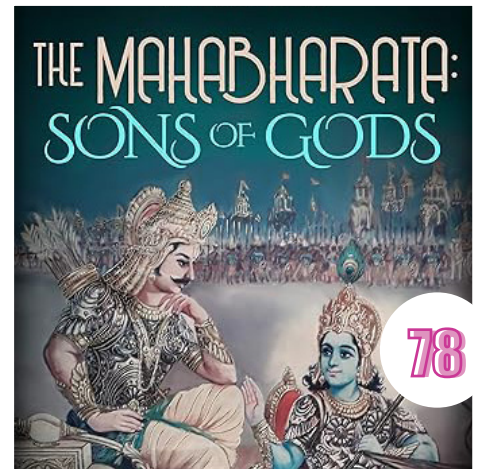
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YOGA BEYOND THE MAT IN A SEDENTARY AGE

Author: Anji Gopal

How to care for your back and nervous system in the modern world

For many of us, our working lives now happen largely from a chair. Whether it's the kitchen table, a home office, a co-working space, or a laptop balanced on the sofa, our days are increasingly defined by stillness. Not the nourishing stillness yoga teaches - but long, unbroken hours in static positions, eyes fixed on a screen, breath barely noticed.

As a yoga teacher and osteopath, I see the consequences daily in my clinics and retreats: neck pain, jaw tension, headaches, lower back pain, hip stiffness, pelvic floor issues, shallow breathing and fatigue. Often there's also a low-grade sense of being less vital than usual - congested, compressed, even irritable.

With the world of work moving firmly towards *working from anywhere* - marked each year on *Global Working From Home Day* on 10 April - and with modern life carrying a high mental load, our physical and mental yoga practice matters more than ever. But I'd argue it needs to be central to daily life, not just squeezed into one or two classes a week. If your body spends 40 hours a week sitting and 75 minutes in a yoga class, you don't need a calculator to see which pattern is shaping your tissues and nervous system.

wellbeing on just another task - was echoed recently at a British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) event at SOAS, where workplace commentator, Julia Hobsbawm OBE, spoke about how we are living and working in an "*age of overload*". Ongoing shifts in how, where and when we work continue to create uncertainty and cognitive strain, making simple, embodied practices that restore rhythm, movement and nervous system balance more important than ever.

The real problem isn't posture - it's stasis

When it comes to spinal pain, we've spent decades debating "good" and "bad" posture. But the body is far more adaptable than we give it credit for. It can tolerate many shapes and positions if it's allowed to change them regularly. What the body struggles with most is a lack of movement.

Research shows that sitting itself isn't inherently harmful. Standing isn't automatically better either. The issue is staying in any position for too long. When joints don't move, muscles don't change length and circulation doesn't get a mechanical boost from regular contractions. We start to feel stiff. Over time, this 'stuckness' can contribute to more persistent pain and a sense of low energy.

Working from home - or anywhere - has quietly removed many of the natural movement breaks we once took for granted: commuting, walking between meetings, getting up to speak to a colleague and even popping out for lunch. Add blurred work-life boundaries, longer screen hours and higher cognitive load, and the result is a perfect storm for physical and mental strain - often showing up as jaw, head, neck or back pain.

Sedentary behaviour is now linked not only to musculoskeletal pain, but also to cardiovascular, metabolic and inflammatory health issues. It affects circulation, breathing mechanics, digestion, hormone regulation and, crucially, the nervous system. When the body doesn't move, things get stuck at every level. We may start to ruminate more, sleep less deeply and find it harder to shift out of stress mode because the cues our nervous system expects - changes in posture, breath and sensory input - are missing.

Why yoga matters more than ever - and can't stay on the mat

Yoga was never designed as a once-a-week activity. It was a daily practice of self-regulation - of body, breath, attention and nervous system.

If we only stretch or breathe deeply for 75 minutes a week, we miss yoga's real value. Those 75 minutes can feel wonderful, but they cannot fully undo eight or more hours a day of immobility and low-grade stress. So rather than thinking, "*I can't wait for yoga class tonight to undo my day,*" a more helpful question is: "*How can I bring yoga into my working day?*" This doesn't mean doing sun salutations beside your desk (unless you want to). It means simple,



repeatable practices that interrupt stagnation, restore circulation and remind the nervous system that it's safe to soften.

Think less *workout* - more self-regulation. Think of yourself not just fixing a 'bad back', but cultivating more choices in your body and your nervous system.

Below are four evidence-informed practices I regularly teach to professionals, patients and yoga students. They require no equipment, no special clothing and very little time. Done little and often, they can genuinely change how your body and mind feel by the end of the day. You can use them as micro-breaks, as transitions between tasks, or as a brief arrival ritual before you start work.

Practice 1: The Physiological Sigh

Resetting breath and nervous system in under a minute

Most desk-based breathing patterns are shallow and subtly held. We often breathe high in the chest, with minimal movement in the lower ribs and diaphragm. Over time, this feeds tension in the neck, jaw and shoulders, keeping the nervous system slightly on edge. You may notice you clench your teeth, grip your tongue to roof of your mouth, or hold your breath without realising during difficult tasks. The physiological sigh is one of the fastest ways to down-regulate stress and resembles many pranayamas. Practice this whenever your head, eyes, jaw or neck send you a 'help' signal.

How to do it:

- Sit comfortably, feet on the floor
- Inhale through the nose
- Pause briefly, then take a second small sip of air through the nose
- Exhale slowly through the mouth
- Repeat 3-5 times

As you breathe, see if you can soften your gaze or even close your eyes. Think of it as a reset button - especially after intense concentration, a difficult email or back-to-back meetings.



Practice 2: Seated Glute Squeeze

Supporting the lower back without stretching it

Long periods of sitting switch off the gluteal muscles - key stabilisers for the pelvis and spine. When they disengage, the lower back often takes the strain and we may feel achey or compressed in the lumbar region. Many people instinctively stretch when this happens, but without re-engaging the muscles that support the area, relief is often short-lived.

This small but effective practice reawakens the glutes without leaving your chair. It supports the spine from below, reduces lumbar fatigue and is particularly useful during long calls or computer work.

How to do it:

- Sit upright, feet grounded
- Gently squeeze each buttock in turn: right, left, right, left
- Then squeeze both together
- Hold each squeeze for 3 seconds, then release fully
- Repeat 8-10 times, feeling warmth and tone, not gripping

You might imagine you are gently trying to lift yourself a millimetre off the chair. Keep the jaw, shoulders and belly soft; the effort belongs in the glutes, not the whole body.



Practice 3: Desk Stretch for Spine and Breath

Ardha Uttanasana

If you have a desk, you already have a stretching tool. This classic forward bend variation decompresses the lower spine and neck. It also creates space for the breath to move more freely into the sides of the ribcage, which can feel wonderfully refreshing after hunching over a keyboard.

How to do it:

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, hands on the desk about shoulder-width
- Bend the knees and take the pelvis back
- Keep the knees soft as you lengthen the spine
- Breathe into the whole torso for 5 slow breaths
- Walk forward gently to come out

As you stay, imagine your sitting bones gently widening and your spine flowing forward from the pelvis, rather than forcing the chest down. Let the head hang in line with the arms or slightly between them so the neck can release.



Practice 4: Standing Arm Swings

Circulation, shoulders and energy reset

Prolonged sitting often leads to slumping or a jutting chin, creating tension in the shoulders, neck, arms, hands — and often the jaw, head and eyes.

Arm swings are deceptively powerful for restoring circulation and releasing held tension. They help decompress the shoulders, stimulate circulation and shift mental state - ideal between tasks.

How to do it:

- Stand with feet hip-width apart
- Let the arms swing loosely forward and back
- Allow the torso to gently rotate
- Keep the breath easy
- Continue for 30–60 seconds

You are not forcing the movement; instead, let momentum build gradually so the arms feel free and slightly weightless. Keep your knees soft and jaw relaxed and notice how the rhythm of the swings begins to shift your mental state too.



Simple wisdom for better health

None of these practices are complicated. That's the beauty of yoga: simple things make a difference. It's a great reminder that health isn't built through heroic effort once a week, but through small acts of care repeated daily.

In a sedentary world, stagnation and congestion are the real enemies of physical and mental wellbeing. Yoga gives us tools to counter both - movement, breath, awareness and regulation. Movement - of body, breath and attention - remains one of the most reliable antidotes to the strains of modern life.



Find out more

Anji will be running her Yoga For BackCare Short Course in November 2026. She will also be leading a Yoga Masterclass for BWY in January 2027. Full details will be available on: www.bwy.org.uk soon.

If you are interested in learning more about 'Yoga in the Age of Overload', you can purchase a recording of the SOAS / BWY summit for £45 here: <https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/996>



Anji Gopal is an osteopath, senior yoga teacher and workplace wellbeing speaker, widely known as *The BackCare Boss*. She has over 20 years' experience teaching yoga for back care, women's health and sustainable performance, alongside a clinical practice working with persistent pain and stress-related conditions.

Anji helps people integrate simple, evidence-informed practices into real life — not just the yoga studio. Her work bridges anatomy, nervous system regulation and ancient yogic wisdom, with a strong focus on simplifying health in complex modern lives.

She runs osteopathy clinics, leads retreats in the UK and abroad, and delivers workplace wellbeing programmes for organisations navigating hybrid and remote work.

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A woman with curly hair, wearing a white tank top and patterned leggings, is smiling as she is guided through a yoga pose by another person whose arm is visible. The background is a bright, indoor setting. The image is split into two color zones: a yellow-green on the left and a teal on the right. A white diagonal line separates the two zones.

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