Introduction to Yoga and Mindfulness – Lucy Aston Founder and Teacher of YOGADOO

Introduction to Yoga and Mindfulness – Tuesday 14th March

It’s all about the breath – we breathe 20,000-30,000 times a day, start to notice and improve the quality of your breath. From the confines of a bed, a desk, or anywhere quiet, use these 4 Breathing exercises to help you to feel calm and focus

1. **Belly Breathing Technique**
   *How it’s done:* With one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, ensuring the diaphragm (not the chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs. Exhale through the mouth and feel your hand moving as you take nice deep breaths.

2. **Progressive Relaxation**
   *How it’s done:* Through counting during your breaths, slowly make your exhales longer than your inhales. Start with breathing in for 2, out for 4, then in for 3, out for 6, in for 4 and out for 8, and finally in for 5 out for 10. Again, breath in through the nose and out through the mouth.

3. **Nadi Shodhana or “Alternate Nostril Breathing”**
   *How it’s done:* A yogi’s best friend, it’s said to bring calm, balance, and unite the right and left sides of the brain. Starting in a comfortable position, hold the right thumb over the right nostril and inhale deeply through the left nostril. At the peak of inhalation, close off the left nostril with the ring finger, and then exhale through the right nostril. Continue the pattern, inhaling through the right nostril, closing it off with the right thumb, and exhaling through the left nostril.

4. **Finger breathing**
   *How it’s done:* If a situation is just too stressful that you are unable to count or focus, try ‘finger breathing’. Place your left hand in front of you (palm up), take the pointer finger of the right hand and trace the hand from the bottom of the little finger to the top, then down the other side. As you go up the finger, breathe in and as you go down each finger, breathe out. Do this for all of the fingers and thumb. You can trace back from the thumb and go back over the fingers, back to where you started. This is a great exercise if someone is feeling particularly anxious. The connection of touching the hand, brings their attention inwards, and the breaths get progressively longer so it helps to calm the mind.

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**Mindfulness:** Based on the ancient concept of meditation, Mindfulness is a modern day buzz word which basically means the cultivation of moment-by-moment awareness of our surrounding environment is a practice that helps us better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause us stress and anxiety in everyday life. “It’s not about having a particular experience; it’s about noticing what that experience is.”

With regular practice of mindfulness exercises, rather than being led on auto-pilot by emotions influenced by negative past experiences and fears of future occurrences, we harness the ability to root the mind in the present moment and deal with life’s challenges in a clear-minded, calm, assertive way.

Try: Mindful colouring books, mindful eating (noticing all the flavours of every mouthful), going for a walk and listen to the sounds all around you!
What is Yoga and how it can help us?

Yoga started in India 5000 years ago. The word ‘Yoga’ means ‘Union’ bringing together our body and mind, our body and breath. Yoga is an ancient form of exercise that focuses on strength, flexibility and breathing to boost physical and mental wellbeing. By stretching we can relieve tension in our muscles and feel more connected to our bodies.

Yoga to release tension.

We hold most of our tension in our head, neck, shoulders, lower back and hips – so we can practice yoga for a few minutes each day, choosing poses which with release and relieve tension in these areas and help us to feel more comfortable, calm and relaxed.

- **Neck stretch**: Sitting crossed legged, start with neck rolls on the ‘compass points’ so with a deep breath out firstly taking the chin down to the chest, then taking the head back over the shoulders, relax the necks and let the head fall as far as you feel comfortable (breathe out through the mouth). Then take the left ear down to the left shoulder and take a couple of deep breaths there, and then the right ear down to the right shoulder, and again – a couple of deep breaths.

- **Shoulder opener**: Next, still sitting comfortably, lift your arms straight up from your body as you breathe in and then as you breathe out take them out to the sides, bringing them back in towards you. Repeat 5/6 times, trying to maximise each stretch.

- Next take your arms out in front of you and drop them down to the mat, allow the palms to touch the floor and help yourself to feel grounded, relax the shoulders, and let the head to fall between the shoulders. Allow the neck and shoulders to relax. Then take the arms out to a 45 degree angle to the right, so your right arm is resting on your right knee, your left arm is as far over as feels comfortable - allow the head to fall and take three deep breaths. Do the same on the other side. When you feel ready, push your weight into the hands and lift the arms up for one final stretch, and bring your hands to your heart (in prayer position), close your eyes and have three deep breaths.

- **Poses to help focus the mind**: Tree, Mountain
- **Release the lower back**: Cat, Cow, Standing forward bend, seated forward bend
- **Help with shoulder tension**: Upward hand pose (below)
- **All over**: Downward dog
- **Relax**: Savasana (Lie & rest)

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Yoga & Mindfulness for all. Do Yoga. YOGADOO.

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