

SIX MOVEMENTS OF THE SPINE

A fluid movement exercise promoting mobility and lubrication of the spinal joints.

Body benefits:

- Rotates, flexes, extends and aligns spine
- Stimulates spinal nerves
- Tones abdominal and back muscles
- Improves breathing
- Helps prevent incontinence
- Stimulates kidney function
- Activates digestion (peristalsis) and relieves constipation
- Increases circulation
- Brings fresh oxygen to musculoskeletal system

When to avoid Six Movements of the Spine:

- If you have an abdominal hernia
- Avoid putting your head below your heart if you have:
 - Glaucoma,
 - Detached retina
 - Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- If you are beyond 3rd month of pregnancy avoid the dog stretch (movement 2)

MOVEMENTS 1 & 2: THE CAT AND THE DOG

1. Begin down on your hands and knees in the Table position: your hands directly underneath your shoulders, and your knees directly underneath your hips. Keep your back flat, and your head in line with the rest of your spine. INHALE
2. With an EXHALATION of breath, tuck your tailbone under and gently tilt your chin into your chest while you lift the middle and upper parts of the back toward the ceiling. Press the hips slightly forward, rounding your back like a rainbow. This is called the Cat.

3. With INHALATION of breath, tip the tailbone up, drop the belly toward the floor, and lift your head and chin up toward the ceiling. You are not compressing the lower back; rather you are lengthening it. This position is the Dog.
4. Practice undulating the spine between the Cat and the Dog several times to loosen and warm the spinal column. As you begin to awaken the spinal muscles, allow the movements to be slow and mindful. There is no need to rush.
5. Establish a breathing rhythm. Inhale completely with the Dog position and exhale completely with the Cat position.

MOVEMENTS 3 & 4: THE PUPPY DOG

1. In the Cat and the Dog you flexed your spine up and down. These next motions you will move your spine side to side.
2. Return to Table position. INHALE
3. As you EXHALE, draw your right ear towards your right shoulder and bring your right shoulder toward your right hip. From an aerial view, your body will resemble the letter C or a comma.
4. As you INHALE, slowly come out of the comma position and return to the Table position.
5. As you EXHALE, bring your left ear to your left shoulder and bring your left shoulder towards your left hip, once again forming a comma.
6. The movement between the two positions is smooth and continuous. Move with your breath in a slow, meditative way. The Puppy Dog is very subtle.

MOVEMENTS 5 & 6: THREADING THE NEEDLE

1. Return to Table position.
2. With an INHALATION, lift the right hand and turn it over so that the palm is facing up with the fingertips pointing to the left. This will rotate your spine to the right. Imagine that the right arm is a needle.
3. With an EXHALATION, "thread" the right hand along the ground through the space between your left hand and the left knee, keeping it close to your left hand. Slide the right arm as far as it can go, lowering your right ear and shoulder to the ground. If you cannot rest your ear on the floor, instead lean on the forearm. The buttocks are now higher than the head.
4. Be careful not to strain your neck. Listen to your body and go only as far as it is comfortable and allow yourself to relax completely in this position. BREATH!
5. When you are ready to return to Table position, press down into the left hand and lift the head and shoulders back up into Table position.

6. Repeat Threading the Needle on the opposite side using left arm as the needle.
7. Once you have finished the Six Movements of the Spine, sit quietly and notice the effects.

MOVEMENTS 1 & 2 IN A SEATED POSITION

1. Sit comfortably cross-legged on the floor or in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Sit tall. Imagine that there is a silver thread running through your spine out the top of your head. Keep this length with each movement.
2. With an EXHALATION, tuck your tailbone under and like a wave allow the rest of your spine to follow tucking your chin into your chest. Imagine each vertebrae moving segmental. This position will resemble the Cat.
3. With an INHALATION, tip the tailbone back and push your belly forward allowing space for your lungs to inflate. Lift your head and chin towards the ceiling being mindful not to compress your neck, rather you are lengthening it. This position will resemble the Dog.
4. Practice undulating the spine between the Cat and the Dog several times to loosen and warm the spinal column. As you begin to awaken the spinal muscles, allow the movements to be slow and mindful. There is no need to rush.
5. Establish a breathing rhythm. Inhale completely with the Dog position and exhale completely with the Cat position.

MOVEMENTS 3 & 4 IN A SEATED POSITION

1. With the first 2 movements you flexed your spine forwards and backwards. In these next two movements you will be moving your spine from side to side.
2. Sitting tall with the weight of your torso evenly distributed between both sit bones, INHALE. Let your hands sit lightly on the floor beside you.
3. With an EXHALATION, take your left hand and reach over your head towards the right bending your spine to the right, stretching the left side of your spine. Be sure to lead with your left hand/arm being mindful of keeping the length in your spine.
4. With an INHALATION return to neutral position, sitting tall with both hands overhead.
5. With your next EXHALATION, let your left hand sit lightly on the floor beside you. Side bend to the left leading with your right hand/arm overhead, stretching the right side of your spine. Return to neutral position with both arms overhead when moving into the next motion.
6. The movement between the two positions is smooth and continuous. Move with your breath in a slow meditative way.

MOVEMENTS 5 & 6 IN A SEATED POSITION

1. Sit comfortably cross-legged on the floor or in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Sit tall. Imagine that there is a silver thread running through your spine out the top of your head. Keep this length with each movement.
2. INHALE in neutral position, facing forward. With an EXHALATION rotate your spine looking over your right shoulder while your right hand rests on the floor behind your right buttock and your left hand rests on your right knee.
3. When you are ready to INHALE, return to forward facing position.
4. With your next EXHALATION, rotate to the left. Rest your left hand on the floor behind your left buttock and your right hand on your left knee. When you are ready to INHALE, Return to neutral position.
5. Move slowly between these two motions, undulating between right and left rotation of the spine. Keep your length with your spine. The movements should be slow and meditative. Move with your breath.
6. Once you have finished the Six Movements of the Spine, sit quietly and notice the effects.

REFERENCE _YOGA FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL MUSCLES, RACHEL SCHAEFFER