

# Yoga for Seat Dwellers

Discover easy ways to re-open your hip creases!



**SPOILER ALERT!**

*Scroll to the end for everyday tips on how you can release tension in your hips creases*

## WHY YOU SHOULD READ & DO THIS!

→ With constantly sitting, our hip creases (or flexors) are in a constant state of shortening and contraction, making these very important core muscles, tight and weak. Tension and weakness create a whole host of problems in our bodies; we will cover three of them.

→ I offer a small amount of anatomy and A LOT of description for the poses, to help you understand how the anatomy affects your body!

→ I provide **TIPS** *that offer insight into what's happening in your body* and **WATCH OUT FOR** *that are signs that your body has gone too far in a pose.*

<b>Here are 3 common problems from tight hip flexors</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Low back pain</li><li>2. Weak buttocks and hamstrings</li><li>3. Shortness of breath</li></ol>	<b>Props you'll need</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Bolster or 2 pillows</li><li>- Blanket</li><li>- Block or book</li></ul>
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### **Yoga is all about interconnection and so is the body!**

So we can't just target the hip flexors. Your main hip flexor (psoas) works the hips AND spine, so we also need to focus on strengthening the low back...this is why breath and core work are a part of this practice.

#### ***I'd like to stress...***

...in some of the poses, I offer difference variations; if any of them do not feel good for your body, please do not continue just because it's a more challenging option.

Pain is the body's way of telling you something is wrong. Please listen to that.

**Now let's get started with some light stretching and releasing!**

## **ARDHA APANASANA** (Half knee to chest)

1. Hug your right knee into your chest, reaching for shin or behind the knee.

Keep your other leg straight and active.

Hold for several breaths; then gently circle the knee to help with mobilizing that hip. Switch sides.

**WATCH OUT FOR** *If your shoulders pull up when you reach, USE A STRAP*

**TIP** *If your straight leg begins to bend and pull back, that is a sign that your psoas is tight*

2. To increase the stretch, bring a bolster underneath your pelvis and support your sacrum and follow directions above.

Lift pelvis up, move bolster off to the side and take a wide stance with your feet, slowly dropping knees side to side.

**WATCH OUT FOR** *This should feel very supportive.*

*If it feels tweaky in your low back the bolster is likely too high and is creating too much of a back bend, so you should continue with #1*



Now, I want you to actually **FEEL YOUR HIP FLEXORS AT WORK...**

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the mat, hands on your hip creases.

Try to pick up your feet, without actually lifting them.

**TIP** *Simply initiating this movement, you will be able to feel your flexors engage.*

This is actually quite hard, because you will want to remove your feet from the floor, but fight that urge...

we'll pick them up momentarily!

Do this several times to drive some heat into the front of the hips.



### LEG LIFT WITH EXTERNAL ROTATION

Staying on your back, keep one leg bent and straighten the other.

Let that leg fall open naturally and move it out, away from your body a few inches.

Engage your belly slightly and lift your leg up a few inches on your exhale.

Inhale lower, exhale lift. Repeat 7 times, *the slower the better* and then switch sides.

### COMMON PROBLEM #1 – CONQUER LOW BACK PAIN

Tight hip flexors mean those muscles are constantly pulling your pelvis forward, creating a lot of pain and discomfort in your low back. In addition to stretching your hip creases, it is also essential to strengthen your abdominals, which help to stabilize your spine and relieve low back pain.

### ABDOMINAL STRENGTHENING

1. Bend both knees, squeeze your belly toward your spine and lift just one foot from the mat, trying not to let the pelvis move. Place foot back down and switch. Move slowly! Repeat 10 times.

**WATCH OUT FOR** *If the pelvis rocks, it's a sign of instability in your deep abdominals and you should not try #2*

2. To add more of a challenge, squeeze your belly and side body in and pick up both feet, not letting your low belly puff. Slowly place back down and repeat 7 times. **WATCH OUT FOR** *If low belly puffs &/or your low back pulls away from the mat as you begin to lift, it's a sign of instability in your deep abdominals*

To correct this, push your lower back ribs down, maybe even bring your hands under your hips to help.



## COMMON PROBLEM #2 – REMOVE WEAKNESS IN GLUTES/HAMSTRINGS

If your hip flexors are tight, it's likely that there's also weakness in your glutes and hamstrings. Bringing your leg behind you helps to bring strength to the back of your body and length to your front!

### **SALABHASANA** (Locust pose)

Squeeze the top of your right leg and lift it off of the floor a few inches, then give the buttocks a good squeeze. Lower down and switch. Repeat on each side 7 times.

**TIP** *The movement should be slow and should not irritate your low back*



### **ANANDA UTKATASANA** (Baby Chair pose)

I love this pose...It doesn't look like much, but there's so much going on in your legs and hips! Come to standing with feet hip width apart.

Squeeze your legs together and take a small bend in your knees, keep most of the weight in your heels. Do not let your knees move too far past your ankle.

Feel the activation on the backside of your legs and hold for 5 breaths.

**TIP** *Move your thighs back and tailbone toward the floor, to keep your torso vertical*

### **TABLE**

Lift one leg behind you, keeping the knee bent at 90 degrees between thigh and calf. Slowly lift and lower, giving the buttocks a good squeeze on the way up and trying to keep the pelvis level. Repeat 7 times on one side and switch.

**Now that you're warmed up, let's ramp it up!**





### **ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA** (Downward Facing Dog).

Press your fingers into the mat and lift your hips up toward the ceiling.

Squeeze the tops of your thighs and squeeze your legs together.

Stay here for several slow, deep breaths.

**TIP** *With all of the activation through the back of the legs in the last three poses, this stretches out your glutes and hamstrings!*

### **CHAIR LEG LIFTS**

1. Place a folded blanket on a chair to help tip your pelvis forward. Make sure your knees are over your ankles. Ground down through the left foot and without leaning backward, exhale and lift the bent right leg a few inches from the floor. Inhale lower and switch. Repeat 5 times on each side.
2. To add a challenge, straighten your leg, then lift. Repeat 3 times on each side.

**TIP** *You'll notice you won't be able to lift as high; that's due to the weight of your full leg and puts more stress in your back, so be careful with this one*

**WATCH OUT FOR** *Don't let yourself lean backward; it's a sign of instability in your low back*



## **ALANASANA** (Crescent Lunge)

Mindfully stand up from the chair, move it to the side and step into Alanasana. Be sure to stack your front knee directly over your front ankle and gently squeeze the top of your back thigh.

Hold the lunge for 5 full breaths and switch sides. Do 2 times each side

**TIP** *From all of the squeezing and flexing in the previous pose, you want to counteract this and bring the leg behind to stretch it out!*



## **NAVASANA** (Boat pose)

Let's work even more closely with the abdominals and hip flexors.

1. Come to sitting with knees bent, feet on the mat, resting on your forearms.

Roll the shoulders back and energetically keep a lift through your heart/chest.

Squeeze your belly back to your spine and lift one foot off the mat, then the other. Hold for 2 full breaths and lower. Rest and repeat 2 more times.

**WATCH OUT FOR** *If your spine rounds or over arches here, this is your stop; do not try the next one*

2. For more of a challenge, come onto your hands, gently squeeze elbows together and keep lifting at the heart. Inhale lift your legs off of the floor, exhale squeeze them into your body, inhale release/lower. Repeat 3 times.
3. To add more, place your hands behind your knees and find your balance. Inhale pick up both feet, exhale squeeze one in, inhale release. Exhale squeeze the other in, inhale release/lower. Repeat 3 times each side.

**TIP** *You can keep your hands behind your knees for support or bring them to your heart's center*





### **PSOAS STRETCH**

Come on your back, knees bent, feet wide apart.

Drop your knees to your right and place your right foot on top of your left knee/thigh.

Lightly engage your belly to your spine and press your right foot down. Feel a nice stretch up the front of your leg.

Hold for 5 breaths and then release the foot and bring your knees to center. Switch sides.

### **SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA (Reclined Bound Angle)**

Lie on your back and bring the soles of your feet together, resting on the bolster, halfway up your calves and underneath your feet. This should feel very freeing. Rest here for 8 elongated breaths.

To come out, engage your belly and bring your knees up, feet resting on bolster. Slowly walk the feet open, so that your knees rest close to one another.

**TIP** *This opens your low back, further releasing tension*

**WATCH OUT FOR** *If you feel discomfort in your low back, add a folded blanket on the side of each hip, for support. If that doesn't remove the discomfort, simply straighten your legs and rest with the bolster under your knees.*



Now, let's take a few minutes to set up in a comfortable seated position for some relaxation practices and so that you can feel the effects of your efforts. After all, the intention of Hatha (active) Yoga is for you to be able to sit comfortably, for longer periods of time! This is also the perfect time to bring pranayama (breath work) into your practice.

## SEATED POSITIONS

### 1. **SUKHASANA** (Easy pose )

Sit up on your block or bolster, knees should be below hip height. Maybe even set a blanket or two underneath each knee/thigh if they feel pressure.

**TIP** *Setting your hips higher than your knees releases the psoas and allows your abdominals to their job – support your spine!*

### 2. OR sit in a chair with a folded blanket underneath your sitting bones, knees over ankles.

**COMMON PROBLEM #3 & BONUS TIP** *When you free up your psoas, you free up your breath! The psoas and diaphragm connect to the spine at the same place, so the health of one, affects the other*



## RELAXATION PRACTICES

EVEN BREATHING – Count your breath and match the length of your inhales to your exhales.

See how long you can draw out your breath, perhaps to the count of 8?

HEART CHAKRA MEDITATION – Maintain natural breathing and try to visualize a green light around your heart.

Notice the color of green, is it pulsating, does it move with your breath. Focus on these details as you breathe.

OPPOSITION THINKING – Sit still and tall. Deepen your breath and notice every thought that comes in.

If it's negative, immediately think of something positive. This gives you power over your thoughts and the ability to change them!

Spend a few minutes on all three or pick one that resonates! After some time, shift awareness back to your physical body and take your time transitioning into Savasana...

## **SAVASANA** (Corpse pose)

Play some soft, instrumental music for Savasana and pick one of these options; spend at least 10 minutes here:

1. Sit in front of a bolster or 2 pillows, hold on to them as you lie back; then send a block or book underneath your sacrum.

Walk your feet open nice and wide, so that your knees come in toward one another.

Let your shoulders drop down and enjoy the incredible opening along your chest and shoulders.



**TIP** *This opens your heart and relieves tension in your low back and sacrum*

2. Place a folded blanket on your bolster, then place both underneath your knees before lying on your back.

Place your arms alongside your body, palms face up.

**TIP** *This added height roots your thigh bones further into your pelvis, releasing your psoas and allowing your diaphragm and deep abdominals to work more freely.*



Thank you for joining me on your journey to opening your hip creases!

I hope that you feel more comfortable and at ease in your body.

While we can't fully get rid of sitting, we can change how much we sit and where, and we can do our best to keep this affected hip crease area strong and long!

**Below are some more quick tips to help you on your way...**

If you enjoyed this e-book, *check out my upcoming 'Essential Core' workshop on May 20<sup>th</sup>.*

We'll be covering more on hip flexors and many other areas that are essential to healthy living!

*Namaste,*

Melissa Kleehammer

[www.Beyond2Yoga.com/workshops](http://www.Beyond2Yoga.com/workshops)

### **EASY WAYS TO RELIEVE TENSION IN YOUR HIP CREASES...**

1. Take breaks from sitting...stand, stretch once an hour, for 30 seconds, next to your desk. Go refill your water bottle, something, anything.
2. Sit on the floor! Instead of lounging on the couch for 2 hours, arrange a few pillows and blankets in front of the couch and cop a squat there (don't actually squat!) and use the couch as a back rest. Do this even for just 10 minutes. Switch it up!
3. Try more deep breathing and relaxation practices (like the ones above!)
4. Sit less...as in, turn off the TV and go for a walk. BONUS – the fresh air works wonders for your mental health!
5. Bring attention to how you sit. Get your butt back in your chair, redefine your low back curve, roll your shoulders and find an open chest. All of these actions will improve posture, low back pain and breath capacity.
6. Drink more water. With all of the tightness in your body, the least you can do is hydrate those tissues.