

## Five–Minute Yoga

*prepared by Jiji Russell, E-RYT, for the December 2019 edition of Clarke Monthly  
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### Forward bend

Stand facing a wall or if you're outdoors: a tree. Place your hands about shoulder-width apart with the tops of your fingers just below shoulder height. Take a few steps backwards and attempt to bend from the hips, keeping your spine elongated (not rounded). As long as the spine is long, with a little natural curvature at the lower back, it does not matter how far you go. If you can form an "L" shape with your trunk parallel to the ground, then do that, making a straight line from your hands, to shoulders, to hips. Otherwise a lesser bend in good form is best. Benefits of this pose: elongates the spine, taking pressure of the low back; stretches the backs of the legs; stretches and opens the shoulders, relieving shoulder/neck fatigue.



### Backward bends

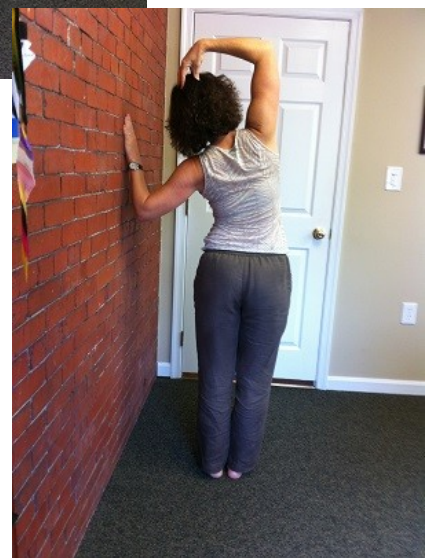
Stand facing a wall or tree. Place your hands about shoulder-width apart with the tops of your fingers just below shoulder height. Step one foot just slightly behind you, pressing into the ball of that foot for balance. Try to "lift" your whole rib cage up and off your pelvis by standing very erect. Begin to raise your chest upward, followed by your head, making an arc of your upper body, as you arc up and away from the wall or tree. Come out of the pose and switch to the other foot behind you. Benefits: opens the chest and shoulders to help counter "computer slouch" and "drivers' slouch"; stretches the spine into a back bending position; offers an energetic boost.



NOTE: aim to hold each pose presented in this guide for four deep breaths. As your comfort level and stamina increase, you can attempt a one-minute hold. Always breathe deeply as you hold a yoga pose or stretch; the inability to breathe can indicate undue forcing of the pose.

## Side bends

Stand beside a wall or tree, about the length of your forearm from the structure. Keep your inside hand (the one closest to the wall) on the wall, or tree at about shoulder height. Take your outside hand and place the fingertips on the top of your head, pointing your elbow out to the side. Lift and lengthen your spine, and then curve yourself toward the wall/tree as you “reach” slightly through your outside hip and rib cage in counter position, reaching away from the wall/tree. Optionally, take your outside foot, and place it slightly behind you as in the backward bend pose, with some of your weight gently pressing into the ball of the foot. This increases the overall stretch of the pose. This pose is great because it offers your body an escape from typical daily movements and gets you moving/thinking alternatively. Slowly come out of the pose, turn around, and do the other side. Benefits: Stretches the lower back, muscles in the side waist and groin, and the neck.



## Spinal elongation

Stand with your feet a little wider than shoulder-distance apart. Bend your knees just slightly, and make sure the knees point in the same direction as your second two toes. With hands on your hips, gently “drop down” your pelvis, as if to weight yourself more fully toward the floor. Simultaneously, “reach” your spine/neck upward into the base of the skull. Relax the shoulders and jaw. Breathe deeply, closing your eyes if you can. Benefits: Lengthens and helps to decompress the spinal vertebrae; “grounds” and relaxes the body and mind.





## Twists

Stand beside and very close to a wall or tree. Step your inside foot (the one closest to the wall) slightly forward, and your outside foot slightly back, to make a small lunge position with your feet. Bend both knees slightly and turn the toes of both feet to point straight forward. Relax your back and pelvis, and stand tall. Turn toward the wall, and place your hands on it about shoulder distance apart, with the fingertips no higher than your shoulder height. Hold yourself in this twisting position and breathe deeply. Optionally, widen the hands and turn to look slightly behind you for a deeper twist. Slowly bring your feet together, turn around, and do the other side. Benefits: Twists are good energy-releasing poses. They are also good for helping digestion along, and relieving back pain. Always lengthen your spine top to bottom before twisting it, and never force a twist. Let the twist deepen only by holding the the position and gently winding further with each exhalation.



## D.I.Y. Yoga Resources

**Yoga Journal** – [yogajournal.com](http://yogajournal.com) has detailed descriptions of poses, along with photos and step-by-step how-to guides; also very good articles on food and lifestyle

*Yoga Mind, Body, and Spirit: A Return to Wholeness* – This book by yoga teacher Donna Farhi presents a wonderful primer for beginners and a mainstay for the library of experienced yogis.

**Yoga International** – [yogainternational.com](http://yogainternational.com) offers a rich subscription-based resource of online classes; multi-day courses; articles, and more.

**Yoga Glo** – Find classes in any style or focus area that you like, with teachers from all over the world on [glo.com](http://glo.com), a subscription site.

