



# Yoga and Mindfulness for MS

Presented by:

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## **Marie LeGrand:**

Hello and welcome to MSAA's live webinar, Yoga and Mindfulness for MS with Kimberly Castello. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for joining us this evening. I'm Marie LeGrand, Senior Director of Mission Delivery and Health Equity for MSAA and your host for the program. As you may know, MSAA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives today for the entire MS community. And some of our free programs and services include a national helpline, we have equipment and cooling products, we have an MRI funding, an online community, webinars, and many more free programs available to people living with MS nationwide. Now to speak to one of our specialists, you can reach our helpline Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 8 p.m. Eastern Time. And to learn more about MSAA's programs and services, please do visit our website at [mymsaa.org](http://mymsaa.org) or you can also give us a call.

Throughout tonight's program, you will have the opportunity to ask questions by typing them into the chat box. We encourage you to please submit your questions throughout the program, and we will do our very best to answer your questions during the Q&A portion of tonight's webinar. At the end of the program, we ask that you please complete a brief survey. Your feedback is extremely important, and it will help us in developing future programming and content. A link to the survey will also be included in the chat box.

Now we're extremely grateful to have Kimberly Castello with us, who will provide us with simple, accessible ways to reduce stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue. She will also provide us with a better understanding of yoga and mindfulness as a whole person approach to bringing ease and balance to the nervous system, which helps in managing MS symptoms. You are more than welcome to use what you have in your home to practice gentle therapeutic movements and breathing techniques to improve balance, strength and flexibility. This program is for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute as formal recommendations. Please do speak with your doctor or healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

Without further ado, I would like to introduce our speaker for this evening. Kimberly is a certified yoga therapist with the International Association of Yoga Therapists. She earned her credentials after graduating from the clinical yoga therapy program at Loyola Marymount University and gained her clinical experience working with chronic pain patients at the Simms Mann Venice Family Clinic in Los Angeles. After being diagnosed with a chronic illness, she began exploring the therapeutic and restorative aspects of yoga practice to complement Western medical treatments. She specializes in developing chronic pain management and stress relief programs

for individuals, hospitals and clinics. In 2017, after five years of leading the wellness program for the Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health, Kimberley developed a yoga therapy program for their MS patients. Welcome, Kimberley.

### **Kimberly Castello:**

Thank you, Marie. I appreciate it. And I'm just so excited to be here with all of you. So I just want to start by saying there are so many wonderful benefits of yoga. And I'm really hoping that tonight we can see how that applies to MS. So I'm going to go ahead and bring my slides up and we can get started.

All right. So starting here. So this is Yoga and Mindfulness for MS and what comes to mind typically when we think about yoga, it's not usually breathing, so it was really important for me to put this up here, this "Inhale / Exhale", because first and foremost, yoga is about the breath. And a lot of times it gets overlooked because how it's presented just out in the world on social media. Any time you've heard or seen a class, it's always focused on the physical postures, and there are a lot of benefits beyond the physical posture. So I'm really hoping to share that with all of you tonight.

So let's talk about this. What do we think about... let me move this out of my screen really quick, sorry about that... What do we think about when we are hearing the word yoga? A lot of the common beliefs I've heard from different people over the years is it's challenging stretches and difficult movements, vigorous exercise, and also could be a religious practice. Now, some of this can be true in the sense that stretches can be very challenging, but it's really about how we learn to adapt the movements to our own bodies, not the other way around.

So when I go through some movements a little bit later this evening, what I really want to say first before we get started with any of that, is that everything you see here tonight can be done seated, standing, in your bed, on the floor, with a chair, with a wall. There are endless ways to practice yoga. Unfortunately, we don't see that everywhere we go, so it can be really discouraging. And then we do see these difficult movements being presented to us, and it's really frustrating. So I want to offer you what yoga is really about. And again, it's going to come back to the breath every single time. It's going to be awareness and mindfulness.

So.. Ah! come back here! Okay, so first and foremost, stress reduction. I think we all want to learn ways to reduce our stress. So if you think about when we're living with a chronic illness like MS, there's going to be stress from the treatments we're going through, the side effects from any of the medications, just the daily management of adapting to and living with a chronic illness. It creates a lot of stress. That stress can come forth as depression, as anxiety, as fatigue. So what ends up happening is we end up being overwhelmed with stress in such a way that we don't even realize the effects on our nervous system sometimes. So I will get to that in a little bit.

And again, so yoga, we come back to it's being aware. What do we mean about awareness? Being more aware of how we breathe, how we're feeling in our body. And the truth is, when we're living with a chronic illness, we become heightenedly aware of what's going on in our body. We get to know ourselves probably better than we really ever wanted to know. So we do have this awareness of when something is aching, when something is tightening, when we're having spasms, when we're feeling fatigued. But the awareness that I want to bring forth today is awareness of the breathing and how we can use our breath to really help manage and relieve some of these symptoms that we're dealing with.

And that's where mindfulness comes in. So learning to be a little bit more intentional and mindful in the movements that I'm going to offer you tonight. And in the breathing, for the most part, the breathing is going to be the most essential thing that we do, and we can always add movement later. But I would always begin with the breath.

And then, of course, accessible therapeutic movement, which I think everybody wants to know a little bit more about, I'm sure. Because, again, if we're not given a movement that works for our body, then what? What do we do, right? We're going to get frustrated and then we're not going to do it at all. So I want all of you to have tools that work for each of you, and that's going to be different for every single person that's here this evening.

So the effects of stress. So let's talk about that. So I'm sure we're familiar with all of these - fatigue, very common, obviously, with MS. But stress, in general, can cause additional fatigue and also it can aggravate and cause flare ups. Common to have back and neck pain. Lack of sleep, which we're not getting rest, really hard to feel good. Headaches. Gut issues are really common. And as I mentioned earlier, depression and anxiety. So let's talk about what the stress cycle can look like. And I truly believe that we can tackle the stress cycle. We have the ability to communicate with our nervous system and to get it in a better place where it's more in a restful and replenished state.

So we start with stress. Whatever that stress is coming from, we have physical, we have emotional stress. Wherever it's coming from, it causes us to go into our sympathetic, nervous system, which I'm sure we're all familiar, it's our "fight or flight", often called our goal mode. And so we think about we need our nervous system to operate from both aspects. We do need our sympathetic, our fight or flight, and our parasympathetic, that restorative part. But we live too much in that fight or flight, the body can be overtaxed, overstressed, and then it's very hard to recover when we do have flare ups.

So from there, fight or flight is going to take us into decreased breathing. So I always say quality of breath. So when you hear me say that, what I mean is having a sense of ease to our breath, being able to take deeper, slower, longer breaths. And when we have decreased breathing and we have all of this stress, you're going to then have more inflammation in the body, and that leads to chronic issues.

So how do we start talking to the nervous system? So what stress relief would look like in the body? Stress relief would take us into resting and restoring. That's going to be that parasympathetic nervous system. And again, what happens, unfortunately, with a chronic illness like MS is we don't even know that we've been in this state for so long. Our sympathetic nervous system, that is, that that's such a huge part of this process. So we want to start to focus more on slow movements, therapeutic movements, meaning movements that are accessible and that we can adapt to our body and how we're feeling in the moment, and being able to just pause and notice when the breath changes.

So for instance, when we're in that stress mode, we'll feel shortened breaths, we'll feel rapid breaths. So when we come to a state of stress relief, we're asking ourselves to bring that breathing to a more comfortable place. And that's going to take us again into that rest and restore, which is our parasympathetic nervous system. And that's going to improve the quality of our breath, again, bring more ease into our mind, into our body. And of course, we'll see some decrease in our inflammation. And that brings an improvement to the quality of life.

So what do we do to lower our stress? I mean, that's the real big question here. So 3 to 5 minutes of daily breathing and it's not as easy as it seems to just sit and breathe. So we're going to talk about what we can do, how we can integrate breathing into our day. For instance, sometimes I start in the beginning of the day when I have a little bit of time, maybe still laying in my bed, just to kind of wake up the mind and the body and really start to get that positive mindset going. And even if you just start with one or two minutes a day, everything that we do is very impactful. So subtle movements go a very long way.

Pausing and noticing your breath during times of stress. So when we're not feeling good, again, whatever those stressors are, whatever they're coming from, physical, emotional, mental, whatever those stressors are, we pause and we notice what's the change in the breath? Where do you notice movement in the breath? Do you find it happening more in the chest? Most likely so. Do you notice if you're able to deepen that breath, slow it down. So it's just again, starting to check in a little bit more throughout the day.

So something that's really important would be focusing on lengthening and slowing our breath down. And I don't say this lightly because it does take time to really practice breathing. That's really why we call it a breathing practice, because it takes time and we really need to just give ourselves the time and patience. In yoga we say ahimsa, meaning being kind to ourselves, and that would be kindness to me right there, is just learning to give ourselves some patience and a little break, knowing that we can always start fresh every day, come back to our breath.

So from here, additional benefits. So mindful and intentional breathing that I'm referring to, again, where we pause, we're checking in, we noticed a change in our breath, and that signals a time for us to just take our time and slow our breath down. This is going to provide more insight into our stress. We're going to get really familiar very quickly with what our stressors are, what our triggers are, and what our reaction is in our body and in our mind. So that's going to allow us to become more present. And this is about teaching us to let go of distractions.

So one common thing that, I think misconception there is with meditation and mindfulness is that we're just supposed to sit and let all of our thoughts go and clear our minds completely. And that's actually not true or realistic. So instead, it's about not attaching to our thoughts, just letting the thoughts come and letting the thoughts go, but not attaching or holding on to any one particular thought, so that we realize there's still going to be things going on, still feelings that are coming up. And, you know, emotions and thoughts and distractions all around us. But it's really just the ability to just continue to breathe and remain focused on our breath.

So how do we normally breathe? So this is really interesting because I'm always, you know, inviting people to do a breathing practice. And the question is, what do you mean? I breathe all day long. Well, for the most part, I don't know about you, but I was never taught to breathe until I got into yoga. So that's a lot of years without knowing how to breathe. And we don't usually have to know how to breathe because it's an automatic function, thankfully. However, what happens a lot of time is, again, we reside in our chest, especially during times of stress. So you'll feel the movement in your chest happening and it's not going anywhere else.

We often breathe through the mouth, which there is nothing wrong with that. There are definitely breathing techniques in yoga where we do breathe through our mouth, but there are specific techniques that we can use to cool the body. So for MS, we don't want to overheat, as we know. So I'm going to talk a little bit about cooling breath and why that's really important and relevant. So there are going to be times when we breathe through our nose because that's going to automatically slow the breath down for us. Another way that we normally breathe is just going to

be those short, rapid breaths. And again, that's going to come when we're under stress, any type of stress that we're experiencing.

Reverse breathing is something nobody really talks about until we get into yoga. So reverse breathing is where we're breathing in opposition to our diaphragm, our breathing muscle. So what we're going to talk about tonight is how we're going to breathe with the diaphragm. And that's going to help us take deeper breaths. So typically, when we're breathing without even making any effort, when we take an inhale, our diaphragm descends down. When it descends down, it pushes everything out and expands the belly, the ribs, and the chest. That's our natural inhalation. Our natural exhalation would be the diaphragm descends back up and softens everything back in - the belly, ribs, and chest. However, we get out of this natural breathing state when we're going through stress, and it takes us into a reverse mode where we're pulling in on the inhale or pushing against our diaphragm. So you can imagine if we're sort of working against our own body, there's not a lot of space for us to move and take deeper breaths.

So breathing techniques. So we like to focus more on breathing in and out through the nose, which takes some time. So you can always start with like pursed lips and just kind of a gentle exhalation where it's kind of like you're blowing out a candle and get more comfortable with that until you're fully comfortable with closing the mouth and focusing a little bit more on breathing through the nose.

And again, that inhalation is going to be about expanding the belly, so we're filling the belly up, and we'll feel the expansion in the ribs and the chest. But often this doesn't happen until we get some movement going. We're able to break up movements, break up the tension, rather, in the body. So we don't have a lot of movement in our side body, in our ribs or in our spine. And we move and twist and open our chest and our back. It is going to be harder to feel like you can access those areas. So that's where movement is going to come in and really help us out. And then Exhale Again is going to be about softening the chest, ribs and belly. You'll feel everything kind of releasing and empty now.

So that was a lot of information to take in. So we're going to go through this breathing together in a few moments. So the inhalation can be warming. And this is something we really want to pay close attention to with MS. We don't want to overheat. So there are times we do want to bring our energy up. So, for instance, if we're having a day, we're having low energy, pretty fatigued, maybe feeling a little depressed, it might be focusing a little bit more on these long inhalations because it's an energizing breath. It's a warming breath, and it also represents what we take on in our life. So in addition to that, the movements and the breath combined can be used to warm and energize. So we want to pay attention to when we're building heat, when we're releasing, when we're calming and cooling so that we know when to apply which movement at what point in our day. And that is going to change on a daily basis because our body is ever changing. So we really have to sort of, again, give ourselves some patience and teach ourselves how to adapt to those changes.

And something interesting to pay attention to is if it's easier for you to take an inhale versus an exhale. So I'm going to ask you to think about that when we do this breathing exercise here shortly, because for some of us, like myself, for instance, it's easier for me to take an inhale because I'm a complete Type A personality. I'm very much a perfectionist, and I will just pile, pile, pile things on, so I can take this deep, deep, deep inhale instead taking everything in. And then that includes all that stress. And then that exhale is like a shorter breath because I'm not allowing myself to let go. So you'll notice some interesting qualities about yourself as well when we're paying attention to our breathing.

And that brings us to the exhalation. So again, it's about cooling, relaxing. This can be more relief for anxiety. So along with exhalation, there are movements. It's going to be more like forward bends and flexing the spine, something like pulling the knees into the chest when you're laying on your bed, that would be more considered a calming and cooling exercise to relieve anxiety. So again, that exhalation is going to represent what we're able to let go of in our life. So it's important to just learn these things about ourselves, not so that we can judge or attach to what we learn, so we can just get a little bit of insight on maybe a different way that we can support ourselves.

So before we get into movement, let's pause and see what this breathing is all about. So I'm just going to sit up tall and I'm actually sitting on a chair, you probably hear it creaking a little bit, and a cushion. So it gets me a little bit taller. And if you are laying down maybe on your bed right now and that's a comfortable place for you, that's perfectly fine. Sometimes that's more accessible to lay on the back, to rest the body, because right here I still have to work to hold the body up. And so sometimes that does get tiring. So keep that in mind. But if we're seated, make sure that your chair is stable. If it's not, maybe push it against the wall so the back of the chair is to the wall. So for any breath or movement that we do, you feel like you have the support of what's beneath you. And again, if I'm seated, I'm just going to keep my feet hip-width apart and my knees are over my ankles and I'm just going to sit up nice and tall just to remind myself that I have length in my spine.

And again, if you're on your back, just go ahead and relax and find a comfortable position, whatever that is. You might have a pillow under your head or a blanket or pillows under your knees, the backs of your knees and the backs of your legs for a little more support for your lower back. So whatever makes you comfortable in this moment, let's just pause and think about beginning to take a slow breath in through the nose. Feel the belly expand. And when you take that breath out through the nose, just feel that belly, soften in and down. So again, slow breath in through the nose, fill the belly up like you're filling up a balloon. And when you take that breath out through the nose, again, just a gentle softening.

Sometimes I place my hands on my belly just to feel that feedback of the movement from the breath so that when I'm inhaling, I feel my belly rise gently into my hands. And whenever my exhale happens, for me, I'm letting the belly soften away from the hands. And we just start to put the intention out there, that we're going to slow and lengthen our breath, without worrying about any specific outcome or feeling in this moment and knowing that this is about finding a natural pace for you. So even though you're going to hear my words and see my movements, this me, it's important for you to feel this in your own body and make choices for yourself in the sense that you're finding your own pace, your own breath, you're breathing and moving when you're ready to breathe and move. So there's no particular pace here.

In time, you might notice it gets a little bit more comfortable to breathe in and out through the nose. And if we're staying with that, we might notice that that space, again, is happening up in the ribs, not just in the belly. So if you took your hands above the navel, but below the chest, you might notice there's a little bit of space there. And if not don't worry about it because we'll find it. And again, every exhalation is going to be about emptying that breath out, softening and releasing. So again, we're just continuing those slow breaths in and out through the nose. And just, what do you notice? Again, no right or wrong here. There never is. It's just our body giving us some information and insight. Notice if the inhalation or the exhalation is easier for you and knowing that over time it gets more familiar, it gets more comfortable.

So take a few more breaths here where we're just focusing on our breathing, not worrying about anything else, just with the idea of just noticing the length in and out. Again, an opportunity just to become a little more mindful of the breathing and how it affects us so that when we're stressed, when we're feeling discomfort, when our energy isn't where we want it to be, we're able to pause and notice how that's changed our breath and how can we start breathing to better support our nervous system.

So, take a few more breaths here, and I just have a hand on, kind of, belly and ribs and a hand on chest because that's a comfortable place for me and a reminder that I'm feeling more space with every inhalation. And a little more release with every exhalation. So, again, we bring a little more quality into our breath. We're giving ourselves the opportunity to support ourselves and to reduce our stress, again, by getting our nervous system to move from that fight-or-flight into that rest-and-restore.

So slowly just relax and wherever you're at. And I really just want you to take an opportunity to just notice how that felt for you and maybe just make a note to yourself of what you noticed. It's usually very impactful. We sit down and we start paying a little bit more attention to our breath, especially before we get into movement, because we get really sort of excited about the movements and kind of concerned and worried about what can we really do with these movements. And I'm here to tell you, there is a lot that you can do. There's at least four or five ways to do everything that I'm going to show you this evening. And I'm barely going to scratch the surface tonight. So just know everything that we do can evolve and grow with how we're feeling. We can do things, again, on our bed. We can be laying on a floor. We can be seated. We could be standing and hands supported on a chair or a wall. There are so many variations of every single movement and it's really not about how a movement looks. It's about how a movement makes you feel and what it's bringing to you.

So that being said, what are the benefits of movements? So, really important, movement in general, we want to keep moving and it's hard sometimes to move when we don't feel good, but we need to move to feel better. So it's kind of a tough one some days. So what I have to say about that is just each day we approach it, as I said, fresh start and we're going to pause and check in again with our breath, with our body, with our mind, and then we're going to decide what movements would help us most. And it may look completely different from the day before and certainly from the day after.

So improving digestion, really important, especially if anyone has ever had gut issues. We really want to keep our bodies moving - movement, twisting, gentle twists, that is, even just gentle twists from a chair or rocking from side to side on your back, like knees to chest, even in your bed, can really help get your digestion going. Increasing circulation. It's really important, right? We want to keep the body healthy, improving posture. So a lot of times we tend to just too much sitting or lack of movement or just, we're tired or however we're feeling in our body, we tend to maybe get a little bit more rounded, myself included, and then we get a little bit more hunched. And then there's not as much space for the body to move, meaning the breath to expand. And so we won't have that quality of breath. We won't be able to find those deep breaths. And also just keeping healthy posture keeps a healthy, strong spine. So all of those things are extremely beneficial to our health.

Also, movement, it is going to strengthen the mind and the body. So I know when I'm feeling good and strong in my body, I'm in a much happier place in my day. I feel more positive. My outlook is different. I just notice how things are moving a little bit more in the way I want them to. So just starting our day off with one breathing exercise can make a huge difference. And if there

are movements that you're enjoying and that are working for you and you're able to do, adding some movement in as well can be very helpful. Of course, we all want our bodies to be strong. We want strong spine and legs and we want to be able to improve our balance, which we can do that, and also just keeping up our mobility, our flexibility. So these are all well-known benefits of movement and yoga is a very wonderful tool to go into those movements. But also being mindful with breath. So it's not just exercise, it's more mindful and intentional movements.

So how do we adapt movements to our body? First and foremost, start where you are. That is the most important thing, not where we think we should be, but start where we are, and then we adapt movements to ourselves, not the other way around. We're going to use what we have in our home. So for instance, I'm sitting in a simple folding chair. I have a bolster underneath me to help my spine sit up taller. That can be a pillow or blanket. And if you're using something like a pillow at home, make sure has a little bit of firmness to it so you don't completely sink into it. You do want to have a little... feel like it's giving you support, but it's cushioned enough that it's comfortable.

So using a chair I mentioned that. So there are standing movements, there are seated movements, there are lying down movements where you can use a chair, a wall always comes in handy. It could be a desktop. Towels can really serve as a great tool, like a yoga strap. So if we don't have a yoga strap, we might use something like a towel because it has some length that we can reach and extend both arms and legs. It's great for helping us open hips, release hamstrings, and open back, chest, and shoulders. And again, anything we have, we can really improvise and use that we have around us. You'd be surprised what you already have in your home that could be a yoga prop. And blankets, of course, can really be interchangeable with pillows. So you can fold blankets, or again, towels and just kind of thick blankets and towels, you can fold them up and stack them. And those are great for placing under the head and spine to support and open the chest and back.

So if you remember earlier, I spoke about movement and breath can either open you and release and also sort of bring our energy up and be warming. That would be something that would open your back and your chest, which we would know in yoga as a backbend. Now, when I say the word backbend, I think of a picture of, a crazy picture, of something really scary and complicated. And we look at it and we think, there's no way I can do that. Well, it's not really a safe way that's typically presented, I'll be honest with you, that we see out there in those pictures, because there's a lack of stability for the neck. For instance, if I were to do this, I have no stability in my neck. And I actually can't breathe very easily. So that really wouldn't be comfortable and it wouldn't serve me. So that's not actually a backbend. I'm going to scoot back in a few moments and show you what a backbend is for me and it's going to accomplish the same thing. So a backbend is truly just going to be about opening the back and chest, and that's all you would do. But you're getting stability in your neck, in your c-spine, and in your lower back, in your lumbar spine. So it's about opening that thoracic spine, that upper middle back, that is a backbend that could be looked at as energizing.

So again, when I want to warm the body, when I bring up my energy, when I want to change my mood because I'm feeling depressed, that's where I would focus on that. And so that's, again, where maybe a towel or a blanket or a pillow or a strap would come in handy because they can support us, so we can use it as support under the body, under the head and spine, when we want to open the back and chest and we can use it under the legs, when we want to support the lower back and the hips. So again, there are endless ways that we can approach this. If you can't tell, I'm pretty excited about it. So I love movement and yoga and breathing. It's very, very



helpful and supportive and it's helped me and continues to help me a lot in life. So again, another way of adapting movements to our body is just picking a movement that feels good for you in the moment. That's the most important thing, truly. And I'm going to show you how we can do that.

So listening to our body, focusing on our breath, taking the time to rest whenever we need to, that's a tough one. It is for me, because I'm somebody that just wants to move, like, you know, the speed of light. I'm ready to get things done yesterday. And it's been very challenging over the years to remind myself that I need to rest sometimes and that that is the best choice for the day, and that maybe the next day I'm going to get up and do more movement and feel a little different. And that's what I call small victories. So small victories to me are when you find one small thing in your day that really helped you, something positive for you. And it might be something that you least expect. So for me, it could be just having the energy to get through my day. And if anyone is familiar with the spoon theory, it's very well known out there for chronic illness. If you're not familiar, I'll just share with you. It's helped me a lot explain to other people how I'm feeling when I'm fatigued.

So, essentially, spoons represent the amount of energy that we have and the majority of people have endless amounts of spoons when they wake up. When you're dealing with a chronic illness, you have a limited amount of spoons. Maybe you wake up and you have five spoons. And every time you do something, just a simple daily task, like getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, taking a shower, having a meal. Each one of those represents a spoon. So sometimes we don't always have the spoons, we don't always have the energy to do everything that we want to do. So I'm hoping for all of you, you find some small victories in this. And we notice that maybe it's a day where we're breathing and just reducing our stress helps our body recover a little bit better. And then tomorrow we're able to do some movement. And then that just creates a new cycle for us, a new positive habit.

So again, mindful movement and breathing is a yoga practice and we are going to see that here in a few moments.

So a way to create a daily routine, just something I do for myself. And it's a daily practice, making small steps each day. Create a routine that's really feasible, meaning you're able to integrate it into your day, whether it's something for 5 minutes in the morning, maybe a short break throughout the day, maybe 10 to 15 minutes, maybe you have a few minutes in the evening. And when you put that together, that turns into your yoga practice. So it doesn't have to be 60 Minutes in one time. It's small times, increments throughout the day that are really going to add up and be very impactful. So begin your day with 5 minutes of breathing if you can, and try to end your day with 5 minutes of breathing. And, again, you can sit and breathe. You can lay in your bed and breathe. I highly recommend that because it's very comfortable, and just working on improving our posture to bring more ease into our breath. So, again, so that we're a little bit more upright and open, and just do one thing each day that makes you happy and brings you ease.

So this is one of my favorite quotes from one of my teachers and mentors, and I'd like to share it with you. "We practice yoga not to keep the bad things from happening, but to have the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual resources to recover quickly and well when they do". So, I'll just leave that for a moment just to kind of absorb that. It feels so powerful to me because it's so true. It really embodies what yoga is to me, and what yoga therapy is, where we're really taking a whole person approach, looking at everything going on in our life and really adapting

breath and movement to ourselves from there. So it's a way to really just help us keep moving in life.

So, I'm going to bring us out of here. All right. Okay. So I'm going to scoot my chair back and do a little bit of movement and breathing with all of you. So I'm going to shoot on back and adjust my screen here, and just, I wanted you to know this is what I was sitting on. It's a yoga bolster. It's one of my favorite props. I love all the props. It's a pillow. It's just, it's got a little give to it, but it's got enough support that it's stable but comfortable. So pillows and blankets serve the same purpose. I'm going to keep it close by for a lunge that I'm going to demonstrate.

So if you have a chair, make sure it's stable. If it's got wheels on it and you want to scoot yourself against a wall, to the back of a wall, I would do that so that you feel a little bit more stable and it's not moving. And then keep a pillow or a blanket, whatever you have, close by, because I'm going to use this eventually. And... yeah, just make sure that you feel comfortable. And if you're not doing movement with me, if you're just absorbing, your lying down, breathe with me. That's your yoga today.

So let me just adjust just a pinch. All right. So hopefully everyone can see clearly and has a good view of everything. So I'm going to sit forward in my chair so that I'm not relying on the back of my chair here. I'm going to ask my spine to work a little bit for me, which is going to just give some insight and talk to my abdominal muscles. So it's going to ask my abdominals to help strengthen, to lift up through my spine. So we're already inviting space into the body. And as I said, if you're sitting with me, feet hip-width apart, knees tucked over the ankles. What happens a lot is this, and then we put a lot of stress on our ankles and knees and it goes all the way up into the body.

So bring them in front of me and stack the joints, sit up nice and tall, and just pause and find a comfortable lengthened position. Come back to that slow breath in through the nose, feel the belly expand. And that breath out through the nose, feel the belly just soften and release. And again, maybe if you place the hands on the belly, it just gives you a little bit of feedback. So feel the belly expand with every inhale. And that breath out through the nose, feel that softening, and not forcing it, just let it happen naturally. We'll get there. Just remember, when we're breathing in and out through the nose, it's a smaller airway, so it's automatically going to slow your breath down. It's going to work for you and help you out.

And we're just finding a pace that feels good for us. And again, you could be doing this lying down. And if you're just breathing with me, that is your practice. That in itself is yoga. And we're just going to keep this breath flowing, whether we're holding or moving, and maybe just consider letting your hands rest on the tops of your thighs here. And then just on an inhale, let your shoulders come up, and exhale drop the shoulders down. Slow breath in and out. If we find ourselves getting to warm, longer, slower exhalation. When we're focused on bringing our energy up, longer, slower inhalation. When we match our breath-in to our breath-out, that's more about balance and evenness. So just continue to notice how you feel.

I'll just have you draw the arms out to the sides here and just turn the palms to open forward, we're just breathing in and out. Seems like a very simple movement, but if you think about it, most of our time it's like this, arms turned in, we're a little bit more rounded and hunched, so just turning the palms to open is going to really start to activate the arms, feel more openness in the shoulders and chest and even in your upper back. So still breathing in and out. I'm going to invite you to raise your arms about shoulder height to your comfort on the inhale, with your palms facing up to the ceiling, and on your exhale, just let the arms float down towards the floor. We're

always finding a comfortable range of motion for us in the moment. So again, breath in when you're ready, create that space, that length, whenever you're ready for your breath out, we're just relaxing the arms back down.

So again, think about that inhale. It's about energy, warming, lengthening. And again, my palms turning up seems like a very simple movement, but it's going to go a long way. Palms turning down on the exhale is going to be the calming, releasing, the cooling. So focus where you need to be in this moment. Again, breathing in and breathing out.

So following your own breath and movement, even though I was kind of guiding you here, we'll do this one more time, if you will, and we'll start to add a little bit to our movement. So if it's comfortable, consider raising the arms above the head on your inhale, and then turning the palms forward on the exhale, pull the elbows down in line with or a little below the shoulders. Go ahead and pause here and take a deep breath in and out with me. So notice you're creating space in the chest and upper back. Here is our backbend. I'm just going to have you take the arms right back up on your inhale, whenever you're ready. And your exhale again, bringing the elbows back down. So again, the backbend is opening the back and the chest, and we'll take that one more time when you're ready, breathing in and breathing out.

I'm going to change this movement one more time here. Breathing in, take the arms out, palms are up. Breathing out, turn gently to your right, and let's pause here in this twist and take a breath or so. So I'm reaching my left hand to my right thigh, or anywhere that's comfortable, my right hand is on the seat of the chair, whether it's the seat or the leg of the chair. Whatever is comfortable and accessible in this moment. Maybe turning the whole head and spine together. Can you still breathe with ease? That's the question always. Not just does the movement feel okay physically, how are the muscles feeling, but can I still breathe with ease?

When I'm ready to bring it back, unwind with this twist, I'm going to inhale to open up. Get there whenever your body takes you there. When you're ready for an exhale, take it on over to the left. So we're alternating this twist to the other side, and I'm pausing and breathing. Why? Because this is where we become mindful. This is where we notice how the body is feeling. On our next breath, and whenever we're ready, we're just going to open back up on the inhale, and on our exhale, we're going to take it back over to the right and pause and take a full breath in and out. Let yourself just kind of absorb the movement and decide how you feel, and you might already notice one side is easier than the other. And that's very common.

On a breath, and when you're ready, open back up, and on your breath out, take it on over to the left, take a breath in and out. If you wanted to do the twist without the arms, you could do that. Just leave the arms to the sides of the chair. You don't have to lift the arms when you turn. So what does that look like? On an inhale, I'm going to open up without the arms. On an exhale, I'm going to reach that left arm to that right leg, still breathing slowly in and out through the nose. You can open it up, just without the arms, coming up shoulder height, inhale, I'm just going to bring the arm back to the chair. Exhale. Take that right arm to that left leg. Pause and breathe. On an inhale, I'm just going to open back up, on an exhale, I'm going to pause.

I'm going to take those few movements and put those together. And let's just add a little sidebend here. So I was talking about the ribs and opening up the ribs here. So we're going to take that left arm out on an inhale. Turning that palm up. There's that opening in the shoulder again. On the exhale, go ahead, bend your elbow, take your hand behind to support your head and neck. Inhale. Stay here. That right hand supporting me. I'm just going to lift up a little bit more, keep that length and exhale. Just maybe take a little tilt. Only if this feels good for your

lower spine. If not, I would stay upright. On a breath, then, we're going to bring it on back when you're ready. Slow breath out. Release that arm down.

We're going to take that to the other side, so sweep that right arm up on an inhale. On your exhale, bend that elbow, take the hand behind the head to support the neck. And on the inhale, lifting up, opposite hand supporting me. Exhale, take a little tilt. There's that sidebend. And again breathing, and we're just going to bring it right back up whenever we're ready. Breathing out, we're going to release.

So we're going to put all those movements together. So on an inhale, let's bring the arms up to a comfortable place, even if it's just halfway. That's perfectly fine. Exhale. We're going to bend elbows. I'm going to take the arms back out on an inhale, palms up. On an exhale, we're going to rotate right. Here is where we pause and take a full breath in and out. And the slower we go, the more we learn. When we're ready for an inhale, bring it back, with or without the arms, your choice. Exhale. Return to the left and you can pause and take a full breath in and out. I'm going to bring it back on an inhale. And I'm just going to let the arms float back down on an exhale to prepare for that sidebend. So we're going to bring that left arm up on an inhalation and stay here. Exhale, bend the elbow, plant that hand behind the head, support the neck, can inhale, lift up just a little more and then on your exhale, take a little tilt. Breath and we can bring it up. Breath out, we release down. Take that one more time, right side, inhale, bring it up. Again, there's that palm turning up. We're going to get into the arm, shoulder, and back. Exhale. We bring the hand behind the head. And on the inhale, we lift. And exhale. We take a little tilt. Breathing in, bring it up. Breathing out, we release.

Let's take that all the way through those movements one more time. Again, that movement, into the spine, that length, taking the arms above the head, just inhaling, bringing your arms above the head is lengthening and extending your spine. Exhale, open that backbend by bending your elbows. There's chest and back opening. Feel the shoulder blades move in and down. On your inhalation, take the arms out, palms turned up, is going to get into the shoulders and back. On your exhale, relieving tension by twisting to the right for breath in and out, so breaking up some tension in our spine. It's going to get that breath moving a little easier.

And then one more time, we're going to bring it back on an inhale to take that twist on an exhale. Take a full breath in and out. We're going to come back for that sidebend here, one last time, breathing in, open up, breathing out. Let the arms rest down when you're ready and slow, slow, slow breath and movement. We're going to come back to that left side, extends up on the inhale. Exhale, bend the elbow, support the head, breath in, take it a little taller, you can always reach your arm up if you want a little more extension. And exhale, a little tilt, my hand is still supporting me. Breath and take it back upright. Our breath out is eventually going to release us down. And again we're going at the pace of our breath, hopefully slowing that breath down. Breath and bring that right arm up, last time here. Breath out, bending the elbow. And again, breathing in, we can stay here, bent elbow, or we can reach the arm up at the shoulder, light set today, and exhale, a little tilt. Inhale, we bring it back. Exhale, we release.

So let's get the legs moving a little bit here. So I'm going to keep my hands on the chair, I'm using my abs to support me. I'm going to slide my right heel out in front of me on an inhale. There's your hamstring and a little bit of length in the front of your hip, your hip flexor. The exhale is going to bring that leg in. We're going to alternate to that left side, inhale, press that heel out, and exhale, pull that heel in. So we're breathing in, I'm using my hands, my abs, my spine to support the movement. Stand up, nice and tall, moving slowly. So right here we're warming up the back, the legs, getting some stretch into the hamstrings. But also we can work

balance a little bit, just trying to take one arm off the chair, on the inhale, opposite arm and leg. And the exhale, we're bringing it down. Only if we felt like bringing the arm up today. Maybe we just want to bring it up halfway. There's our inhale, and exhale. And slow breaths in and out, connecting breath and movement. Try to lead with breath and follow with movement. Decide if you want to bring an arm up, or need both hands to the chair.

On a day that we're feeling our energy and strength and balance are there, maybe we bring both arms up. And again, this is a movement you'll see on your back. You can do this with a chair, standing upright, you could do this on hands and knees. There are so many ways to do this. Let's just take this one more time on each side, with or without the arms.

And I'd like to get a little bit of opening here. I'm going to ask you to widen the legs a little bit, I'm going to scoot back, use the chairs, use my arms and just turning the knees and toes out and widening here and taking a few breaths is going to get into the inner part of the leg as well as the outer part of the hip. And I'm still working posture here, nice and tall. And I'll give you an option, so you can stay here and take several breaths if this is working for you, if you'd like to try a lunge this evening with me, I'm going to put a pillow or blanket here, I'm going to turn completely to the right. I may drop my left knee onto that blanket or pillow. My right knee is in a lunge position, where it's stacked knee over ankle, and I'm working at sitting up nice and tall. So this is a lunge, just in a seat. And we're going to get a nice stretch here for this back hip, for the front of the hip, which would be your hip flexor. Nice thing to know is that you can always add arms for a little bit more balance and lengthen your spine.

You can also twist towards the chair, get a little rotation in your spine. Any of these movements can be held while we're breathing or we can breathe and move and keep it moving. So we may take as many breaths as we'd like getting this stretch. When I come out of this I'm going to use my hands, my legs, my abs. I come back to this position, take my time. I can stay here or I can go to the other side with my left leg. And the entire inside leg, the hip and the glutes, the whole leg is on the chair and I'm supported. And this bottom leg, the knee is supported and I'm getting a nice stretch here. Let's sit here nice and tall. And again, I'm going to just take as many breaths as I was comfortable taking. So opening up the hips is really important also for breathing because the hip muscle attaches to our breathing muscle, our diaphragm muscle, and if we have any resistance there, it's going to limit our breath as well. So lots of benefits other than just wanting our hips to feel good and have that mobility.

So again, when I come out of this, I'm going to come back slowly, and once again, I'm going to just pause, take my time and breathe. I'm going to move my pillow out of the way here. I just going to bring my feet back to hip-width apart. And whether you're seated or lying down, let's just close with a few deep breaths. So again, come back to that breathing slowly in and out through the nose, feel that expanding happening from the belly up into the ribs, up into the chest with every inhalation, and that emptying of the breath, with every exhalation from the top of the chest to the bottom of the belly.

As we take these next few breaths here together, try to allow the muscles of the face to soften and release, unclench fatigue, relax the jaw, release the tongue from the top of the mouth, soften the lips, just gradually lengthening your exhalation. Let's take one more full breath in and out together. Maybe on your next inhale just bring your arms above the head, if that's comfortable, or anywhere else that feels good, and bring the fingertips or palms together, exhaling right to the center. And I thank you for joining me in this practice. Namaste.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Thank you so, so very much. Kimberly, this was wonderful. I managed to follow along with you and feel so much more relaxed. I'm pretty much ready to go right to bed at this moment. So thank you. This was excellent. And you know, you providing the demonstrations as well as the different techniques that we can all use in our yoga practice, I think is extremely helpful. So thank you again.

**Kimberly Castello:**

My pleasure.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Yes, I know we're just a little bit short on time, but I did want to just take a couple minutes to go through some of the questions that our viewers sent in. And the first question that we have is, how do you get started in yoga when MS dictates your life?

**Kimberly Castello:**

That's a great question. And I apologize, I ran us over a little bit and these questions are extremely important to me. So I'm going to try to tackle everything. I just think the most important thing we can do is... I would honestly look for a yoga therapist in your area because that is going to be the most qualified person to bring a yoga practice to you, and that'll help you figure out where to start. And you're always going to start with breathing. That's always going to be where we start you in yoga therapy, it's going to be very different than just an average class that's just going to give you a sequence just, you know, to do, it's going to be more really catered to what you're going through in your body in dealing with your everyday symptoms and helping you adapt your practice to your symptoms.

So yoga therapy, you can look at IAYT, International Association of Yoga Therapists, and that's going to give you a listing of people in your area. And that's who I would reach out to, to find resources in your area, because that will help you with a starting place. But start with your breath and then we slowly integrate movement and we go from there and it grows and it gets better.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Wonderful. Can you provide that site again for those who may not have had the chance to jot it down?

**Kimberly Castello:**

Yes. Do you want me to write it or just repeat it?

**Marie LeGrand:**

You can repeat it. That's fine.

**Kimberly Castello:**

Okay, sure. IAYT.org, It's the International Association of Yoga Therapists and if you Google it, you'll get so much information and resources and you'll be able to locate somebody in your area.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Wonderful. The other question I had is, is yoga beneficial if you're wheelchair bound? And how would you go about doing it if you can't move your legs much?

**Kimberly Castello:**

Yes, it's absolutely beneficial. I have worked when I was working at the Cleveland Clinic, I worked with several different progressions of the disease and some people were in a wheelchair. Other people were able to get on the floor. Other people were not. So I showed some ways you could do things in your bed, and when you are in your chair, it's similar to what I was just doing. But if you are able to use your hands to lift your legs and do things, for instance, if I were to use my hand for support, maybe you can kind of see this, I would bring my legs up and down. I would stretch my leg out. And so you're going to be using your arms. You can use your upper body. But there are ways to do it, both seated and in your bed. And there, again, a yoga therapist, we're the best people to tell you, and show you, rather, how you can integrate. But you absolutely can do it even if you can't envision it right now. I promise you, there's a way to do it.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Wonderful. And then the last question, unfortunately, we're out of time... These programs are always amazing and, you know, it's just funny how quickly time goes by. But the last one that we have is how do I apply yoga to managing pain?

**Kimberly Castello:**

So the breathing and meditation is going to be the most significant and impactful for pain. You'd be amazed if you looked at the studies of how meditation and breathing can improve pain. There are... one of the best apps, it's a free application that you can put on your phone or computer, whatever you use, Insight Timer. I use it all the time and you can do guided meditations, meditations with sound, music. You can do 5 minute meditations, 30 minute meditations, whatever you have time for. I say start small and then grow it because it's not easy to do and it's just becoming more mindful and focusing more on our breathing and it's... I realize it takes time and practice. So it is a practice. But meditation with breath, of course, is going to be the most impactful for pain.

**Marie LeGrand:**

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much, Kimberly. This has been absolutely amazing. This has been relaxing and insightful. I truly appreciate you being able to show us how to do some of the different yoga moves and also accommodating to individuals with different needs. So I truly appreciate it.

This concludes the Webcast. Tonight's webinar was recorded and will be made available on our website at [mysaa.org](http://mysaa.org). Please do visit MSAA's calendars of events for some of our upcoming webinars. And on behalf of MSAA, we would like to once again thank you, Kimberly, for the wonderful presentation, and we'd like to thank you for joining us this evening. Please consider completing a brief survey which will appear on your screen momentarily and know that we are thinking of the entire MS community and hope that you and your families continue to stay safe.

Thank you and have a good night.