



Using Therapeutic Yoga Techniques to Improve Your Quality of Life

Presented by:
Kimberly Castello, C-IAYT, YTRX, E-RYT

Yahaira Rivera:

Hello, everyone. Good evening and welcome. Thank you for joining our first webinar of 2025: “Using Therapeutic Yoga Techniques to Improve Your Quality of Life” with Kimberly Castello. My name is Yahaira Rivera, I'm Director of Mission Delivery and Program Development for MSAA, and I'm honored to be your host. If we can get to the next slide, please.

And now here's a brief overview of who we are and what we offer to the MS community. MSAA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives today through vital services and support. We provide a variety of resources, including a national helpline staffed by compassionate team members, equipment and cooling distribution programs, educational programs, award winning publications, self-management tools, an online community, and more. To learn more about our programs and services, please visit our website, mysaa.org.

And now just a couple of reminders and housekeeping items. During tonight's program, you are welcome to submit your questions using the Q&A. Please know that we have already shared questions submitted during the registration, and Kimberly will be addressing those during her presentation. If time permits, additional questions will be answered following her presentation. Tonight's webinar is being recorded and will be available as an on-demand video on our MSAA's Video Library in a few weeks. And as usual, at the end of the program, we kindly ask that you complete a brief survey. Your feedback is extremely important and will help us to improve future content and programs.

And as a friendly reminder, this program is for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute any formal recommendations. Please speak with your doctor for specific questions or concerns.

And now, please help me welcome our guest speaker, Kimberly Castello. Kimberly is a certified yoga therapist accredited by the International Association of Yoga Therapists. She earned her certification after completing the Clinical Yoga Therapy program at Loyola Marymount University. Following her own diagnosis with chronic illness, Kimberly delved into the therapeutic benefits of yoga as a complement to Western medical treatments. Kimberly specializes in creating tailored chronic pain management and stress relief programs for individuals, hospitals, and clinics. Welcome back, Kimberly. We are so grateful to have you.

Thank you for your time, and we are so excited to continue learning about yoga techniques with you.

Kimberly Castello:

Thank you so much for having me. I just want to thank everyone for being here and spending part of your evening with me. And then also just MSAA for hosting this and inviting me back to spend some time talking about the therapeutic applications of yoga. So I'm going to go ahead and share my screen and we will get started.

All right. Okay. So I do want to say before we get started, I know it was mentioned a few moments ago, but I did receive a lot of the questions that were submitted ahead of time, which I greatly appreciated because I always like to integrate that into the presentation. If there is anything that I don't cover as thoroughly or that I happen to miss, please let me know and I will be happy to answer that towards the end of the webinar.

So therapeutic applications of yoga. I want to begin with what yoga is and where it came from. So one of the things that always comes up is Yoga is a vigorous exercise. It is sometimes practiced in a hot room, which I don't endorse at all. I know we all know that just the temperature changing for MS is not comfortable and it's not safe in general for most people. So it is not something that I would recommend, but it's not actually what yoga is. So we see if we were to go on to social media, if we were to see any videos or just how it's presented in this country, it is looked at as a vigorous exercise. Something where you're standing on your head, you're doing handstands, things like that. And in general, this is a good quote to kind of describe a little bit of what I believe the initial essence of yoga is, which is: "The body benefits from movement, and the mind benefits from stillness." So yoga really came about about 5000 years ago from India, and really didn't come to our country till about the 1960s. And it really translated more to a physical practice. And truly what it really is about is breathing, mindfulness, meditation, creating awareness in our mind and body. So I'd like to talk a little bit more about that today. And then we're going to put some of these ideas into practice.

So, just some of the techniques that I was just discussing are breathing, meditation and mindfulness, and let's add gentle movements that can be adapted to the individual. And if you were to walk into the average yoga class, it doesn't typically accommodate every single person. It's often presented with good intentions as more of a one size fits all. But tonight I'm really hoping to show how that is actually not how it is intended to be. So, if you will, think about yoga as an umbrella and there's all these different layers that come underneath it, and it all begins with the breath, essentially. So there's breathing, there's movement, again there's meditation and mindfulness. But all of those things encompass the breath.

So let's talk about some of these breathing techniques. These are some of the things I'd like to go over this evening. And again we're going to put this into practice so that you can get a sense of how this feels and really what I'm talking about versus just hearing something. We really do need to feel it in our own body. So a couple of the techniques that are really valuable would be nostril breathing, belly breathing, 3-part breath, and long exhalation. So we're going to see what this is all about.

So, I Invite you to sit comfortably. If you are seated in a chair, feel free to bring your feet about hip width apart, stacking your knees over your ankles. If you are lying down, that's perfectly fine as well. Just find a comfortable way to position the body so that you feel supported. And if you are seated with me, think about lengthening up to the crown of the head and maybe just allow your shoulders to come up and down a few times and just get a sense of the shoulders relaxing.

And as we let the shoulders settle, start to allow the breath to happen slowly in and out through the nose. Start to notice that breathing in through the nose allows us to slow and deepen the breath gradually, naturally, versus the open mouth breathing that we're typically used to taking.

Continue to feel the sense of that inhalation and exhalation through the nose. This is an opportunity to bring a little bit more ease, mind and body. Consider placing your hands on your belly if that feels comfortable. And if not, envision the ability to expand your belly on your inhalation and relax the belly on your exhalation. Each time you breathe in through the nose, feel the sense of the belly expanding, as if you're gently filling air into a balloon. And each time your breath out happens, a sense of the belly softening towards the spine. If you are lying on your spine or in your bed, feel the sense of the lower back releasing down to what's beneath you. As we continue to allow the belly to expand on the inhale and relax on the exhale, just notice how you're feeling. This is actually the natural course of our breath. Throughout the day, without us making any effort, when we breathe in, our diaphragm descends down, and that pushes everything out. And whenever we breathe in, the diaphragm ascends up. And that softens everything in and down. But stress, pain, tension, tightness, depression, and anxiety can shift us out of this natural pattern of breathing.

Continue to notice your breath, feeling this sense of expanding with each inhale. Notice the inhalation has more of a warming, active quality. And that sense of softening with each exhale, offer yourself a little bit more ease, mind, and body. Consider the idea of maybe sliding your hands a little above the navel, below the chest. Maybe make a little connection to the ribs. Without changing anything, see what you notice. Maybe the movement is a little bit subtle, a sense of almost kind of a lateral expansion in the ribs, so that when you take your breath in through the nose, you notice the belly expanding, and, if you're able, to take that expansion up into the ribs. And again, whenever your exhalation happens naturally for you, feel the sense of the ribs and the belly softening as you continue to notice your breath in and out through the nose. Consider the idea of sliding the hands to the side ribs. If it was comfortable for the thumbs and you're able to just kind of slip the thumbs to the back ribs, we would be able to access the whole spectrum of the ribs. Knowing the sense of the front ribs with the fingertips, the side ribs with the palms of the hands, and maybe the back ribs with the thumbs. And if you're not placing your hands on the ribs or the belly in this moment, again, envision the opportunity to create space. Space for the breath to expand, for the muscles to lengthen with each inhalation. And again, that sense of relaxing with each exhalation.

Over the next few breaths, as it becomes comfortable and you're feeling your breath slow down, just at your own pace, without forcing the breath, notice your ability with each inhalation to expand from the belly, into the ribs, all the way to the top of the chest. See what you notice.

Start to notice, if you will, the length of your inhalation; how many counts you're comfortably able to breathe in for in this moment. And whatever that count is, whatever that amount is, is perfect as is. And as you reach your exhalation, can you, considering the idea of your exhalation becoming a little longer in your inhalation, maybe starting with one count more in your inhalation. And letting this happen naturally, again, not forcing it, maybe we're just putting that intention out there for this moment. The exhalation has more of a calming and cooling quality to it, which allows us to communicate to our nervous system.

When we're dealing with a chronic condition like MS, it often puts our nervous system into the sympathetic state. It puts us into that stress mode more often than we would like to be there. So we focus on these slow, deep breaths in and out through the nose. When we are able to take longer exhalations, what we call in yoga "Langhana," we're able to communicate with the

nervous system, we're able to remind our nervous system how to get back to that parasympathetic state, to that rest, digest, replenish.

So, over these next few breaths, I encourage you just to notice how this is feeling for you in this moment. Continue to focus on the length and pace of your breath. Allow your thoughts to come. Recognize them. And then I offer for you to come back to noticing the length and pace of the breath. Notice how many counts you're able to comfortably breathe in for. And, if you can, allow your exhalation to become anywhere from one to two counts longer, and your inhalation. Focusing on these longer exhalations is also an opportunity to help us maintain a comfortable temperature for the body. And when we integrate movements along with these longer exhalations, allows us to practice movements. But keep the body calm and cool.

And as we notice our thoughts, our feelings, our movements, our stress, and how this can influence the quality of your breath, that is practicing a form of meditation and mindfulness. Mindfulness, again, is the ability to bring awareness to how we're feeling and how we respond to everything around us, both internally and externally; noticing how physical, mental, and emotional responses can shift our breath throughout the day. There are several forms of meditation - observing the breath, would be one of them. There are also silent meditations, sound meditations, walking meditations. So, it's really about finding a type of meditation that resonates with you and that brings you comfort, ease, and stability.

So let's talk a little bit about what the gentle movements look like, because I know that's what a lot of the questions are going to be. And again, a lot of times the average class is going to present things very much as a one size fits all, rather than a very individualized approach, which is really what yoga was designed for. It really started as a teacher to student presentation. It wasn't so much a group class, so there was the opportunity to really let the movements, let the breathing fit the individual. So I'd like to show you how you can do this on a daily basis, in your own life, in your own space, and even if you're ever in a group setting, so you can make sure you're feeling comfortable and that you're choosing movement and breath that is actually very comfortable, suitable, and brings a lot of stability and ease for you.

So we adapt to how we feel in the moment. So with MS, as we know, things are changing continuously, it can change from day to day. It can change from hour to hour, sometimes from moment to moment. So the mindfulness aspect of yoga comes in where we take the time to check in, we notice how we're feeling, we honor where we are in the moment, and we decide what feels best for us in the moment, whatever that may look or feel like. Movements that we practice have the ability to increase our strength, our flexibility, and our balance. Again, they can bring a sense of calm and cool to the mind and body and, of course, improve our energy, which is another big one that I know is very valuable to us, because there is a lot of fatigue, depression and anxiety affiliated with MS.

So, how do we make these movements accessible? You actually have a lot of things in your home already that can make things accessible for you. So first, let's start with the idea that every single movement can be done seated, standing, on the spine or in your bed. So if you don't see something that is feeling comfortable, that is resonating with you, that doesn't feel like your body is cooperating to get into that movement, please know that there is always a place for you to be. There is a place for everyone to be in yoga.

So, let's put that a little bit into practice, we'll do that shortly here. So, props, again, we have chairs. I have a simple folding chair behind me. It can be any chair that stable. If you're in a wheelchair, maybe consider making sure that it is stable, that it's locked in place. Or any chair

that we're using, rather, maybe we're placing it against a wall, I point to the left because there is a wall here to my side. So, sometimes putting a chair against a wall to make sure that it doesn't move from underneath us can be good. Blankets and towels are very much interchangeable, and firm pillows.

I'm actually sitting on a bolster. And bolsters are essentially just pillows that have a little bit of firmness to them. They're wonderful when we are on the floor, whether that's in our bed or actually on the floor, because they can be placed under the head and spine to open. The spine, the chest, the ribs, the abdominals. Release tension in the neck and shoulders. They can also be placed underneath the legs to support and open the hips and the lower spine. So areas that get very tight. For most of us.

Blocks and straps are probably commonly mentioned in yoga. I prefer chairs, I would say, over blocks because chairs bring more height underneath us. And the more we build the floor up to us, the more ease you're going to find in the body and in the breath. The poses become a lot more gentle, a lot more comfortable, and that allows the breath to not be so labored. Straps, you can really use anything that you have. Of course, I do have a yoga strap back here, which we'll get into shortly, but anything with some length, even if it's a long sleeve shirt, it is a towel with some length, a sweatshirt, using the arms of the sweatshirt. There are stretchy bands, I'm sure everybody has seen or heard of, and those can be used as well. Typically in yoga we use a strap that doesn't have as much give to it, because it's about, really, stability. So, the straps can be used to release the lower body, like the hips and the hamstrings, also to open and stretch the upper body, like the chest, the back, and the neck and shoulders.

So, some of the movements I mentioned can be done in your bed, on your spine, seated in a chair, or standing with the support of a chair or wall. So again, if there's something that you ever see, please know there is always a way to do it. There may be a different perspective that you see from it. It may look a little bit different, but the same benefits will be there. So before we get into some of these movements. Let's talk about what types of movements can be helpful.

So moving the spine. In all directions meaning flexion - forward bending, back bending, which sounds a little bit overwhelming because backbends often are presented in yoga where we don't have stability and support for the neck or the lower back, where the head is dropped back and the lower back doesn't have any support. Essentially, that's not very safe for any of us, because we want to make sure that we have stability and support in the neck, and we're not dropping the head back and pinching any nerves back there. And also, we want to make sure that we're stabilizing the lower spine, because sometimes we already have a little bit too much movement in that lumbar spine. So, backbends essentially just mean we're opening the chest. You often hear people saying "heart openers" in yoga. And really what that means is we're opening the chest; bringing some openness and space to the front and back body, meaning the spine.

So there are supportive ways to do backbends - on the floor, in your bed using pillows and blankets. And there's also active ways to do backbends, which we will see shortly this evening, doing from an upright seated position. Twists, where we're doing rotation, can be really nice to break up tension in the spine. And I'm not sure if any of you have heard, but sometimes twisting can really be good for stimulating our digestive system. So just getting movement from side to side gets that circulation going, our digestive system moving. The movements do not have to be large movements. I would actually recommend subtle, soft, gentle movements. They will be very beneficial and impactful. It's not how a movement looks, it's how. It feels in your body. And when we move, if we're able to keep the quality in our breath, meaning we're able to have ease, we're able to breathe slowly, to breathe deeply, and that the breath is not labored. Because again,

when we're dealing with pain, stress, tension, tightness, anything. That's going on from a physical, emotional, or mental perspective, we often end up with short, shallow, rapid chest breathing and not accessing that full capacity of the breath, as we were doing a little bit ago. And then, of course, side bends, just lateral movements, moving very gently from side to side, again, very subtle movements go a long way, just get us into the side body, into the side ribs, and that helps expand the area for the breath to move.

So some of the benefits of these forward bends and back bends I want to talk about, and then I'm going to scoot on back to my chair shortly, and we're going to do some of these movements and see how they feel, see how we can adapt them and what comes up for each of us tonight. So flexion, forward bending, most of us spend more time in flexion in our life than we do in extension. I'm in extension right now, just sitting upright or raising my arms above the head would be extension. So forward bends, kind of like those longer exhalations, again, can be calming and cooling. That can help us reduce stress and anxiety because they're bringing us inward. It's bringing a sense of softness to the body.

So, when we're feeling overwhelmed, when we're feeling stressed or feeling anxiety, things that bring our body more to a soft, rounded position, like rounding the spine or seated forward bend, which we'll see shortly, standing forward bends, lying on your spine and bringing your knees to your chest, those are all forms of flexion. That can be very calming. And also, they can help release the lower back, hamstrings, and hips. And they can be practiced, again, seated, standing, or on the spine. Backbends on the other hand, again, which are considered extension, which could be as gentle as just bringing the arms out to the side to a bent elbow position and just opening the chest and back, are actually very warming and energizing for the body as well as the inhalation. So, when we're focusing on inhalations, you will feel a sense of heat building in the body. So when we're concerned about temperature, exercise intolerance, anything like that, we want to focus on those longer exhalations to keep the temperature of the body at a very comfortable, safe place, to allow us to bring that ease into the body, to help us release the tension, stress and pain, mind and body, and again, just that overall sense of ease. And also backbends are great because they can improve our posture, so meaning getting us out of a rounded position, if we tend to kind of get rounded or hunched, which we all do throughout the day. And backbends, because they're energetic, can be helpful when we have fatigue or depression. But also, practicing it, again, with those longer exhalations to keep that sense of coolness happening in the body. They're also great for building strength in our spine and releasing that tension, as I mentioned earlier, in the neck, shoulders, and upper spine.

So let's talk about how we can integrate some of these yoga techniques into our day. So just a few things to think about, beginning with your breath. If you do nothing else, breathe - five minutes a day of long, slow, deep breaths can make a very big impact on our entire day. And if you think about if you're just doing five minutes a day accumulated over several days, that really adds up to a nice breathing practice. So even on the days that movements aren't feeling good, come back to your breath, because breathing is yoga. And one of the most well-known quotes about yoga that comes from a book of philosophy, it's an ancient yoga text called The Yoga Sutras, is: "yoga is calming the fluctuations of the mind." And I love that, because that's really just about calming our thoughts, feeling a sense of ease, mind and body.

So, again, begin with your breath. And we always want to start where we are. So, again, check in from moment to moment, day to day, see where we are, how we're feeling, what do we need in the moment? Do we need to focus on breathing and movement? Or is breathing really the most essential thing in that moment? And I'm always going to say come back to the breath because it's the most valuable thing I can offer you. And set yourself up to succeed, meaning

take small steps every single day. So we're all human. Sometimes we do better some days than others. So, I will have days where I can do really good at integrating these practices, and some days I'm not doing as good of a job as I'd like to do. So, I offer for you to give yourself patience and grace along this journey. 5 to 10 minutes a day again can be very impactful. And again, it does not have to be anything high impact, high intensity, long periods of time, you don't have to sweat and build heat. And think about, again, just ease in the body. There's a lot of evidence that really shows that low intensity, low impact, short intervals throughout the day can be very beneficial.

So, just some simple daily habits to support you that I want to offer. Taking 5 to 10 minutes a day to focus on your breath. Letting your exhale be longer than your inhale is going to bring that sense of calm, cool and keep our temperatures in a comfortable place. Counting your breath every time you wash your hands. And 10 to 15 minutes of gentle movement with belly breathing. And last but not least, is finding gratitude in the small things.

So just to quickly touch on a few of those things and then we will get back to breath and movement. So 5 to 10 minutes of focusing on your breath is going to allow you to become more mindful of the quality of your breath. It's going to help you create awareness of how your breath shifts throughout the day. Regardless of what we're doing, we can always take a few moments to check in and we'll start to really get a sense of when we can support ourselves and how we can support ourselves throughout the day. So, again, noticing how your thoughts, movements, tension, stress affect your breath. And, again, letting the exhale be longer than your inhale is going to help you lower your stress by accessing that parasympathetic nervous system, releasing tension and pain in the body.

And counting your breath every time you wash your hands. I really love this recommendation. It came from a colleague of mine and it was, I thought, a wonderful way to start integrating this into the day, because sometimes we get ourselves overwhelmed and we feel like, where do we have time to put things into our day? So think about the amount of times that we wash our hands throughout the day. If you were to every time you washed your hands instead of singing the Happy Birthday song, which has been recommended to us, I know, taking the time to just count your breath. Start to get a sense of how many counts you're comfortably breathing in and out for, and just slowing the breath down. And then each time you do it, maybe consider the exhale becoming a little longer than your inhale. And on the opposite end of the spectrum, if we needed to bring our energy up, we could also take the inhale to be longer than the exhale. But I encourage you just to notice how that feels for you. And sometimes when we're fatigued, just to mention that about our energy being low, just laying with your legs on the seat of a chair, and if you are not able to get up and down off of the floor, laying in your bed and elevating your legs and taking five minutes of deep breathing can really help as far as replenishing our energy. But again, the counting of your breaths can help us gain some insight to how you breathe throughout the day, what the quality of your breath is. And again, it's going to accumulate through the course of the day to a breathing practice.

So I love this quote: "When the breath wanders, the mind is also unsteady. But when the breath is calmed, the mind too will be still." And that is mindfulness. So 10 to 15 minutes of gentle movement, and we're going to take that in just a moment, maybe 1 or 2 times a day. Maybe it's five minutes in the morning, five minutes in the afternoon or evening, or maybe it's one time a day, whatever feels good on that particular day. Just recognizing that every day is going to be a little different. And it's just us kind of learning to reframe things, learning to focus on the things that we're able to do and to let go of the things that we're not able to do. And that is what I call a small victory. So short, simple increments, again, opportunity to increase the mobility and

stability in the mind and body. And, again, remember when movements don't feel good, just breathe.

So, "your breath is your anchor in the present moment." So, when we are having these moments of overwhelm, again, coming back to noticing the breath, observing, slowing things down, and just noticing, even if what's going on in the present moment is uncomfortable, continue to notice your breath. And that in itself is a form of meditation. So, finding gratitude in small things. I love this. I keep a gratitude journal. Sometimes it's typing something into the notes in my phone. Sometimes it's writing in a journal, which I love, because that's really kind of how I grew up, without the technology. So, it's really nice to go back to basics and putting a pen to paper. But, I notice that it can reduce depression, can improve our mental and physical health, it can boost our happiness by shifting our focus to our positive thoughts; again, to the things that we're grateful for, the things that are working out well for us versus the things that are not serving us in the moment. And that, of course, can enhance our relationship not only with others, but with ourselves. So, again, just gratitude, being thankful for the things that we have in the moment, maybe just coming up with one thing every day that brings us ease, brings us joy, brings us a sense of gratitude.

So, taking a moment with me, we're going to get back to the breath here. So, I'm going to come back and sit in a chair. So, any way that is comfortable for you, and then we are going to add some movement here into the breath. And again, I invite you to, as you breathe in, to think of something that you're grateful for. And each time you breathe out, let go of anything that does not serve you. So, I'm going to stop the share and move back and let's get some movement and breathing in. I hope I wasn't glowing too much. I felt like I was sort of glowing, so I apologize. I was sitting close to the screen and I have my little light with my camera on.

So, hopefully everybody can see this okay. I do have a strap. I do want to show this. And again, there's no particular type of prop that you need here, but if anybody's interested, these straps are great. So there isn't any give here, as you can see. So, do I use a stretchy band? Sure. But this has a lot of length to it as you can see. So anything with length and stability can be wonderful. And again, anything that you have, a towel or something with some length, so that when you're doing things like, you know, extending and lengthening for the arms or the legs, this gives you a lot to work with. So I'm going to set this on my chair and just have it there for the time being. And of course, let me know if you cannot see or hear me well, and I'll make any adjustments that I need to.

But, if you're sitting with me, kind of sit with your feet hip-width apart or a little wider, whatever brings you stability, and taking the knees to stack over the ankles, because again, that's going to bring support to the whole body here. Think about maybe scooting slightly forwards so you feel your spine lengthen, but you still feel like you have the support and stability of the seat. And lengthen up to the crown of the head, if you will. And then, again, maybe place the hands either maybe somewhere onto the body, the belly or the ribs. Or if you want to rest the hands to the tops of the legs, palms down is often considered a little bit more grounding, as we say. And what do I mean by that? Calming. Palms up has more of an energetic feel to it, so you might even notice just a very subtle openness in the shoulders. So rest your hands in any way that again brings you comfort, ease, and stability in this moment.

And we come back to slow breaths in and out through the nose. With each breath in, feel the sense of the belly expanding as if you're softly filling air into a balloon. And with each breath out, the sense of the belly softening. As I guide you through this, both breath and movement, whatever you're participating in in this moment, I encourage you to let everything happen at

your own pace. There are no expectations of you, of the movements, of the breathing, of any pace that you have to maintain or achieve. And we're just simply here to serve as a little bit of guidance, as well as my movements as demonstrations and just a starting point. Continue to feel the sense of the belly expanding as you breathe in and relaxing as you breathe out.

As that breath begins to slow and deepen, and you allow that inhalation to expand from the belly into the ribs, maybe all the way to the top of the chest. And when you take that breath out, that sense of emptying the breath from the top of the chest to the bottom of the belly, maybe placing one hand on the heart and one hand on the belly and rib area, if that feels comfortable in the moment. Notice how many counts you're comfortably breathing in for. And again, can you allow your exhalation to, over time, become a little longer than your inhalation? It can be anywhere from 1 to 3 counts longer. The intention is to continue to extend both the inhale and the exhale, while keeping your exhalation a little longer than your inhale, again, for purposes of calming, cooling, and, again, for bringing a sense of ease back into the nervous system.

Now, I invite you just to continue those slow breaths in and out through the nose. And shortly I'm going to add a little bit of movement. So, you're welcome to join me or to observe. It just depends on how you feel in the moment. But I invite you to focus your intention on what's feeling good for you, and to let go of anything that is not feeling good in this moment. And if perhaps you're not finding an option or variation that feels good for you, please know that there is always a way to take any of these movements that I'm showing this evening from a different perspective, from a different position. Again, it may look a little different, but it's going to give you the same wonderful benefits.

So, continuing with that breath at your own pace. Consider placing your hands onto the tops of the knees if you're not already there. Let's take a little extension and flexion. So, on an inhalation, if you will slide your hands from your knees towards your thighs, bending the elbows, relaxing the shoulders, if you will exhale all the air, this can be an energetic movement. This is a backbend. Continue to breathe here for a few breaths. We're moving slower to keep the breath slowing down. And to also give the body some opportunity to absorb what's happening and to give us some feedback. Again, staying here with your breath, this can be great for opening the chest, improving our posture.

Whenever you're ready for an exhale, allow your hands, if you will, to slide back from the thighs to the knees, rounding your spine. There's forward bending, also known as flexion, and you can take a few breaths here. Start to notice how flexion versus extension feels for you. There's no right or wrong here. There's no perfect formula for anything we're doing. It's just more observation. What are you noticing? We'll come back to that arching, that extending, that back bending when you're ready. On an inhale, slide the hands back. Again, allow the elbows to drop down, the shoulders to relax, pause and breathe, let yourself sink into that exhalation. And then again, if you can, notice your inhale, encourage your exhale to become a little longer than your inhale.

And again, whenever you're ready for an exhalation, slide the hands forward, again, around to your comfort. Remember, as we pause here and breathe, these movements do not have to by any means be large movements. It's not the range of motion, it's not how far or deep you come into these movements. It's how you feel in a movement, and finding the place in the movement that feels best for you. Let's take that again, if you will, inhale extend by sliding the arms back. So we often say, lead with heart. That just means we're opening the chest. Pause and breathe.

When you're ready for an exhalation, if you will, slide the hands forward and round to your comfort. And let's take a few breaths here. So any of these movements that we're coming through, especially depends on the time of the day and how your body is feeling, how much movement you've had, what your stress levels and fatigue are like. Taking the movements at least maybe 4 to 5 times through in each direction to give your body the opportunity to warm up. So that being so, let's take that maybe one more time whenever the breath in happens for you. And again, allow the exhale to relax you, and can you take a few breaths here before coming into that rounded position? I offer for you to spend as much time as you'd like in any of these movements. And you can focus your attention on what you feel you need more of in this moment.

And again, whenever you're ready to exhale, maybe round. And it's just whenever the breath and movement happens comfortably for you. Just take another breath or so here. Feel the sense of expanding on your inhale, and relaxing on your exhale. Over the next breath or so, I invite you just to come back to sit nice and tall and, again, relax your shoulders. If you're able to bring your arms out to the sides, I encourage you to turn your palms forward. It's a very subtle movement, but you're going to start to notice as we pause and breathe here, if you need any movement like circling the wrists or anything like that, to again, just get the blood flowing and get that circulation moving, feel free to do that. But something to think about is when we're turning the palms forward, you're bringing some openness across the chest, across the upper back, bringing some openness to the shoulders. If you were lying on the floor, lying in your bed, this would equate to just the palms turning up to the ceiling, and it would be the same benefit. From here, let's just bring the arms up to your comfort on the inhale. When you exhale, let the arms relax back down. Each time you breathe in, find a comfortable range of motion, let the belly, ribs, and chest expand. And wherever you are in the breath and movement is perfect. Try to let go of having to match my words, movements, you're matching your breath to the movement.

So I'm relaxing on the exhale. And this time, whether you're sitting there or you want to bring the arms up a little bit more is up to you. On the inhale, I'm turning the palms up to the ceiling for openness in the neck and shoulders, and relaxing the arms down on the exhalation. Let me continue to give several options. Please take it or leave it. Take what works for you. Again, you can come out just a little bit or halfway, palms turned up on the inhale. And let it all relax down on your exhale. If it's comfortable and you want to bring the elbows to a bent position, inhale and bring the elbows up to about shoulder height or a little below. That's also an active, energetic movement, opening chest and back, also known as a backbend. And then exhale and relax the arms back down. Take the option that's resonating most with you tonight. Again, breathe in. I'm showing all those options here. And then again as you exhale, relax when you're ready and let the belly soften, the arms relax, and that breath slow down. Let me take one more option here. Maybe we're taking arms all the way above the head on the inhalation. And wherever we're coming from, let your palms come together and exhale bringing the hands to the center. Let's take that again. Slow breath in through the nose, and we can take the arms out, halfway, bent elbows, all the way above the head. Even let your palms come to meet in the center. Wherever your arms are coming from is perfect. And bringing the hands down through the center.

Now do that a few more times. Just showing those movements again, just those different variations and, again, choose what feels good for you. Take a pause, notice the breath, in and out through the nose. Focus your attention on that exhalation, the ability to calm and cool. If and when you feel like adding arms, breathe in and take the arms out or up. Breathe out when the palms come to meet. Slow breath in through the nose when you're ready, and you can take your

arms out halfway, bent elbows, above the head, lower to the sides, start bringing the palms together. And this is all extension and lengthening and just getting the body moving. Again, breathe in. You're taking the arms out halfway, opening chest and back. Just notice the different responses in the body based on the different positions of the arms.

So, we'll take that one more time. Wherever you're coming from, slow breath in. Maybe you're taking the arms above the head. Full breath out, bringing the arms down. Gonna add a little bit of rotation here for the body. Maybe we'll add a little bit of movement for the lower body as well, which will include some forward bending. So, when you're taking that inhale, keeping the arms to the sides here, if you will. So, rotate to your right, I'm mirroring you. So you're coming to your actual right. Pause and breathe. Let the left hand just relax on to the top of the right thigh, and the right hand just rest somewhere onto the chair. Take one more full breath in and out through the nose. And again, I encourage you to take this anywhere from three to five times, in each direction in these movements. And just to your comfort, you can be the judge of it.

When you're ready to come to the other side, use the inhales to bring the arms back to where we started. Palms turned open to open the neck and shoulders. When you exhale, rotate on over to the right. Long breath in. And you can take any of the arm variations we did earlier for the twist. Whether the arms stay to your sides or they come above the head. It's up to you. When you're ready to inhale, let's come back to where we started. Exhale. Take it out over to the right. And if you're lying on the spine, we could still be doing rotation. So, there's always ways to do these movements. Even if you're not seeing it tonight, please know that's available to you and I'm always happy to show that. And again, whenever you're ready to come to the other side, slow breath in, come back to where you started, and full breath out, coming over to the other side.

And you pause and breathe. So we're taking a little rotation, twisting to get the spine moving. Again, twisting can be nice for really stimulating your digestive system. We just want to pay attention to that. The extension is good for improving your posture, bringing length and space near the spine. That helps the breath expand. And let's take this one more time in each direction, just your own pace, just breathing in and out, and the belly expands on the inhale, and relaxes on the exhale. And as long as you're breathing and not holding your breath, the connection of breath and movement comes in time. And then when you're ready to take that twist one more time to the other side, take your time. Slow breaths in. And full breaths out. We're going to just rest here. You can kind of see some stretches for the lower body. And we're ready to come back, breathing in, staying here, breathing out. So, maybe make sure to scoot forward just a little bit to still have stability and support, but enough to give the legs some space to move. And have the hands either on the seat or legs of the chair, you can also have the hands on the thighs, as well. Find what feels most supportive for you.

We're going to take the right leg. I'm mirroring you. You're on your right side. Push the right heel out in front of you, flexing the foot on the inhale. Exhale, stay here. Pause and breathe. So, as we're here, this is a stretch for the back of the legs, so the hamstrings. Let's get some movement in the feet here. On the inhale, point the toes down, when you're ready. On your exhale, draw the toes towards you. So we're moving from flexion of the foot and back to where we're pointing the foot on the inhale. So this can be helpful when we want to strengthen the body, strengthen the feet. We're just moving and bringing this... so anyone who is dealing with drop foot, this can be great as far as stretching the legs, stretching the calves, stretching the hamstrings. I'm just breathing and moving. Your own pace here. But also that selection of the foot is going to strengthen... let's take that one more time. And while we're here, we're getting a hamstring stretch. There's a little bit of multitasking that can happen in these movements to help

save time throughout the day. Take one more breath here, if you will, sitting up nice and tall, so working on our posture and breath. And on that exhale bring that leg back in. And we're going to take them over to the other side. Slow breaths in, push that left heel out in front of you. Full breath out.

As you stay here and take a few breaths and we come back to pointing and flexing, think about if you have some hypermobility. I have a little hypermobility, so some thoughts on this, and I also had some questions on this. One thing you want to focus on is not pushing as far as you can go. So not pushing past your edge. So, as you come to this pointing and flexing here, something to just kind of notice is, if you have hypermobility, you might tend to lock the knees, just like you might tend to lock the elbows a little bit when we're doing straight arm or straight leg poses. So keep a little micro bend in your joints, in your knees, in your elbows. Let's maybe just take that another time breathing in and out. So we're finding the balance between strength and flexibility. So try not to, essentially, overstraighten the arms or the legs. Okay, and a little bit of strengthening and stretching at the same time. On your next exhalation, when it happens for you, allow that leg to slide back in. Let's come back to that right side, push that heel out on the inhale. There's that hamstring stretch. Exhale. Stay here. We're staying again for a couple of reasons: to slow the breath down, to keep a sense of coolness going on in the body, calmness in mind and body, to absorb the stretch. So we can take some time there. And again, if pointing and flexing felt good, you're welcome to take that. You can also circle the ankles, so the movement of the feet, again, can be really helpful. Getting that mobility and stability in the body, helpful for drop foot as well. And you can come to the other side anytime you'd like to. I'm using an exhale to come back, but as long as you're breathing, that's what matters. And then an inhale to come back to the other side.

So these movements can be active or passive, meaning we can come into them and stay there for several breaths, or we can take continuous movement several times, but slowly with breath. And again, you have the options for pointing and flexing, for circling. And again, hypermobility, keep a little softness in the knees so that you almost feel like you are activating the quadriceps and the hamstrings. And again, when you're ready to come back, you can come back at any time. I'm gonna add a movement here. Get the hips involved. Push the right heel out and over on the inhale. Exhale, stay here. Take a breath in and out. So now we're getting the inner part of the leg, outer part of leg, and back of the leg. And again, the flexing of the foot brings some strengthening into the feet, into the legs. The movement. The flow of everything is going to help reconnect, as far as the nerves, getting into the nervous system, and a little softness in the knees for hypermobility.

Come up on the inhale, when you're ready, stay here, or on your exhale, hinge forward, resting your elbows onto your opposite thigh. Pause and breathe. So you can be upright for length and extension, bent forward with support for flexion, which helps you get into your lower spine and your hamstrings. Stay here, or when you're ready, press up on the inhale. Take your time. Exhale. Bring that back in. We're going to come to the other side here. Inhale. Push that heel out and over. Again, there's hips and hamstrings. Exhale. Stay here. Take a breath or so. Again, hypermobility, try not to push as far as you know you're able to go. And sometimes hypermobility isn't uncomfortable, it's just recognizing that we don't need to put all that pressure on the joints. And again, can come back on your inhale. Take your heel, pressing down to the floor, softness in your knees. Stay here or exhale. Hinge forward, resting your hands or elbows on to the opposite thigh. It's going to increase the stretch in your hamstring. You to decide if that is right for you. It's also going to bring some release to your lower spine. Just one way to forward bend. There's several ways. And then press up on the inhale and slowly come back on the exhale.

You can stay with any of these movements and breath that we were doing. I'm also going to show a way to get a lunge. This can be done standing or seated, but I'm going to demonstrate it seated tonight. This is actually one of my favorite ways to do a lunge. I'm going to turn all the way to my right. Now I don't have arms on the chair here, so it makes it easier for me to do this. So please keep that in mind. And I have a blanket or pillow for my bottom knee, so I don't have pressure into my knee. Depends on the height of the chair and how tall you are as well. So here is a lunge. And we're just pausing and breathing. And my front knee is stacked over my ankle for joint support. If I wanted to, with or without the support of the arms, I could bring the leg up on the inhale and down on the exhale. So I'm getting hips and hamstrings here, and I can also push and slide the foot back, that back foot, to stretch those hip flexors, stretch the fronts of the hips. We got the outer hip a moment ago. And we can also relax the legs. You can stay with that for several breaths. You can also come to the other side. I just want to show what this lunge looks like, so we just remind ourselves this is a lunge, it does the same thing. I just I have a chair there. We can be standing, can be on the back toes, we can have the back foot down, we can have the knee rested to the floor. And I'm keeping my time. I'll just get another minute or two. We'll get to a few questions.

So I want to show that on the other side. There are so many things here. I wish I had tons and tons of time with all of you. So I just want to show this on this side. And again, this is going to be hips, this can be building our strength and stamina while bringing support to our joints so we don't overwork, overstretch, fatigue the body. But we're getting stretches into our hip flexors as well for a lot of the sitting that we're doing or lack of movement, that we feel that we're not getting as much of. And, we can also bring arms into these movements. So there's so much that we can do. So, take a few more breaths wherever you're at. And I'm going to scoot closer. I'd like to take a few minutes, if possible to answer a few questions, if I didn't get to those. And, I'm trying to think if there's anything that I didn't think of that I wanted to answer if there was a question that came up so I know I missed a few things in the chat, so I apologize.

Okay, so hopefully you're all still with me here. Okay. You're... okay. Elaine, if you don't mind me... Your neurologist told you that you have spasticity, but not what kind of spasticity. Does it have anything to do with your hypermobility? Is it important to know what kind of spasticity, hypermobility we have? Oh what kind of yoga mat is that? Okay, see that one coming up, too. I'll answer the yoga mat one really quick, because that's the quickest one to answer. I have a Manduka mat. It's probably on the higher end side, but it is... you can get any mat that you need, as long as it's stable and it's comfortable. With spasticity, it's... I think it's really just important to feel things in your own body and, of course, know where the hypermobility is coming from. But as long as we're paying attention to not pushing too far, not pushing past our edge, that's really the most important thing, essentially. So always trying to find, this goes for everybody, hypermobility or not, finding that balance between strength and flexibility, because these movements can be about strength and flexibility, as long as we're moving with ease and we're not overworking the muscles and the joints. So I hope that that helps. And I can always add to that a little bit later and answer these questions further outside of the webinar, I'm happy to do that as well. Anything else that I missed?

Yahaira Rivera:

Thank you. Kimberly, we do have another question and it reads like this: My legs are too short to have my knees on the chair and my feet on the floor.

Kimberly Castello:

Okay, so, you can put a pillow or blocks or books or anything you have when that happens. I know, I'm just... this is just the right fit for me, so, I apologize. It demonstrated, probably, easier for me than it was for you. But when that happens, you can have something under the feet so your feet can come down to something stable, as long as it feels comfortable. And again, I just have a firm pillow here, so I'm able to bring my feet to the floor. I know I'm not the same height, that there's a difference there, but I would encourage you just to try different props out. Again, books, blocks, something sturdy, stable with some weight, and/or pillows or blankets, and build it up to use if you have enough room or enough support to bring your feet to something comfortable. But, still try to keep your hips and your knees on the same level and your knees stacked over your ankles. And then we adjust from there. It does not have to be perfect, it just has to be comfortable and bring us some stability. So, try adding some props in and see, under the feet, and see how that works for you. And then, what else? Was there...?

Yahaira Rivera:

I have another question about the yoga mat that you're using.

Kimberly Castello:

Okay.

Yahaira Rivera:

So maybe we can describe it or give some recommendations.

Kimberly Castello:

Okay. Yeah. So and there's all kinds of different yoga mats. I mean, I'm someone who practices everyday, so the investment of like \$80 was worth it to me, because it's just like 27 years of my life. So I think that that's okay. Manduka is a company, you can Google it and find it. I love their mat. It's a PROlite Mat, and it's got a lifetime warranty. I have never had to replace it. I've had it for years. It's durable, it's sticky, it's thick, but not as thick as a Pilates or an exercise mat, because those are a little too thick that you would lose stability. And with yoga mats, you want to ground, you want to feel your feet pressing into the floor, which is also really good for dealing with we've got the numbness, the tingling. We want to put the energy back into the feet, connect the nerves and, you know, access the nervous system. So having that grounding feeling versus like a mat that's a little less stable, like typical exerciser pilates mats, won't do as well, but you can still use them. So anything you have will do. But again, Manduka is the company that I have had mats from for years and years and years, and I happen to love it. But, again, use what you have. You don't have to go out and buy anything, use what you have in your home. And that's the best thing about this, is it can be very accessible.

Yahaira Rivera:

Thank you. And we have a couple of questions about people who were trying the breathing exercises, but they were struggling with it or feeling dizzy. Do you have any recommendations?

Kimberly Castello:

Sure. Yes. I will say, and thank you for that question, because that can happen. That definitely can happen. It's a very different way of breathing and our body already knows how to breathe, but it's been taken out of the real natural course of the breathing pattern because of the MS, and the stress that it puts on the body and any underlying symptoms that come from the condition or from medicines or anything like that. So, I would say slow down. Don't take as long breathing periods, maybe take shorter increments of it, try it for a minute, versus five minutes. Check in, see how you're feeling. I would definitely either be seated or lying down. I would never

do it standing until you get a sense of how the breathing is affecting you. Notice if the long exhalations were making you feel a little dizzy cause it was too relaxed. That can happen for some people. And often it's the increase in oxygen that we're getting that we're not really used to. So slowly and a lot of observation, make sure you have a lot of support. Make sure you're hydrated, of course. But the inhalation and exhalation, if it's too much to do a long exhale, I would do an even count for inhale to exhale, because sometimes the excessive exhalations, even though it's relaxing the body, it can bring you to more, like, a sense of too relaxed or dizzy or nauseous. You might want to consider, you know, taking the inhale to the exhale, like two counts in, two counts out. Or three counts in, three counts out. Or whatever you have to offer yourself. But I would encourage you to notice when that's happening for you. Is it just any time you breathe in and out through the nose? If so, take the out-breath through the mouth. Is it only when the exhale is longer than the inhale? Then that gives us a little bit of insight into maybe, okay, maybe I don't need as long of an exhalation, if that makes sense. So, just a thought. But a lot of it is exploring and observing. But of course, listen to your body. That is the most important thing I can offer you. And sometimes breathing techniques aren't right for everybody and we have to change the breathing technique. And there is like a half a dozen breathing techniques I can think of that we can do to kind of see what fits each individual person. This is just one of the things I offer tonight. So, I hope that helps.

Yahaira Rivera:

Wonderful. Yes. Of course. Thank you so much. And before we conclude our program, Kimberly, what advice would you give to someone who is feeling afraid or hesitant to try yoga for the first time?

Kimberly Castello:

Absolutely. So a couple things. I would say, first and foremost, I would be looking for someone who is a yoga therapist. So the training and background that I have, it doesn't necessarily have to be me, I would offer time for any of you, but looking for a yoga therapist, and you can do that by going to the IAYT.org site, the International Association of Yoga Therapists, because we're clinically trained and we are trained to work with chronic conditions. So there's ease for you in that. And we do Zoom sessions, so you're online. You don't have to be in person if you don't have the time or ability to get somewhere. And you can work with anybody, anywhere in the country, which is great. It's very accessible. But it's somebody guiding you through it so that you have an individualized, personalized plan developed for you, and we can see what feels best for you, so you're not doing it by yourself, because you're not alone. And if you were just to start by watching videos out there on YouTube or social media, you're going to feel really overwhelmed. So just know that there, again, is a place for everyone to be in this, and there is someone out there that can work with you and offer you some tips and some guidance and a starting point until you become comfortable with doing it on your own, in your own space and you will get there. You just probably need to have a little bit of time with someone to give you some support and help to kind of see what things work and what things don't for you as an individual.

Yahaira Rivera:

Thank you, Kimberly. Once again, thank you for your time and for leading this wonderful yoga program, especially for providing demonstrations that were tailored to our MS community. We appreciate you and your positive energy. And to our participants at home, thank you so much for joining. We hope that you enjoyed this session and that you feel inspired to try yoga, to explore yoga as part of your wellness practices this new year. This program was recorded, so don't worry, you're going to be able to visit our website and find the video, the recording, so that you can rewatch it and practice those breathing and yoga demonstrations that Kimberly shared

tonight with us. Please know that MSAA is here for you to support. And on behalf of MSAA, thank you everyone, thank you Kimberly, and have a wonderful evening. Bye bye.

Kimberly Castello:

Thank you everyone. Appreciate it.