

# ***Breathe, Stretch, Relax, and Meditate***

Mind-Body Methods for Life-Fitness

## **Course Excerpt**

### **Course Objectives:**

At the completion of this course, the participant will be able to

- ✓ List and explain the benefits of stretching
- ✓ Describe characteristics of proper stretching
- ✓ Demonstrate the six directions of spinal movement
- ✓ Be familiar with the terms “body armor” and “restrictive breathing,” and understand why people assume these protective devices
- ✓ Understand the interrelationship between the body, the mind, and the breath
- ✓ Identify the three important qualities of respiration in a “Breathing Checklist” (where, what, and how fast)
- ✓ Demonstrate 4 seated positions to use during meditation and breathing practices
- ✓ Teach (demonstrate and describe) Ujjayi, the Classic Yoga breathing technique
- ✓ Write affirmations and understand how to use them

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- ✓ Be able to teach the following four basic meditation techniques
  1. Meditation using a Sound
  2. Meditation using a Phrase or Mantra
  3. Meditation using the Breath
  4. Meditation using an Object

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### **Placement Guidelines during Stretches**

#### **Feet and toes**

In standing stretches, the toes indicate whether there is a balance or a misalignment in the body's anterior-posterior centering. If the body's weight is too far forward, the toes will grip. If the body's weight is too far back, the toes will lift.

1. The *toes should remain relaxed* as you lift the arch of the foot.
2. Pressing down on the *great toe* will counteract the tendency to roll out on the foot.
3. Anchor the foot via the '*four corners*' – the inside and outside of the ball of the foot, and the inside and outside of the heel.
4. If the hips are *squared* in a standing pose, the feet should be *parallel*.

#### **Knees**

The knee is a vulnerable joint because it is shallow and unstable. If you are not sensitive to this joint's potential fragility, positions that involve side bending or twisting can compromise the knee's integrity.

1. In standing poses, good knee alignment is determined by inspecting the relative positioning of the foot to the kneecap. Therefore, in most standing poses, optimal placement of the knee involves an *outward rotation of the femur* such that the center of the kneecap will be aligned with the foot's second toe. The knee and the thigh should not be allowed to collapse

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- toward the body's center line, which indicates an inward rotation of the femur.
2. *Strength in the quadriceps* is important for stabilizing the knee in standing poses.
  3. Good knee alignment is also an important safety issue during *seated poses*. Toes that angle outward during Virasana (sitting on the feet) produce an uncomfortable and potentially harmful torque in the knees. To ease this discomfort, make sure that the toes are aimed straight back, and keep the shin bones parallel. You can also try separating the knees a little more, or sit up on a folded blanket or block. If you feel the slightest or momentary twinge of pain in the knee, ease out of the position.

## Hips

Tight hips, along with tight hamstrings, can limit the body's ability to bend forward.

1. To achieve a comfortable and complete forward fold, *all of the muscles on the backside of the body* must be able to release and lengthen.
2. Whether seated or standing, a good cue to induce proper placement and use of the hips during forward folds is to "let the sitz bones widen apart, and tip the tailbone up." This image will help release tightness in the *external rotators*.
3. Use the '*parallel feet*' position to help restore proper placement and flexibility to the external rotators / hips.
4. When standing, a good cue to *counteract the tendency toward swayback* (lower back compression that is commonly associated with tight hip flexors), is "move the tailbone down, lengthen the lumbar spine, and lift the anterior superior iliac crests on the front side of the pelvis."
5. *Warning*: Forcing a body with tight hip flexors into a back bending pose like the bridge or the bow will result in lower back compression.

## Neck

1. Poor use of the neck, such as *jutting the chin* and *collapsing the back of the neck*, can produce painful symptoms during back bending poses.
2. Another common misalignment involving the neck is the *'forward head'* position, in which the entire body must compensate for the stress on the neck.
3. *Warning:* Do not attempt headstand or shoulderstand until you have developed adequate strength and flexibility in the hands, wrists, arms, and shoulders. If performed incorrectly, these poses could cause neck injury. Begin by practicing simpler, safer poses like the down dog and the crow to build strength in the upper extremities.