

4 Yoga Poses for Tight Shoulders

By Laura Waite – For Active.com

The following four yoga poses increase flexibility and range of motion, decrease stress, and allow blood, oxygen and energy to flow into the chest, neck, back and shoulders.

Add these poses to your daily routine to open them up.

Utthita Parsvakonasana: Extended Side-Angle Pose



Stand tall with your feet about 4-feet apart. Turn your left foot in slightly toward the right and turn your right foot out to the right 90 degrees. Align the right heel with the left arch. Raise the arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides with palms face down.

As you inhale, gaze over your right fingertips. Exhale; bend the right knee over the right ankle, so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor. Lean the torso forward, resting the right elbow on the knee. The left arm extends over the left ear and your palm faces the floor. Activate the left leg and press the outer edge of the left foot into the floor. Roll the left hip open and reach through the extended arm to lengthen the torso. Stay here for five breaths and then switch sides.

Benefits:

- Stretches the upper back, neck, chest and shoulders: latissimus dorsi, levator scapulae, pectoralis major and teres major.
- Strengthens the shoulder girdle: serratus anterior, posterior deltoid, infraspinatus and teres minor.

Garudasana: Eagle Pose



Begin standing with your knees slightly bent. Lift the right foot up, balance on the left foot, and cross the right thigh over the left. Hook the top of the right foot behind the left calf. As you balance on the left foot, reach the arms out in front of you, cross the right arm over the left, and bend the elbows.

Wrap the left hand around the inside of the right wrist and press the palms together. Raise the forearms perpendicular to the floor and squeeze the arms together while slightly dropping the shoulders down. Sink into the standing leg, gaze forward, and breathe. Stay here for 15 to 30 seconds, reverse sides.

Benefits:

- Stretches the shoulders and upper back: supraspinatus, rhomboids and posterior deltoids.
- Strengthens the chest, back and shoulders: pectoralis major, latissimus dorsi and teres major.

Purvottanasana: Upward Plank Pose



Come to the floor in a seated position with your legs extended forward, feet together. Place your hands several inches behind your hips with the palms on the floor and fingers point forward. As you inhale, press into your hands and feet to lift your body up. Press the feet down into the floor with your big toes and inner thighs pressing towards each other. Lift through the front of the body by pressing the hips and chest towards the sky. Keep your glutes relaxed. Slowly drop your head behind you.



Modification: Go into a reverse tabletop position. Keep feet hips-distance apart and under the knees. Stay for five breaths.

Benefits:

- Stretches the chest, neck and shoulders flexors: pectoralis major, sternocleidomastoid, the anterior deltoids and biceps brachii.
- Strengthens the back and shoulders: posterior deltoids and rhomboids.

Gomukasana: Cow Face Pose



Come to a seated position with both legs extended forward. Slide your left foot under the right knee to the outside of the right hip. Cross your right leg over the left, stacking the right knee on top of the left. Now bring the right foot to the outside of the left hip. Sit evenly on the sitting bones.

As you inhale, reach the right arm up. Exhale, bend the elbow, and place your hand on your upper back. Inhale. Reach the left arm behind your back and reach up between the shoulder blades to interlock the hands, or you can use a towel to bridge the gap. Gaze forward, lengthen the torso, and draw your right elbow and shoulders down. Breathe steadily. Stay for five breaths and switch sides reversing the legs and arms.

Modification: You can also take a cross-legged position.

Benefits:

- Stretches the external shoulder rotators: subscapularis, infraspinatus, teres minor and posterior deltoid.
- Strengthens the back and shoulders: rhomboids and infraspinatus.