

Release Tight Shoulders With These 3 Gentle Yoga Poses



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Tension in the shoulders and neck is one of the most common physical complaints people have in our society. So many aspects of modern life can cause or trigger this problem: poor posture, stress and anxiety, overworking your upper body at the gym, sitting at the computer all day, slumping over a steering wheel as you head to and from work, and even looking down as you make dinner and clean the dishes.

Because there are so many different habits that contribute to neck and shoulder pain, tension in these areas tends to build up slowly over time. So it's crucial that we set aside a time to stretch and release these areas before the pain becomes chronic — and much more difficult to manage.

Here are three gentle yoga poses that release the tight muscles around your shoulders and neck and relieve neck and shoulder pain.

Extended Puppy Pose

Sometimes called Melting Heart Pose, this posture combines Downward Facing Dog and Child's Pose to give your shoulders, chest, and upper back a deep stretch as your heart melts toward your mat.

To do this pose:

- ✔ Start on all fours with your back in a tabletop position, your hips over your knees, shoulders over your wrists, and the top of your feet lying flat on the floor.
- ✔ Keeping your arms shoulder-width apart, begin to walk your arms out in front of you until they're straight. Relax your neck and rest your forehead on the mat.
- ✔ Draw your shoulder blades down your back, and lift your hips toward the ceiling, making sure to keep them aligned over your knees.
- ✔ Take 10 deep breaths here, and then slowly walk your hands back to return to tabletop position.

Tips: If you find this pose puts too much pressure on your knees, try putting a folded blanket underneath your knees for more comfort. If you'd like a longer, even more relaxing stretch, try making it a restorative pose by placing a pillow or bolster under your torso, and staying in the posture for 5–10 minutes.

Reclining Chest Opener

This is a wonderful, [restorative yoga pose](#) you can do before bed or whenever you need to relax and recoup a little. As a bonus, it also opens the chest and shoulders beautifully.

To do this pose:

- ✔ Roll up a blanket into a tight roll, making sure it's at least the width of your back.
- ✔ Lie down on your mat so that your shoulder blades are resting on the blanket. You will know the blanket is in the

right place when it feels like the blanket is softly pulling your shoulder blades down and away from your ears.

- ✔ Allow your arms to rest above the blanket and out toward your sides, as if you're about to move your hands toward the top of your head to make a snow angel. Keep your elbows bent slightly and your palms facing the ceiling.
- ✔ Breathe deeply here for up to 5 minutes, focusing your awareness on the chest area as it gradually opens.

Tips: If lying on your back in this way hurts your lower back, try keeping your knees bent and your feet about hip-width apart. Feel free to adjust your arms so that the stretch in your chest and shoulders is gentle, and not overwhelming.

Criss-Cross

This is a [fabulous pose](#) for opening the shoulders and upper back. But be sure to take it slowly as it can really provide a deep stretch!

To do this pose:

- ✔ Start by lying facedown on your belly.
- ✔ Lift your torso up and bring your right arm across your body and underneath your left armpit so it's heading away from the body at about a 90-degree angle with your palm facing down.
- ✔ Stretch your left arm in the opposite direction so it's also extending away from your torso at about a 90-degree angle.
- ✔ You can rest your chin on your upper arms or you can keep your head lifted.
- ✔ Take 5–10 deep breaths here and then repeat by switching the cross of your arms.

Tips: If you don't feel a deep stretch, try walking your fingers out further so that your arms are extended even more. If you hear any cracks or pops when getting into this pose, back off.

By opening the tight muscles in the chest and shoulders that keep many of our necks in a chronically “forward” position, these poses will not only relieve your pain, they’ll also [improve your posture!](#)

—*Teresa Manning*

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