



Get fit where you sit!

2008 Media Kit

www.getfitwhereweare.com

WHAT is Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™?:

Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™—an accessible path to fitness that is changing lives. Whether you are physically fit or have physical challenges and no matter what your age, you will derive wonderful health benefits from Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™.

Lakshmi has designed Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ to allow anyone who can sit on a chair to participate in this results-oriented form of fitness. She has taken the amazing benefits of traditional yoga and reinvented them so they are accessible to all ages and fitness levels. She did this because, while traditional yoga has powerful health advantages, it is not easily accessible.

Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ is based on 5000-year-old yoga postures (called asanas) and breathing techniques plus additional Eastern and Western movements her students find beneficial. Lakshmi has adapted these for the chair making them accessible to everyone.

She has even modified the postures and breathing techniques to take into account the fact that everyone has a different level of flexibility (or range of motion). This includes variations in flexibility between your upper and lower body as well as your right and left sides. Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ is presented in low, moderate and high levels of flexibility so you can learn how to adapt it to your personal needs.

Your level of flexibility may vary from day-to-day. So, vary your posture levels to ones that are comfortable for you. Remember, that no matter the level of flexibility you achieve on any given day, you are receiving all the health benefits of Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™.

In addition to the postures and movements, these classes are a more complete form of exercise than most because they incorporate proper breathing.

You learn beneficial breathing techniques that are a key aspect of reaching optimum health. These deep breathing techniques more fully oxygenate your body and massage

your organs. This improves your energy and mental clarity while reducing pain and anxiety. Performing the breathing techniques, not only during your chair yoga, but throughout your daily life, significantly enhances your health.

WHO benefits from Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™?

▶ all walks of life & ages

▶ all levels of activity & mobility

Who are you?	What are your challenges?
▶ Office workers	▶ Weight
▶ Parents	▶ Inactivity
▶ Children	▶ Flexibility
▶ Frequent fliers	▶ Physical
▶ Commuters	▶ Mental
▶ Seniors	▶ Injuries
▶ Couch potatoes	▶ Illness
▶ Wheelchair users	▶ Schedule
▶ Students	▶ Chronic disease
▶ Disabled	▶ Chronic pain
▶ Chronically ill	▶ Limited mobility

WHY perform Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™?

Benefits	Usability
▶ Improve physical fitness	▶ For all ages
▶ Improve mental fitness	▶ For all activity levels
▶ Increase alertness	▶ For all mobility levels
▶ Fight drowsiness	▶ Perform postures anywhere you can sit
▶ Reduce aches and pains	▶ Perform breathing anywhere
▶ Improve overall health	▶ No special clothing required
▶ Improve flexibility	▶ No special equipment required
▶ Speed recovery from injury	▶ Quick and easy

Lakshmi has designed Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ to allow anyone who can sit on a chair to participate in this results-oriented form of fitness. She has taken the amazing

benefits of traditional yoga and reinvented them so they are accessible to all ages and fitness levels. She did this because, while traditional yoga has powerful health advantages, it is not easily accessible.

Lakshmi chose the chair because many more people can use it (whether for physical or practical reasons) as a basis for improved fitness instead of using a piece of equipment or getting down on the floor or having to stand for long periods of time.

How did this all come about? In 1982, Lakshmi created Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ for a dear friend and yoga student. Candace had contracted rheumatoid arthritis which prevented her from getting down on the floor to do traditional mat yoga. After practicing chair yoga for six months, the arthritis and her mood improved. She was then able to resume most of her regular activities.

WHERE can you practice Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™?

You can practice chair yoga pretty much anywhere. Do not forget that practicing your breathing even if you cannot do your postures will get you many health benefits. All that is required is focusing on your breathing.

Poses & Breathing	Breathing Alone
▶ At work	▶ Waiting in line
▶ Passenger in car	▶ Driving your car
▶ At home	▶ During meetings
▶ While flying	▶ At the movies
▶ While dining	▶ In bed

The Four Variations of Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™

- **Single Chair Yoga**
You use a single chair (preferably with no arms) to perform the postures and movements
- **Double Chair Yoga**
You use two chairs (preferably one chair without arms and one with arms) to perform the chair postures (asanas). The second chair aids in developing deeper stretching.
- **Pair Chair Yoga**
You and a partner, each on your own chair, perform postures assisting each other physically and verbally.
- **Weighted Chair Yoga**
You employ a pair of dumbbells (hand-held weights) as part of your poses. Using weights strengthens bones and tones muscles.

Success Stories:

ADULTS

Paula - 81 years old: Leg Brace due to Polio

With limited mobility in Paula's left leg due to Polio, she felt embarrassed to go to a traditional mat yoga class. She signed up for Lakshmi's class and began doing chair yoga on a single chair for a few months experiencing no pain. Paula had re-gained her flexibility and confidence. She then started practicing double chair by carefully assisting the braced leg onto the double chair. Paula was able to do movements that she thought she never could do! With a newfound positive attitude Paula experienced great joy and confidence as she continued to work carefully with her body and mind via the chair yoga asanas, breathing techniques, and meditations.

Nancy - 50 years old: Fibromyalgia

Nancy had contracted fibromyalgia 16 years ago. Fibromyalgia causes extremely painful "hot spots" throughout the body. When Nancy discovered she could perform yoga with a single chair, she was excited! Her pain started to vanish! The double chair gave her the extra support for her tender challenged body. The arms of the double chair gave her not only support but also confidence. The single chair gave her balance, stability and security. Nancy still comes to Lakshmi's weekly class and practices daily at home! She is continuing to feel great and hardly considers herself challenged by the fibromyalgia any longer.

Candace - 35 years old: Rheumatoid Arthritis

Candace had successfully practiced traditional mat yoga with Lakshmi for over a year. She had rheumatoid arthritis and yoga was helpful in keeping her flexible and out of pain. Candace awoke one morning with an acute flare up of the arthritis, she was unable to walk without pain, open

doors, and could barely sit. She began practicing Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ immediately and continued to do so for 6 months focusing on deep breathing techniques and relaxations. Candace's arthritis began to disappear a little each day and eventually she was able to drive again and attend Lakshmi's mat yoga class. Candace always kept a chair nearby just in case she was not able to get down on the floor to do a certain asana. In this way she could do it on the chair and get the same benefit as the class was receiving and not feel embarrassed by just standing there! (It was for Candace that Lakshmi Voelker created chair yoga in 1982)

Aaron - 76 years old: Tight Hamstrings from Treadmill and Hiking

Aaron has always been a very athletic person. He hikes weekly and walks on his treadmill daily. Aaron's hamstrings, quads and calves started to become extremely tight; like rocks! He started practicing single and double chair yoga with Lakshmi and within 2 weeks was able to stretch out effortlessly and without pain. Now before and after Aaron hikes or gets on the treadmill, he sits down on a chair and practices Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ and feels wonderful and HAPPY again!

Bruce - 62 years old: Low Level of Flexibility

Bruce's low level of flexibility was not allowing him to get down on the mat to perform the traditional mat yoga routines. Bruce discovered that double chair yoga would allow him to sit in a single armless chair, while he extended his legs with ease onto the seat of the second chair. This allowed Bruce to execute forward bends with ease for the first time in his life. Now he is able to accomplish spinal twists, and leg lifts, and other positions that he only dreamed about.

Izy - 78 years old: Neck Problems

Izy had severely injured her neck in a car accident. She came into Lakshmi's class wearing a neck brace ready to learn chair yoga. Izy started with deep breathing techniques while sitting comfortably on the chair supported with pillows. She began to loosen up enough to do a short relaxation followed with a few gentle chair yoga asanas (postures). As the weeks progressed, her neck began to relax to a greater extent and she was soon able to remove the brace. Feeling supported and safe on the chair, Izy began to perform new asana's and experienced more flexibility and safety in her body with each and every class.

Marie - 62 years old: Feet Numbness due to Nerve Damage

Marie started her first day of class by massaging her feet on and over a 2 lb. dumbbell while supported by her chair. She then began to roll her feet over the dumbbell one at a time. Marie slowly worked both sides her soles, and heels. Working closely with her neurosurgeon and Lakshmi, Marie now is starting to feel sensations in her feet and is now able to place her feet on the floor and feel comfortable so she can perform some of the gentle chair yoga asanas!

Ernie - 76 years old: Depression and Anxiety

Ernie suffered the loss of his wife and developed depression and anxiety. His blood pressure rose and his spirits sank! He then began to practice Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™. When Ernie started his first Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ class, he sat on the chair with much sadness in his heart. Lakshmi then taught him how to close his eyes and to learn how to breathe properly. He slowly began to trust again and open his heart! His body began to respond to the chair yoga asanas and his mind began to calm. He stepped into the present, and began to heal his past with deep levels of breathing exercises.

Mildred - 89 years old: Osteoporosis

Mildred, an avid dancer and gymnast since her youth, had developed a severe case of osteoporosis. She heard that chair yoga could help her move like she used to. She asked her doctor for permission to start practicing Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™. Mildred and her doctor were aware of her body's limitations and contraindications. Being a dancer and gymnast, Mildred knew her body well! Her doctor gave her permission to follow her Inner Voice and to do what felt right in her body. They both decided that at her age and intelligence level that she would do what was right. Mildred started Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ at the tender age of 89. She was

gentle when needed and used her breath to assist her into and out of the asanas! Mildred felt free in her body and her mind soared to positive places.

Inez - 102 years old: Aging

Inez was in pretty good health when Lakshmi met her. At that time she was 98! Inez quickly fell in love with Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™. After 2 years of practicing chair yoga, Inez said to Lakshmi, "I am 100 years old—I have seen 6 wars, the invention of the telephone, radio, TV, computers, color and talking movies, airplane, nuclear power, and saw man walking on the moon. I was tired Lakshmi and wanted to die but now I do not for I feel so fabulous doing Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™!" She lived another happy healthy yoga filled 2 years after that statement!

Martha - 93 years old: Arthritis

Martha's passion was crocheting and knitting, she had done it most of her life. She developed severe arthritis in her hands later in life and was unable to knit baby caps for newborn babies in the hospital. She then decided to start Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ class and quickly began practicing the Chinese Arthritis relief hand movements on a daily basis. While practicing, she also integrated the deep pranayama (the science of breath) exercises to oxygenate her body and mind. After 4 weeks of doing her chair yoga, the gnarls in and around her knuckles started to respond by softening and relaxing. Martha soon resumed her passion of knitting caps and continued for many years thereafter.

Tony - 88 years old: Body got Buff!

Tony felt pretty good when she started Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ with no real complaints. As she became more adept on the single and double chair yoga, she started to notice some positive changes in her body. During one of Lakshmi's classes where she incorporated two-pound dumbbells, one of Tony's great granddaughters said, "Grandma, you are getting buff!" "Such a wonderful compliment," thought Tony!

Pamela - 49 years old: Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Pamela is in a wheelchair and was full of joy and also sad because she could not exercise any longer because of her MS. She decided to start private chair yoga classes with Lakshmi. After Pamela's first class, she said to Lakshmi, "My legs are happy again!" Pamela continues to work with her aide and the Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ CD.

Roz - 41 years old: Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Roz had MS and wanted to keep her back in shape. She decided to start Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ as a healing, supporting discipline. Roz learned which breath exercises would keep her body temperature cool and which asanas would help support her back muscles and spine and which ones were contraindicated. She continued to practice Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ and has now added Pilates and other healing and movement modalities with great success and JOY!

Virginia - 72 years old: Stroke

Virginia had a stroke at 68, and lost most of the mobility in her right arm and right side of her face. She came into Lakshmi's class shy and embarrassed of her limitations. After a few months, her confidence increased as well as her spirit and her desire to live her life in a newfound way. She sat on the chairs and assisted her right side with her left arm. As time went on, her physical, mental, and emotional postures changed. She was able to do things with the left side of her body that she was unable to do before practicing Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™. Virginia became extremely confident in herself, which changed her life; and at 70, Virginia secured herself a new boyfriend!

Barbara - 43 years old: Brain Cancer

Barbara was a traditional mat yoga student of Lakshmi's for many years. Barbara then moved out of the area. One day Lakshmi received a call from her son and he said he was going to carry his mother into Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ class. He told Lakshmi that his mom had developed brain cancer, and she was not doing well. Barbara had told her son that she so fondly remembered her yoga classes with Lakshmi, and how good she felt in and after them. He carried

his mother in and sat her on the chair assisted by many pillows and blankets. She just sat there and stared. Lakshmi carried on with the class and noticed after 15 minutes she was breathing deeper. Lakshmi did not make a fuss over her for she knew it would embarrass her and she had done yoga with Lakshmi for so many years; she really KNEW her. Much to Lakshmi's surprise, after 30 minutes, Lakshmi turned to see how Barbara was doing and she had put her body into a gentle spinal twist and she had her eyes closed and she appeared to be in bliss. It was very hard for Lakshmi to contain tears of sadness and JOY! They finished the class and her son came and literally picked her up. He called a week later to tell Lakshmi that his mom thoroughly enjoyed the class and remained in peace for the following week and died peacefully in her sleep!

Helen - 61 years old: Posture/Osteopenia

Helen came to Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ class in great shape. She was a very pretty lady inside and out. Helen developed osteopenia and did not want to start rounding out her back, neck, and shoulders due to her bone mass loss. Each week she perfected Tadasana—the sitting mountain pose and executed her asanas with poise, grace, and dignity. “A REAL LADY!” said Lakshmi. She learned to anchor her sits bones, extend her torso, lift her sternum, roll her shoulders back and down with out collapsing in her chest. Helen had always carried herself well and wanted to continue to do so. She worked with the weights on the 2 chairs and her posture was always in perfect alignment for her body.

Jo - 78 years old: Knee Surgery

Jo was going to undertake knee surgery in a few months and really did not want to go through the surgery at her age! She started Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ on a daily basis while incorporating the Chinese Knee movements. Jo did the knee movements daily, sometimes more than once a day. Her knee started to receive freshly oxygenated blood and she massaged the entire area around, above, and under the knee. Jo then incorporated deep breathing techniques into her routine with great results. Day in and day out for over 2 months she practiced chair yoga. Jo went to her doctor and he said “Jo, whatever you are doing, keep doing it. Your knee is a lot more flexible and strong. We are going to hold off on the surgery for a while. By the way what are you doing?!” She told him about Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ and he said “Continue every day. I just wish my other patients did chair yoga.” Jo brought in a few of his patients and each and every one of them had positive results. Some were able to postpone the replacement surgery while others healed much faster after the surgery and were walking sooner than those who did not do chair yoga

DISABLED CHILDREN

Juan - 12 years old: Cerebral Palsy

Juan was always quiet and had never spoken yet he loved to participate in Lakshmi's chair yoga class to the best of his ability. Most of his movements were involuntary and when he did move there was a lot of jerking involved. You could tell he was troubled with the involuntary movements and the constant dripping of saliva. Juan always had a smile for everyone! One day Lakshmi was telling the kids a story about the sunflower and the seeds and how the birds loved the seeds and if a seed was lucky enough to get away from the beak of a bird it would grow into a what???

Lakshmi posed this question to everyone, who by that time had all smelled the very big sunflower they were holding. All of a sudden the answer to Lakshmi's question came from the right of her. “A FLOWER!” Juan spoke and nearly brought the aides, PT's, and OT's to tears for he had not spoken for a long time. Everyone believed that the breathing and relaxation techniques that his parents and OT's worked on with him afforded him the opportunity to speak.

Johnny - 11 years old: Down syndrome

Well Johnny was the cutest child that Lakshmi had ever seen. He walked into chair yoga class with a great "bowl" hair cut and a red long sleeved shirt wearing Osh Kosh overhalls. He walked in totally confident with a great big smile. He quietly walked around the circle of his disabled friends who were ready to take their Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ class. Johnny tapped each and every one on the top of their heads! He was one pointed and had to touch each and every one of them. When Johnny was done he climbed up on the five foot high PILE of yoga mats and

sat down, crossed his legs in the lotus position and put his thumb and pointers together in Jnana Mudra then he closed his eyes to meditate. In addition; some of the time Johnny led part of the chair yoga classes!

Bethany - 14 years old: ADD

Bethany was a typical teenage girl who was very into herself. She just could not sit still or be quiet. She would not listen and was very impulsive and impatient. Bethany often felt clumsy and uncoordinated. After a few months of participating in Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ classes, her central nervous system began to calm and strengthen. She got in touch with her body as she relaxed. She also learned, with time, how to get grounded in her own silence and internal awareness.

Colita - 16 years old: Autism

Colita was definitely a handful! She repeated sentences over and over again while having seemingly unmotivated tantrums. Colita would bang her head repeatedly on the back of her chair. As time went on in her Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ classes she was able to slow her self down and achieve eye contact. Colita really enjoyed her breathing techniques and replaced the repetition of phrases and words with different breathing techniques. As she learned a new asana each week, they seemed to take the place of the tantrums. When she felt out of control, she would do a breathing exercise and an asana over and over again. She became more and more focused and balanced with each chair yoga class.

Stacey - 19 years old: Cerebral Palsy

Stacey had cerebral palsy and was assisted in her yoga postures by her aide each week. Her brain damage was extensive and she basically had no movement in her body. Stacey's also suffered from visual and hearing impairments with violent convulsive seizures. We all knew that she loved her chair yoga classes by her slight smile each week when she was wheeled into and out of her class. She loved to be with the other students as well as the attention from the aides, PT's, and OT's.

Testimonials

Yoga offers a profound range of physical, mental, and deeper benefits, but many people cannot receive those benefits through a traditional practice. Lakshmi's Chair Yoga makes the gifts of yoga available to everyone. Sitting Mountain Series is a great product for students wanting a safe, simple, and comprehensive practice. It's also a boon for yoga teachers looking for a way to expand their repertoire of skills. The booklet alone is worth the price of the CD.

***Richard Faulds, Board Chair, Past President and Senior Teacher
Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health***

"Chair yoga can magically open doorways to all those who seek all the benefits of yoga. Lakshmi Voelker teaches from not just a deep understanding of the transformative power of yoga, but from her heart and her conviction as to how these practices can safely bring those with limited flexibility to a profound state of harmony, balance and healing."

***Sudhir Jonathan Foust, Senior Teacher and former President
Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health***

"...this is a competently instructed, well-organized, and accessible program suitable for all levels of students."

Richard Rosen, Contributing Editor, Yoga Journal

"With a very hectic work and travel schedule, chair yoga allows me to re-energize and release physical tension almost anytime and anywhere. To put it mildly, I highly recommend chair yoga to all my fellow desk, car, plane, and wheelchair bound warriors as an excellent way to re-energize both our physical and spiritual lives, within the boundaries of a challenging schedule and body!"

Catherine Holmes, MS, Consulting Psychologists Press

"The techniques that Lakshmi teaches arthritis patients are very valuable in reducing pain and increasing function."

Maria Greenwald, MD FACR

"A great pick-me-up for my afternoon slump. Better than coffee or sugar."

Lynn McArthy, Assistant Manager, Disney Studio

"This presentation of do-able yoga is presented as two items: a CD and a pocket-sized tutorial book. Its handy size makes it portable and useful anywhere. The two blend beautifully with the book itself wonderfully helpful. The drawings are excellent, the audio instructions very, very clear. The quality is outstanding and a must for *anyone* interested in the many benefits of yoga without having to be on the floor. It is also for those who sit at a desk for long periods of time, for those perhaps interested in ways to relieve stress by stretching and breathing during a busy day, for those physically unable to practice a more traditional method. Lakshmi has created a package that is worthy of heightened attention by anyone newly intrigued by yoga or by folks, like myself, who have practiced yoga for a number of years. Thank you for this gift, Lakshmi!"

Carol Hochsprung, LPGA, Rancho Mirage, CA

"Lakshmi Voelker's work in the world of yoga is a marvelous blend of gentleness, precision, and spirituality combined with New York smarts. She can change your life!"

Jerry Ludwig, Award-winning TV Writer, Producer and Novelist

"I feel free of any physical limitations thanks to Lakshmi's innovative approach to an ancient practice."

Candace Terry, chair yoga student

“After each class I feel quieted, renewed, and at peace with the world.”

***Ann E. Neal, Resident, Hacienda de Monterey
an Assisted Living Community***

I would love to see Lakshmi’s chair yoga placed into the curriculum of all nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and hospitals. Lakshmi’s nurturing voice, encouraging words, and strengthening postures are a gift towards healing. It would have been a wonderful healing tool for my father who had become wheelchair bound in his last years.

Shanti, Long Island, New York

Recent Articles:

Seniors Sit Down for Chair Yoga

By Daisy Nguyen
Associated Press

PALM DESERT, California (AP) -- A more gentle form of yoga is catching on in some retirement communities.

The yoga mat is replaced by the chair. Sometimes two.

Instructor Lakshmi Voelker-Binder says her students can duplicate any yoga pose typically done on the floor, but it's easier on those less limber muscles.

During a recent one-hour session, she taught her comfortably supported participants to stretch by holding modified versions of traditional yoga poses.

The normally upright forward bend, for example, entailed sitting in one chair and positioning both legs on a facing chair, the hands reaching for the second chair's arms.

"The only thing I won't ask you to do is headstands," Voelker-Binder joked to the group of six women ranging in age from 50s to late 70s. They were gathered in a dimly lit ballroom at the Joslyn Senior Center near Palm Springs.

An estimated 13.4 million Americans practice yoga or other mind-body exercises such as tai chi, according to a 2003 survey by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. Of those, an estimated 1.6 million were 55 or older.

Those numbers are expected to rise, said spokesman Mike May, as senior citizens join health clubs and senior centers offer more exercise programs.

A self-described hippie who felt "misplaced in New York," Voelker-Binder moved to Palm Springs in 1989, becoming one of four yoga instructors in the desert city east of Los Angeles. Today, the lean and lithe 55-year-old says there are at least six yoga studios in the area but she teaches the only chair yoga class in town.

The older students say chair yoga increases their strength, flexibility and concentration.

"It keeps me motivated," said Edie Wallace, a 79-year-old in jeans who switched smoothly between poses.

"It helps me want to go further and do more," Wallace said. "Walk that extra half-hour."

Nearby, a new student said it was more challenging than she expected.

"I noticed some lopsidedness that I have," said Susan Evans, 56, who had gone to mat yoga classes for about 18 months. "Plus you have to really balance yourself on the chair, or else you end up slipping."

Voelker-Binder discovered chair yoga in the late 1980s when she was teaching a mat class and one of her students, Candace Terry, developed rheumatoid arthritis. Terry, who was in her 30s when they met, said her arthritis was so severe she had difficulty dressing herself or opening a car door -- much less doing form poses on her hands and knees.

"Lakshmi understood my predicament," said Terry, now 53. "It's a gentle way of teaching people to experience it as best as they can, which is very encouraging."

Terry said she saw gradual improvements in her health as she practiced chair yoga daily for about five years after being diagnosed with arthritis.

"I feel that between yoga, good nutrition and other things I've done in my life, I've beat the odds compared with many people stricken with the disease," she said.

Peggy Cappy, an instructor who created the video "Yoga For the Rest of Us," which includes some chair poses, offers the chair option at her yoga classes in Peterborough, New Hampshire, to help students ease into more strenuous poses. It also helps them gradually build muscles and joints until they're strong enough to practice on a mat, said Cappy.

"The chair is there for safety," she said. "As a result, people are willing to try things because they know they're not going to be hurt."

Daisy Nguyen is a report for the Associated Press. She can be reached at dpnguyen@ap.org.

Chair yoga: exercise for everyone

By Kelly O'Connor
The Desert Sun

Does yoga look a bit complicated? Think you need more flexibility or strength to get into those positions?

Not with chair yoga.

"Anyone who sits in a chair can do it," said Palm Springs yoga instructor Lakshmi Voelker-Binder.

And, she adds, chair yoga offers the same benefits as traditional yoga -- increasing flexibility, improving breathing and focus and toning the muscles of the body.

Voelker-Binder teaches public and private classes throughout the valley. She said the exercises are ideal for the aging community and those with disabilities who may not be able to exercise on the floor.

The following chair yoga poses are demonstrated by Voelker-Binder. Deep breathing and concentration are an important part of each position.

Consult a physician before starting any new exercise program.

Warrior poses:

PEACEFUL WARRIOR: stretches inner groin area.

For beginners: Turn to the right in your chair and extend left leg while pressing heel back. Raise arms above head with palms facing in. Shoulders should be down and relaxed. Look up. Repeat on other side.

EXALTED WARRIOR: Once comfortable in the peaceful warrior pose, try the advanced pose for a deeper stretch. Interlace fingers with pointer fingers pointing up. Arch your back. Repeat on other side.

ANGLE WARRIOR: stretches upper-body muscles and shoulders.

For beginners: Sit in chair with legs placed on the ground at a 90-degree angle. Right hand is grasping chair while the left arm reaches overhead. Palm faces forward. Repeat on other side.

Advanced pose: Right hand lowers to the shin, ankle or floor, whichever is comfortable. Left arm is straight up with palm facing forward. Left leg is extended with toes pointed. Look up. Repeat on other side.

Double chair exercises: Use two chairs for the following poses.

FORWARD BEND: to stretch the kidney area.

While seated in one chair, extend legs forward on the chair in front of you. Stretch forward as far as is comfortable.

COBBLER'S POSE: straightens and lengthens spine, improves posture, tones gluts and abs.

Wrap legs, in a butterfly position, around the back of the chair in front of you. Hands should be down and to the side. Hold for as long as is comfortable.

TREE POSE: promotes balance.

For beginners: Sit on the edge of the chair. Raise arms above head. Place palms together. Rest right ankle on left ankle. Switch feet and repeat.

Advanced: Once comfortable in the beginners' pose, rest one ankle on the knee of the opposite leg for a deeper stretch.

STICK: Strengthens leg and arm muscles, tones abs.

Extend right leg, holding it at the knee. Point and flex the foot. Eyes should be focused on toes.

Kelly O'Connor is a reporter at The Desert Sun. She can be reached at 760-778-6435.

Seniors stay fit - Exercise helps strengthen the body and mind

By Kelly O'Connor
The Desert Sun

As a nurse, Rosemarie Berryessa knows the importance of exercising.

But raising two kids she had little extra time. Now, at age 64, she makes time.

"I want to stay healthy and look good. All that doesn't happen unless you do something about it," said the Palm Desert resident.

Berryessa finds motivation at group exercise classes for seniors. She does water aerobics at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage and yoga at Joslyn Senior Center in Palm Desert.

Valley hospitals, gyms and senior centers cater classes to senior citizens, many who have arthritis or other medical conditions associated with aging.

Just because the classes are simplified doesn't mean they're boring. Valley seniors are keeping fit with hula dancing, Pilates and Tai Chi.

Yoga instructor Lakshmi Voelker-Binder uses chairs for her senior class.

"Anybody and everybody can sit down in a chair," she said.

Stretching benefits are the same, the chair just makes the movements easier for those who may have back or hip ailments and are uncomfortable on the floor.

The chair yoga sparked Berryessa's interest. She enjoys yoga, but hurt her knee when she did the poses on the floor.

The group also kept her interest more than the yoga videotapes she bought.

When Berryessa leaves class she says she feels "light and free."

At a recent class, 12 students sat in their chairs with their legs extended resting on another chair in front of them.

"If it doesn't feel good, don't do it," said Voelker-Binder, a Palm Springs resident who teaches classes throughout the valley.

The group reached out to stretch their legs and back. Some rested their hands on the top of the chair, others who were more flexible used the arms of the chair.

"Are you still breathing?" Voelker-Binder asked.

"I hope so," one of the students responded as the rest of the class snickered.

Yoga emphasizes deep, focused breathing. Valley resident Helen Hale, 70, knew this and was apprehensive about trying yoga.

"I always thought it was real serious," she said. But Voelker-Binder uses humor to keep the class energy light and easy.

It's important to keep a positive attitude as you age, she said.

"As their body becomes flexible their minds become more flexible too," Voelker-Binder said.

Yoga and other exercise can ease stress, lower blood pressure and strengthen the body. Many seniors are working muscles they haven't used in a long time.

At the Hula for Health class at Cathedral City Senior Center, students work their hips, back, stomach and inner thigh muscles.

Hula dancing is a "good workout for balance and getting that heart rate up a bit," said instructor Carla Culbertson.

To ease into the movements, students start out doing hand and arm movements while sitting.

As the class continues they do basic hula moves, such as ka'o-- a swaying motion done by shifting the body's weight from side to side.

The oldest student in the hula class is 81 and is "always the first to get out of her seat."

"I kind of base the class on what she does. If she can stand up and do the song, then the others can," Culbertson said.

"We basically get out there and clear the cobwebs out," she said.

Biography:

Lakshmi Voelker-Binder has dedicated her life to creating accessible paths to wellness.

She has studied, practiced, and taught Yoga and other Eastern disciplines since 1969. From her early years, she integrated these disciplines with Western health concepts. Her focus has always been to improve her students' wellness by making the integration of these disciplines accessible to the broadest audience possible.

Lakshmi Voelker-Binder, YT, E-RYT 500, KYTA, YA, IAYT is a certified Kripalu Yoga instructor, a member of the Yoga Alliance and International Association of Yoga Therapists, and holder of other certifications.

She created Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ in 1982 when one of her students was stricken with arthritis and could no longer get down on the floor to practice Yoga. She authored and produced her widely acclaimed "Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™: The Sitting Mountain Series" CD/cassette and tutorial booklet in 1999.

Following the success of her CD and Tutorial Booklet, she then created the first in a series of innovative DVDs in 2007. She made breakthroughs in two areas: extensive step-by-step instruction of each class and providing multiple levels of flexibility so all poses are accessible.

Lakshmi certifies Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ teachers (LVCYT's). In just the first two years of this program, she has certified over 150 people in the United States, Canada, and Japan.

Lakshmi also works extensively as a private Yoga therapist who has taught and developed various Yoga classes and teacher training programs. She has led Yoga and Zen meditation as well as dolphin swim and whale research retreats in the U.S. and Mexico. She is a published photographer and modeled for the internationally known sculptor, John Kennedy.

Lakshmi was a longtime member of The National League of American Pen Women, Inc. as author and lecturer. She has written numerous papers and articles expressing more than 35 years of studies and practices of various forms of Yoga and Eastern disciplines. Lakshmi integrates her intuition and humor into a special friendship with her students and community.

Her very first yoga teacher was Anjali Joseph. Lakshmi was 18 when she took her first yoga class with Anjali in an adult education course in Amityville, Long Island, NY.

Additionally, Lakshmi has studied with other masters from many traditions-from India, Japan, Tibet, Taiwan, Korea, and China. She also spent 12 years working in a hospital. She has taken the best from the best to create Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™.

She was given the name Lakshmi 24 years ago by Swami Muktananda of the Siddha Yoga lineage. The Goddess Lakshmi is the revered Goddess of Abundance and Prosperity.

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Side Note: Lakshmi Voelker Chair Yoga™ believes in a greener world. We have intentionally only created an electronic version of our media kit to save a few more trees.



Get fit where you sit!