

5 Yoga Asanas to Strengthen Your Hip Flexors

As a society we are very productive. We spend seriously countless hours sitting at a desk, typing away or pushing papers. As a society we are really comfortable. We spend too many hours sitting on the couch watching tv or scrolling the phone.

Neither of these scenarios help out our hip flexors. What's a hip flexor, you ask? It is a set of muscles that connect your lower back to the upper legs: the iliacus and psoas major muscles (aka iliopsoas), and the rectus femoris (part of the quadriceps).

The hip flexors' job is to allow you to bend at the waist and to bring your knee up toward your chest.

People with hip flexor pains and strains generally get it from not moving their bodies enough (sitting for too long), but it can also happen if you overwork the muscles, like can sometimes happen when running, playing sports, and even dancing.

The usual indicator of hip flexor strain is pain at the front of the hip. The muscles can be torn just a little, or a lot, which makes it difficult to walk without a limp.

If you have to sit a lot for work, besides aiming to get up for a few minutes every hour, you can also aim to incorporate the following yoga asanas into your practice to help strengthen and lengthen these critical muscles.

Taking time to stretch slowly will really pay off in the end!

Camel Pose / Ustrasana

Kneel on the floor with your knees hip width apart and tuck your toes on the floor, with your heels high. Keeping your shoulders open put your palms on your lower back and start to lean back. Remember, keep your heart up as you bend your back to reach your hands onto your heels, with your fingers pointing toward your toes.

Breathe deeply for 30-60 seconds as you imagine your chest lifting up. If you can't get your hands all the way to your heels, just keep them supporting your lower back as you bend your head back. When you come back up, do so slowly, and after you've done the pose 3 times, sit down on your shins and lean forward into child's pose for a few breaths to counter that lower back stretch.

High Lunge

This one is easy and really effective at strengthening and stretching the hip flexors. Step your right leg back and put your hands to the ground on either side of your left foot. The ball of the right foot holding your body steady. You are looking for a right angle in your left knee, so adjust the spacing between feet accordingly.

Your torso should be on your left thigh; your back straight and engaged, like the right leg. Stay here for 30-60 seconds and then repeat on the other side. Do this a few times on each side. You can go to Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svasana) between each interval for a break.

One-Legged King Pigeon Pose II / Eka Pada Rajakapotasana II

I know, I know, this pose isn't for everyone, but just try it out, even the first half of it. Best recommendation is to start in Staff Pose (Dandasana – sitting with legs extended in front of you). Bend your right knee and place your foot in front of your sitting bone. Tilt to the right and turn your left leg straight back behind you, fully extended, shin down.

Your right foot and left knee will take your weight, and you can find stability by allowing the right knee to move forward past the right toes. In that balance, reach one arm up and bend the elbow back in order to hold onto the left foot. Bring the other hand to the left foot, and keep your elbows pointed at the ceiling, and like Ustrasana, keep your heart lifted.

When you are ready, allow your head to bend back so that the top of your head is at the ball of your left foot. Breathe here for 20-30 seconds, then slowly come back up, release slowly, then repeat on the other side.

Upward-Facing Dog Pose / Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

Well, you probably know how to do this pose, so I'll keep it short. This is easiest to come into from Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svasana). Keep your wrists directly below your shoulders, and make sure that your shoulders are not slumping over here.

Your thighs should be off the floor, and the muscles fully engaged. It helps to turn your thighs in slightly, and the elbow creases facing forward. Look straight ahead and breathe for a couple breaths. You can move in and out of Downward and Upward Facing Dog (Adho and Urdhva Mukha Svasana) a few times, or just come down to lay on your belly between each time.

Revolved Side Angle Pose / Parivrtta Parsvakonasana

Start with your legs almost 4 feet apart. Toes of left foot pointing forward, toes of right foot pointing to the right; heels aligned. Bend your left knee until it is at a right angle. As you exhale, turn your torso to the left and reach your right hand down to the ground, to the left of your left foot. Bring your left arm up over your ear. Keep your right leg active as you press the thigh upward and extend strongly into the floor with your heel.

Some people find it difficult to keep the right foot flat on the ground. Keep it as low as possible, and work toward

getting it flat over time. Remember, we're working on hip flexors here, so it is important to concentrate on supporting that growth. Obviously repeat on the other side, and hold for 30 seconds on each side, for at least 3 times on each side. This pose is also really great for digestion, and will help those who experience pain in their lower back.

If done with care and control, this set of five poses can be done in under 20 minutes. You might not find time every day to do them, but if you can try 3-5 times per week, you will do a great service to your dear hip flexors. Happy movement!

How to Make Natural Laundry Detergent at Home

Over the last decade, several brands of natural laundry detergent have gained traction in the super store market. We are no longer bound only by options such as Tide, Gain, and All. We can now choose quality products from Seventh Generation, Pure, Mrs. Meyer's, Common Goods, and more!

This is great for those of us who prefer to use plant-derived materials to wash our clothes. The "mainstream" brands do a great job of demolishing stains, but they also include synthetic organic chemicals to make it happen, also used in pesticides. Need I say more?

Fortunately many customers are supporting a more natural approach, and this is great. Not only do our clothes stay free from unnatural ingredients, we reduce the negative impact of introducing unnecessary substances into the water system.

If you want to take the next step and get even more natural, it is totally doable to make homemade laundry detergent! Here are three versions from two sites.

With Borax

This [recipe for a 5 gallon supply](#) uses only a cup of Borax, a cup of Arm & Hammer Super Washing Soda, half a cup of grated Fels Naptha soap, water, and essential oil as desired. Fels Naptha soap is a stain pre-treater that's been around for 100 years. Other Borax and Washing Soda recipes online suggest using soaps with natural scents instead of Fels Naptha and essential oils. Melting the soap in water takes about 10 minutes, then all you have to do is mix the remaining ingredients in a bucket, let sit for 24 hours, and you have 5 gallons of detergent made for cheap and ultra naturally. Use $\frac{1}{4}$ cup per load of laundry.

Borax-free

[One recipe](#) calls for Liquid Castile Soap, Super Washing Soda, Baking Soda, and water. This great technique is so easy. Just boil water, add ingredients, stir, add more water, let cool, mix. Use $\frac{1}{3}$ cup for each load. The second recipe calls for Dr. Bronner's Sal Suds Biodegradable Cleaner with Super Washing Soda and water. Boil water, mix in ingredients, let cool. $\frac{1}{4}$ cup per load. It doesn't get easier than this, and wow, it *actually* works – it was the first one I tried!

If you plan to use natural homemade laundry detergent in your HE machine, you might note that HE washers require detergents that are low foaming, and the ingredients in all these recipes are low foaming. One recommendation is to run an empty cycle with some citric acid every 2-3 months to keep the washing machine clean and smelling fresh.

For those of you interested in learning more about how to

limit toxin exposure, read Dr. Axe's article on the [Best Natural Cleaning Products](#).

Happy cleaning!

Wow, Vegan Food is Taking over the Airport

If you are like 20% of the world, you have traveled in a plane in the last 12 months. Which means you were in an airport. As one of those travelers, on trip day you spent an average of 10 hours away from home, and your refrigerator. This means you either planned ahead very well, and have enough good, nutritious food until you reach your destination, or you are like the 90% of us who didn't. We take the opportunity to use the extra time we inevitably have at the airport waiting for a connecting flight to buy food. Fortunately there are increasing options at the airport for the vegetarians among us.

Restaurants are recognizing the need to provide quality meat-free alternatives and most are willing to please the masses by subbing out chicken for avocado, for example. Current statistics show that 80% of restaurants in the USA have at least one vegan option. And airport restaurants are no exception. In fact, in my recent airport travels, I've noticed that menus that feature one or two vegetarian options; either by asterisk or, better, it is highlighted by a box, maybe under the "healthy options" section.

It wasn't that long ago that I dreaded walking through airports, hungry and tired, with few possibilities of something to eat with my "restricted" diet. But now, what joy

I find in walking past the mini markets in airports and seeing wonderfully delicious-looking chickpea curry salad, vegan dumplings, or a falafel wrap. You don't even have to go to a restaurant to eat! Wow!

I wasn't even hungry when I bought the chickpea salad. I just couldn't get over that a delicious, healthy vegetarian option was right there for the taking. I saved it for later, and it was seriously very good!

My message here is embrace this change, and help the movement grow! We can all agree that airport food is vastly more expensive than it should be, but make the investment in buying vegan to help ensure even more healthy selections are available. Tell the people you are paying that you are pleased with the positive change; such compliments are usually met with a smile.

You Are What You Eat: Heart-filled Reasons to Be Vegetarian

Wow, so many sources online can give you plenty of examples of why we should ditch the meat.

The low cholesterol, low saturated fat, increased antioxidant and phytochemical contents diet can help keep you heart healthy, and so much more.

According to Down to Earth, here are the [top 10 reasons to become veggie](#):

- 1. Reduce risk of the No. 1 killer – Heart Disease

- 2. Cancer prevention
- 3. Lose excess weight and keep it off
- 4. Live longer, slow the aging process
- 5. Avoid toxic food contaminants
- 6. Reduce Global Warming
- 7. It Makes Economic Sense
- 8. Help end world hunger
- 9. Have compassion for animals
- 10. Enjoy the diverse, colorful, and delicious world of vegetarian cuisine

One of the biggest concerns people should have is the amount of money we pay as a nation and society to the healthcare industry. We wouldn't have this issue if we ate less meat. A vegetarian diet is responsible for a lower risk of diseases in general, and it is seriously tough in protecting against heart disease.

Ingesting the antibiotics and other drugs the livestock are fed cause untold damages to people's health. The repercussions of this can be felt in business with the increasing sick days workers must take to combat illnesses. Not to mention the side effects of prescription drugs that people take for lowering cholesterol.

I am amazed and enheartened to know that many plant foods naturally help prevent cancer. I hope that more people will consider giving up the meat and staying healthy, and for longer.

One myth that persists is, you won't get enough protein! It might surprise you that as a nation, we are eating way over the amount of protein the USDA recommends. "The average bone loss for a vegetarian woman at age 65 is 18 percent; for non-vegetarian women, it's double that. Researchers attribute this to the consumption of excess protein—the average meat-eating American woman eats 144 percent over the recommended daily allowance; the average man eats 175 percent more." [[Footnote](#)]

Besides the global warning item listed above, we have to also consider that a vegetarian diet helps to keep wildlife habitats from erosion. Overfishing can damage coral reefs, which has an impact ecosystem-wide.

You'll have more energy and [one study at the University of Warwick](#) found that people who ate more fruits and vegetables reported to have higher levels of wellbeing. Definitely worth a try for a week, right?

Many people have stated that their skin starts to glow when they give up the meat. Perhaps you are ready to give it a go?

Try it for a week and see how it goes. I'd love to hear what changes you feel!

I love the book *Veggie Protein Power* by HurryTheFoodUp. Their recipe for Spiced Carrot and Red Lentil Soup is so delicious! [The \\$4.95 ebook is totally worth it!](#)

Walking Ease – Use Google Maps to Track Your Distance

Yoga, running, and lifting weights are the physical activities I most enjoy, but I will always love walking. It is a seriously simple thing to do, and seriously effective in keeping our bodies in good health and good form.

Walking is well known to help strengthen bones and muscles, to improve balance and coordination, it can improve your mood, help you be more creative, burn a few calories, lower blood sugar, and best of all, walking [has been shown](#) time and again to decrease your risk of chronic disease.

Just imagine, walk your way to pain-free joints, reduced risk of cancer, lowered blood glucose and insulin resistance, and probably the best benefit: reduce depression and anxiety. Getting your body moving with just a simple walk (it doesn't have to be a power walk) will make huge long-term benefits in your life!

To maintain a healthy body (and mind!) it is recommended that we walk 10,000 steps each day. That's around 4.5 miles. That's a LOT. Especially if you aren't a particularly fast walker. I think that is part of the challenge... to take that much time each day to break away from the daily stressors in life.

This article isn't meant to be about the benefits of walking, though I can't help referring to them since they are pretty amazing. What I want to share with you, in case you don't already know about this, is the tool freely available at <https://www.google.com/maps> to help you track your walking goals. If you go to this page, it should default zoom into your current location. You can do a right click on your mouse and a popup window will appear that offers directions to/from here. At the very bottom of that list is the tool **Measure distance**. When you select this, a black ring will appear at the spot where you clicked. Go to another point on the map and click again and a dot will appear. Click one more time to make another dot and you will see a line appear with the distance from starting point to ending point. If you keep putting dots at turn points, you will see the distance add up and will clearly see how many blocks you need to go to get to your 4-5 mile point. If you make a mistake, or decide to take a different street, no worries... just click once on the dot that you want to remove, and it goes away, instantly recalculating your distance.

I really like using this tool before I set out for a run especially so I know which streets to take to make up my mileage. I also really appreciate this tool when I'm walking or running in a city where I don't live, where I don't know

the streets so well, so I can get a sense of where I'll be and try to find the more visually interesting route. If you click on the little box at lower left of the map page, where it says "satellite," you can see the terrain as well. This is great for when you want to see some nature along the way as well. You'll see in my screengrab illustration for this post that I was eager to cross as many bridges as possible for this walk. I was also lucky that day to have glorious weather and as it was spring time, I saw many trees blooming, and loved the sound of water rushing under me so often.

A hot tip for those of you with tracking apps: you can pre-plan fun drawings and designs using Google Maps, then set your app to track your route as you walk it. Afterward, you can take a screengrab of the app with the red line in a fun shape over streets. Great social media content right there, folks!

Your measured distance route might take you 10,000 steps, it may take more steps, or maybe you have a way to go to build up to that. See how far you can keep going; continue the positive impact you are having on your body and mind, and challenge yourself to go a certain distance daily. You will love the results no matter where your map takes you!

Speak, Think, and Act Truthfully

There are a couple "hiding spots" where police cars sit in my town, presumably taking radar. I'm one of these people who follows the speed limit signs, and I dare say this lesson is ingrained in me because I know police are lurking around any corner.

Do I drive the speed limit? Yes, of course I want to follow rules for the sake keeping my city safe. But I also know police have certain “hiding” spots. Other drivers are in a perpetual hurry and/or could care less about the rules of the road. Do they worry about getting caught?

The other day it occurred to me that the only reason police cars are in their hidden spots is to keep people honest. Seriously, that’s really how we’re motivated. We are good when people are watching, but not always so when the cameras are off and judgmental eyes are closed. It is as if we need each other to keep ourselves in check.

One of the virtues of Indian religions is *Satya*, the Sanskrit word for truth. One should be truthful in thought, speech, and action. *Satya* is one of the five *yamas* in Yoga. It asks practitioners to restrain from saying or even thinking falsehoods and to not distort reality.

Satya teaches us to be true not only to ourselves, but to each other. Being truthful means that we must know and accept ourselves and our intentions. This interesting article in [Psychology Today](#) explains that, as a society, we are 20% dishonest. We lie to each to make ourselves look better, or smarter, to avoid accusations, and just to keep the peace. Sincerity is not always easy when we are concerned with how others perceive us.

If you can be true to who you are, and consider the effect of what you say has on others, you will probably be more honest in general.

Being true to yourself is even more important than being truthful with others. If you can’t look at yourself and be honest about your mistakes and inadequacies, then how can you be honest with others? When you can learn from your mistakes in a non-judgmental way, you can help move the world forward.

When you know someone has lied to you, you have a hard time

trusting them again. And what's worse? That distrust reflects onto completely different people. How can I possibly trust Sally when Mary spouts lies daily? It is sad, but true. And the more the cycle is perpetuated, the longer it takes for us to be truly truthful.

Honesty can give you an almost unimaginable lightness. Truth means you don't have to hide behind anything. You can live guilt-free, knowing that you are an open book. Chances are if you radiate with honest intention, you will end up surrounding yourself with other truthful beings.

Celebrate your Satya with some truthful jewelry:
<https://www.satyajewelry.com/>

3 Yoga Asanas for Stronger Wrists

Some of us have weak wrists. Some of us suffer from carpal tunnel. Yoga can help.

First let me tell you a secret about developing stronger wrists with Yoga. There are several poses that you can use, which I'll explain soon. But first, if you haven't read my post [3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy](#), let me tell you something. The tip that doesn't get talked about enough is: keep intention in your fingers. Your fingers help your wrists bear the impact of supporting the weight of your body. When preparing for wrist poses, spread out each lovely extension as wide as you can, and, like your toes in Tadasana, lift the tips of your fingers and allow the power to radiate from your

fingers. If you put intention into sharing the responsibility of the weight, you will lighten your load.

Plank Pose

This is probably the most universal way to gain strength in your wrists. You can do from standard straight legs and back on toe tips and flat hands, or with knees to floor. Variations include side plank and Upward Plank Pose. Hold your version for at least 30 seconds. As you develop wrist and core strength, extend that period to longer times. Work a few minutes of Plank Pose into your day. Even when you are not exercising.

Crow Pose

I don't know about you, but I love this pose. It simultaneously reminds me of the fun I had playing in the yard when I was 7 years old and of how strong it makes me feel right now. I feel empowered knowing I can keep my body quiet in an awkward position. It gives me strength to keep my gaze on that spot just above my head on the floor as I count as many breaths as possible before coming back down, with as much control as possible. Start in a squat and place your wrists directly below your shoulders. Relax into the pose by putting your knees in your armpits, just to do a slight stretch. Then place your knee caps on the back of your triceps as you lean forward slightly. Slowly lift your toes off the floor. If this pose is new to you, you can work to just keep your toes 2-3 inches off the floor. As you gain more strength, your toes can come together a foot off the floor as you maintain a calm, steady breath as you hold yourself in balance on your wrists for an increasing number of breaths.

Handstand

This pose is, of course, not for the faint of heart, but wow, can it make you feel good! Most Yoga teachers don't want you to do a handstand until you are at least into an intermediate level, because it takes an extraordinary control to keep your body in balance during handstand. Normally you are not using the wall, but simply pushing your legs overhead in the middle of the room. But let's start small. Near a wall, start on all fours – hands flat on the floor and toes tucked under with

knees on the ground. Then push your knees up and back, as if in downward dog. When you are ready, flip one leg upward, with the other joining the first directly after. Your fingertips should be about 12 inches away from the wall. Once your heels are on the wall, keep your feet parallel to the floor and toes pointed. Keep the intention and the strength in your legs while maintaining a focus on the strength your fingers are providing to the pose. Once you have breathed 10 deep breaths, slowly, with control, bring your feet (legs straight) down to the floor. As you gain strength, keep in the inverted position for an increasing number of breaths. Generally Handstand is done towards the end of a yoga sequence, so if you are working on Handstand alone, you might want to take a few moments in child's pose at the end to restore your body before you come to stand again.

If you perform these three poses with some regularity, in just a few weeks you will note that your wrists are stronger. And most hopefully the pains you occasionally feel at night or even during the day in your forearms will melt away before long.

What We Can Learn from Sri Anandamayi Ma

If you don't know about this amazing woman, this Indian Saint, a Sage, some say a Guru, I am very happy to be the one to share a little about her with you! Anandamayi Ma was born in 1896 in East Bengal to highly spirited parents who named her Nirmola Shundori (Immaculate, Beautiful Goddess); her mother is said to have had frequent dreams of gods and goddesses during pregnancy and her father was a devotional singer.

As a young girl, her cheerful disposition inspired people around her to nickname her *Hari Ma* (Mother of Smiles) or *Khusir Ma* (Happy Mother). Anandamayi means “Joy-permeated” in English. She was sensitive and religious as a child and was prone to ecstatic feelings when she heard the sound of religious chanting.

Throughout her life she maintained these traits and people began to hear what she was saying as incredibly profound. She remained celibate during her marriage and her husband eventually became her devotee. She was not trained to be a guru, but because of her ecstatic states, she was seen as such. She didn't claim to be a guru, but rather said, “I am the same” woman later in life as she was as a small child.

Anandamayi Ma spoke about detachment from the physical realm and from specific religious devotion. Through her travels from town to town, she provided guidance and comfort to those who came to see her. Always welcoming everyone, she radiated bliss and acceptance. She inspired her devotees to serve others and to see themselves as divine beings.

Too bad such inspiring people are so hard to find these days. Someone truly accepting of everyone, who radiates with unlimited love and light, and inspires us to do well onto others. We could use more of these leaders in our world.

I hope you will follow these links to learn more about Anandamayi Ma and will dedicate a meditation or more to her wise life and light.

[The Children of Ma Anandamayi Foundation](#) works to give impoverished children in India a chance to learn and be part of a spiritual community. The link here provides more information on Anandamayi Ma.

[The Essential Sri Anandamayi Ma](#) is a great book that gives a wonderful history of her life, and includes many incredible photographs of the Indian Beauty.

And, if you can spare 30 minutes, here is a tracking-challenged documentary on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2aCc6i-TkM>

And finally a couple quotes:

“To find the Beloved is to find my Self, to discover that God is my very own, wholly identical with myself, my innermost Self.” ~ Sri Anandamayi Ma

“Realization must be all-comprehensive, all-embracing, and one must recognize one’s Self in everything.” ~ Sri Anandamayi Ma

Mix It Up, Pumping Up Your Workout at the Gym

Staying motivated is always a challenge. If you have access to a gym, it is helpful to mix up your routine from time to time. Some people want to do something different every time they step foot in a gym, others feel more comfortable using 2-3 machines and that’s it. This article will hopefully give you some basics on using new machines, and tips on ways to step up your game if you are already familiar with these machines.

I advocate for mixing up your routine, because, when you do, it sort of confuses your body and it has to work harder to compensate. This means you burn more fat. If you go to the gym regularly, you may or may not be using more than the treadmill and some weights. Consider incorporating equipment like a rowing machine, a stair climber, or elliptical into your regular routine.

Rowing Machine

Rowing machines are amazing because they provide a full-body workout. When you sit down secure the foot holds and set the resistance low, to 2-3. Keep your back erect and core engaged as your knees are bent and hold onto the handle. Start by pulling back on the handle, then push with your feet to extend your legs (keep knees bent slightly) and, leaning back, keeping your arms strong as you pull the bar up to your chest. Stay there for a moment, then bring your body back, first with your feet, then your arms following. Then do another and another, working your way up to 20 reps in a minute, or more! Keep your focus on your form, and keep all your muscles as tight as possible. You can challenge yourself to do more each minute, and then start to increase the resistance.

Rowing machines burn an impactful ~250 calories in 30 minutes. You work your arms, legs, back, and core muscles all while getting in some cardio. If you are a slightly competitive person, you can keep challenging yourself to do more by the minute. And love the sweat it brings! Added benefit to rowing is that it is a non-weight bearing exercise, which is really helpful to those suffering with arthritis, or stiff joints.

Elliptical

The Elliptical machine is popular at most gyms because it a low impact exercise. You benefit from the movement of running, but your joints aren't slammed the same as when you are running. It is a versatile machine, as you can go forward or backward, you can use your legs and arms, or only your legs, and it is perceived to be easier than running on the treadmill. If you want to use the Elliptical machine for cardio, then work to increase your strides per minute on the machine's screen – you should be aiming to get to about 150 strides per minute if you want to break a sweat.

If you are looking more for toning your thighs, press more forcefully with your heels to work your hamstrings and glutes,

and press more forcefully with your toes to tone your quads and the front of your thighs. Your core can get an extra workout if you go hands free and only use your feet to move the machine. Be sure that your top half is not twisting from side to side. You can help yourself stay steady by keeping your hands on your waist. Once you get the hang of the Elliptical, you can intensify your workout by pushing fast for 60 second intervals throughout your workout. Be sure to add a warm up and cool down to the interval.

Stair Climber

Doesn't really take a scientist to figure out that this machine is a great way to build lower-body strength! Anyone who has walked up 2 or more flights of stairs knows that climbing stairs is not for slouches. The great thing about a Stair Climber is that your leg muscles can get really strong. You are working your glutes, quads, calves, and hamstrings. To get the best results, keep your core engaged, and your spine erect. Keeping your body weight as an active force directly above your legs ensures that they work even harder to keep climbing to... um, nowhere?! If you have to use the handrails, only use them to keep yourself erect, and don't hunch over or you'll miss the full exercise.

Like with the Elliptical, you can target specific muscle groups by switching up how you place your feet on the stairs. If you want to target your quads, push off with the ball of your foot. If you are aiming to target the glutes and hamstrings, put more weight on your heels as you step up.

Because the Stair Climber engages your largest muscles, if you keep up pushing those very active muscles, you end up increasing your metabolism, and you lose weight that much more quickly. Heart pumping cardio plus lower body strength training equals burning more calories while you are working out *and* after you leave the gym, than just a cardio workout alone.

It is pretty obvious how you can take this exercise to the next level. Just increase how fast you climb the stairs. Go from slow climb to normal step to sprinting. In terms of variations, this is where it gets fun: step up to the side, double step up, or going backwards! If you can find some entertainment in the exercise, your time on it will go that much faster, and you'll be closer to reaping the benefits of increased calorie burn in your sleep.

Some fitness machines offer a fantastically complicated option of selections on a digital interface. Most machines have a "manual workout" mode. If you feel overwhelmed by what to enter, just hit the manual button, and find an up or down arrow to increase (and decrease!) your workout intensity. As you use these machines more often, you will discover various built in workout programs such as Fat Burning, Speed Intervals, Calorie Goal, Heart Rate Zone Trainer. You can try a new program each time you use the machine to discover which is your favorite. If you've already got a routine on one of these machines, please share below what makes it exciting for you!

Trouble Sleeping? Try the 7-4-8 Breathing Method

I don't usually talk about this, but after I was unexpectedly fired from my job of 18+ years, I felt the stress.

Where will I come up with the money for the mortgage? How will I find a job locally that will pay the same as I was making? Will I be able to make it?

It isn't surprising that I was losing hair and losing sleep.

During that time, I tried several techniques to help me sleep, and the need for trying was serious as on many days I was waking up at 4 in the morning and just couldn't get back to sleep.

One of the methods I tried, and I found worked best for me, is the 7-4-8 breathing method. Simply put, you breathe in while counting to 7, then keep your breath in for 4 counts, and finish by slowly breathing out for 8 breaths.

It takes some practice to go slowly but then you can absolutely reap its benefits.

This method was apparently pioneered by Dr. Andrew Weil, who recommends exhaling completely before you start and make a "whoosh" sound from your mouth as you do so. Then close your mouth and breathe silently 7 inhalations, keep the breath in for 4 counts, and then 8 exhalations. Do this 4 times total, or repeat until you fall asleep.

The movement of your body will send a signal of relaxation and calm to your mind. The regulation of your breath also helps relax your muscles as oxygen fills the lungs deeply.

Being truly focused on the three part count means your mind can't get distracted by our daily burdens such as bills to pay, mouths to feed, or lessons to teach.

Using this method, I find that by concentrating on the count that my body feels heavier and if I can be really still, I start to perceive my mind moving in rhythm to my breath and then fade screen.

This breathing technique has been shown to provide calm for overly anxious people.

When exposed to a triggering situation, anxious individuals can benefit from slowing down their breathing to help them

keep focused on, well, nothing.

At least hopefully not whatever was making them anxious.

Some people say if you are using this for anxiety (and I guess when you are alone!), that each time you finishing exhaling to blow out your mouth so that your lips flap and make a fluttering sound. I haven't seen why this is suggested, but my guess is that it gets the anxious energy out all the more fully.

If you are experiencing difficulty sleeping, try this method and see if it helps you fall asleep more quickly.

Download Heather's free 15-minute guided meditation to help you sleep! 