

body can induce a release of tension." In the beginning stages she stresses this continual slow movement. If students hold poses at all, they are instructed to tune in to their bodies and to come out of the hold at the first sign of any tension. Her thinking in this regard has been heavily influenced by the approach of T. K. V. Desikachar (see chapter 6).

When students are first learning the practice, Jnani errs on the side of being too gentle. She quotes Nischala Joy Devi: "If you give your students too much, you will give them indigestion. If you give them small morsels, you will increase their appetite." To keep the level of fatigue down, Jnani stresses a model of "exert, rest, exert, rest." Only when you've recovered from one pose should you move on to the next.

Here is a typical sequence of the poses and instructions Jnani teaches in cancer classes like the ones Erin attended.

Jnani begins each class with a "tuning in" process that she calls the Witness Practice, a step-by-step tour through the body. The idea is to check in with your physical body, with your mind and your thoughts, with your feelings and emotions. "Yoga teaches that by heightening your awareness—even of something painful—you can lessen its impact," Jnani says. She encourages her students to include this kind of tuning in process at the beginning of their home practices as well.

**EXERCISE #1. TUNING IN.** Start sitting up straight in your chair, getting as comfortable as you can. If your feet don't touch the floor, place a bolster beneath them so your legs can be passive and soft (figure 12.1). Let yourself relax as much as possible. When you are comfortable, begin the tuning in process:

1. Bring your awareness to the crown of your head and notice any physical sensations present in your scalp, in your face muscles, in your whole head. Whatever you notice, let it just be. In a similar fashion, draw your awareness to your neck, to your shoulders, and progressively through every part of your body. Jnani says, "You're simply saying hello, as if you are taking inventory as a completely disinterested party."

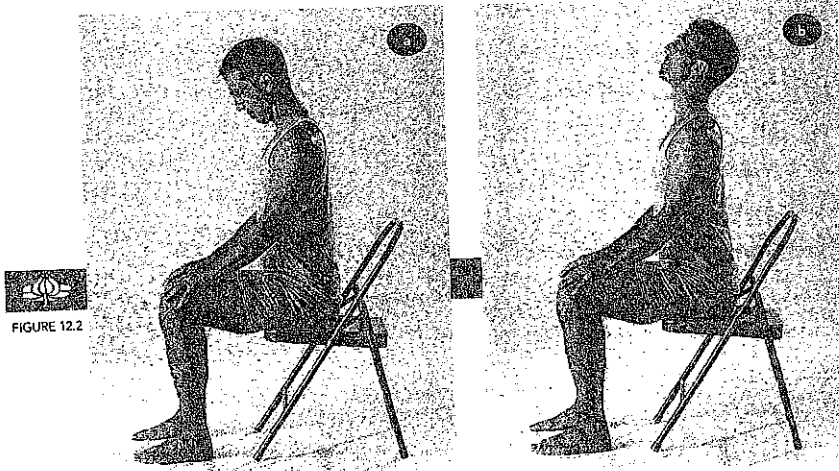


FIGURE 12.1

2. Bring your awareness to your emotional level. Notice if there are any feelings bubbling up for you that want to be acknowledged. Whatever's present, let it be.
3. Bring your awareness to your thinking level. Begin to become aware of each thought that pops into consciousness. Notice any habitual patterns of thinking, any recurrent themes.
4. Bring your awareness to your energy level, noticing whether you are feeling tired or restless or some combination of the two, or if you are feeling completely relaxed and peaceful.
5. Bring your awareness to your breath, without trying to control it. How many seconds does a natural breath take to come in? How many seconds does a natural breath take to go out?
6. Bring your awareness back to your physical body, noticing, for example, which parts of your body are pressing against each other or the chair.

Next Jnani teaches a series of seated postures for the head, neck, shoulders, and upper back. She introduces this head and neck series because most people have tension, if not pain, and some range-of-motion limitation in their neck and shoulders.

**EXERCISE #2. VERTICAL HEAD MOVEMENT.** Start with your head in a neutral position. As you exhale, let your chin drop down toward your chest (figure 12.2a). Then as you inhale, extend your chin gently up toward the ceiling (figure 12.2b). Continue at your own pace, using your breath, deeply and completely, and coordinating each steady



movement with each inhalation or exhalation. Take long, slow exhalations and full, deep inhalations. Jnani stresses that how far you can go is less important than the attention you bring to each point along the way. Repeat this action several times.

**EXERCISE #3. HORIZONTAL HEAD MOVEMENT.** Start with your head in a neutral position. As you exhale, turn your chin toward one shoulder in a horizontal line, for the full length of your exhalation (figure 12.3). As you inhale, bring your head to center. As you exhale, turn your head toward the opposite shoulder for the full length of your exhalation. Turn your head to each side a number of times, moving with your breath, and then return to center.

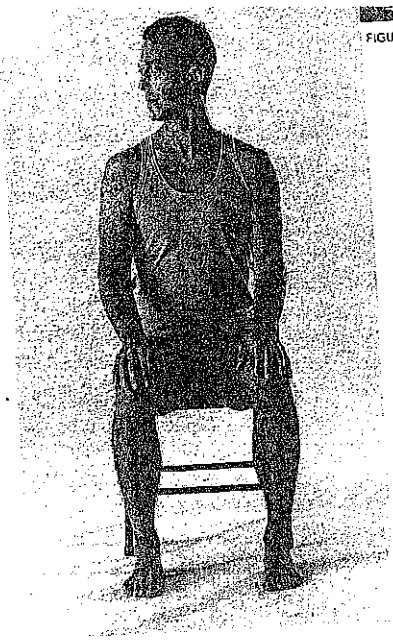


FIGURE 12.3

**EXERCISE #4. HEAD TILTING.** As you exhale, without rotating your head, drop your right ear down in the direction of your right shoulder for the full length of your exhalation (figure 12.4). Then inhale back up to center. As you exhale, drop your left ear down toward your left shoulder for the full length of your exhalation. Jnani says, "Even if the head only tilts a quarter of an inch to each side, that's where the benefit is. So accept what is, and just witness it and the breath."

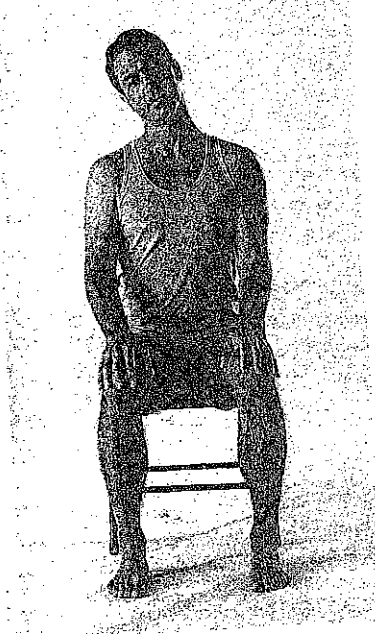


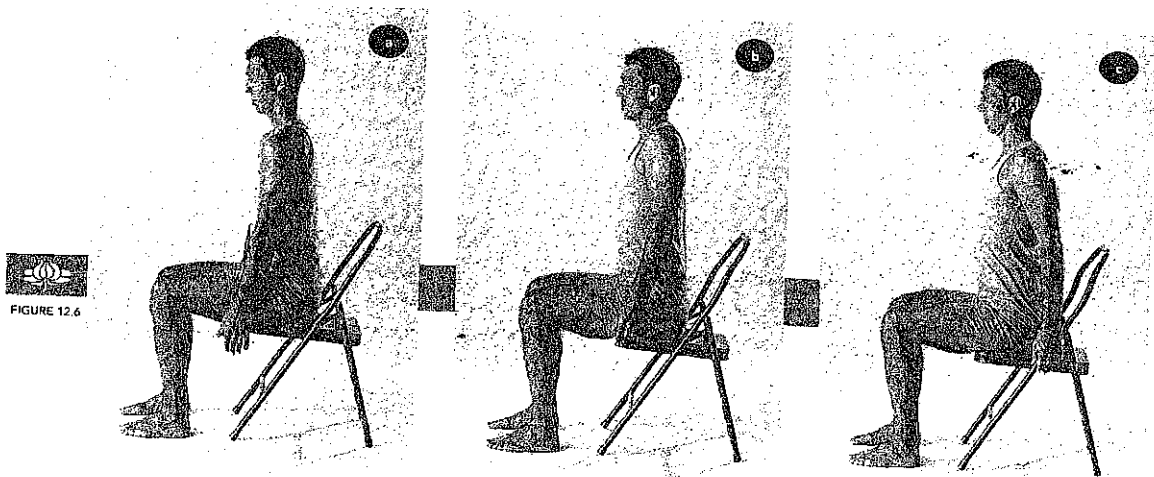
FIGURE 12.4



FIGURE 12.5

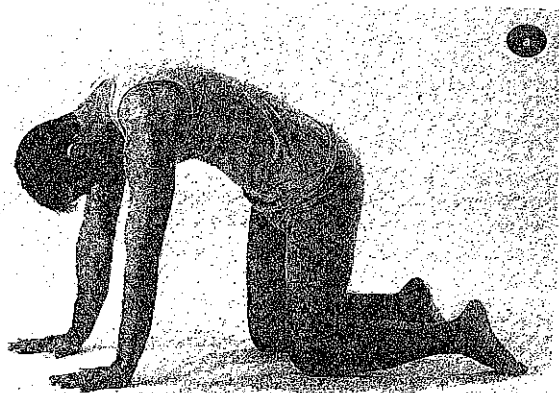
**EXERCISE #5. SHOULDER SHRUGS.** As you inhale, shrug your shoulders up to your ears, for the full length of the inhalation (figure 12.5). As you exhale, press your shoulders down toward your feet. Continue at your own pace.

**EXERCISE #6. FULL CIRCULAR ROTATION OF SHOULDERS.** As you inhale, bring your shoulders forward in front of your chest (figure 12.6a), and continue inhaling as you raise them up toward your ears (figure 12.6b). As you exhale, bring your shoulders back behind your chest (figure 12.6c), and continue exhaling as they come all the way back down, making a full circle.

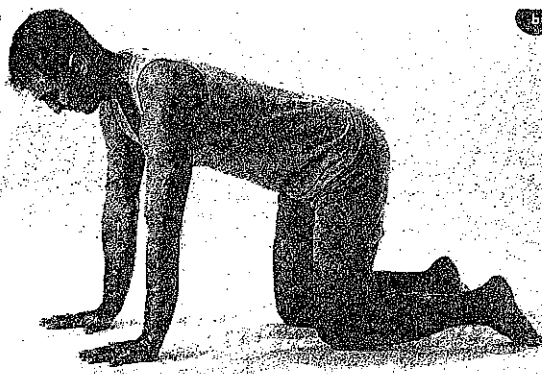


When you have finished these movements, begin to move your head, shoulders, and neck any which way, exploring their range of motion. Shake out your arms, and notice whether your shoulders feel different. Do you feel that you have more range of motion? If your shoulders feel tighter, you may have been trying too hard and should back off a bit next time.

FIGURE 12.7



**EXERCISE #7. CAT/TABLE.** Kneel on all fours on a padded mat or a rug to protect your knees. Place your knees directly below your hips and your wrists directly below your shoulders. As you exhale, tuck your tailbone in and under and round your back, lifting it as you draw your abdomen up and in. Tuck your chin in toward your chest (figure 12.7a). Then as you inhale, flatten your



..., extending your tailbone and the crown of your head in opposite directions (figure 12.7b). Repeat these actions several times, moving with your breath.

**EXERCISE #8. MODIFIED SHOULDERSTAND.** This pose gradually teaches the body to be upside down, and helps create strength and flexibility in the spine. Before doing the pose, be sure to remove any jewelry or clothing from around your neck. To set up for the pose, place a chair so that its back is against a wall. To come into the pose, lie on your back in front of the chair with your buttocks as close to the chair as comfortable and place your calves on the seat of the chair. Rest there with your arms alongside your body for at least a minute (figure 12.8a). Then, when you are ready, turn your palms down as close to the body as is comfortable and bring your feet to the front edge of the chair. Push off with your feet as you press down on your palms and lift your buttocks off the floor. Place the palms of your hands on your buttocks for support (figure 12.8b). Never strain, and be sure your breath stays smooth and regular. Begin by holding the pose for ten seconds, eventually working toward thirty seconds.

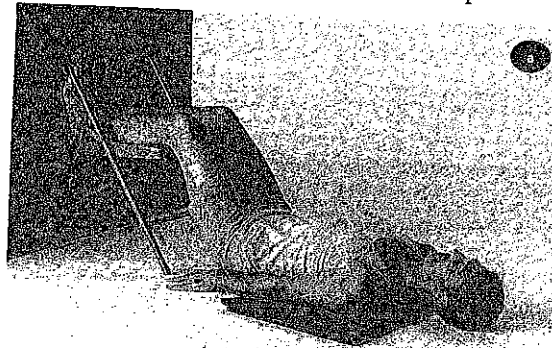


FIGURE 12.8

