

Using Yoga to Help Prevent Percussion Injuries

By Sherri Fleshner and Dr. Brad Meyer

Playing percussion is physically intense, especially in the specific areas of marching percussion and hand drumming. An important part of being a percussion educator is helping students avoid preventable injuries by helping them understand how to take care of their bodies.

This article discusses and illustrates yoga movements that will develop flexibility in different areas of the body. This will increase relaxation and decrease injury while playing. We have created several short YouTube videos that describe and demonstrate the poses mentioned below. To view these videos, visit Dr. Meyer's website, <http://www.Brad-Meyer.com/yogavids>, or search YouTube for "Using Yoga to Help Prevent Percussion Injuries."

FINDING YOUR PERFECT BALANCE

Mountain: Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Connect your feet fully on the ground as you start to stack your joints and vertebrae. As you reach the top of your spine, balance your skull on top of your spine, reaching the crown of the head upwards. Inhale and exhale through the nose.



Mountain pose helps with finding your balance and posture and helps to connect the body with the breath.

POSTURE AND UPPER BODY RELAXATION

Shoulder Rolls: Find Mountain pose. As you



inhale, bring the shoulders up towards the ears. Suspend the breath as you press the shoulders back. As you exhale, let the shoulder blades slide down your back. Continue through a few rounds of breath.

Shoulder rolls help to relax the muscles in the shoulders and help to relax the body and mind with the breath.

Crane in Flight: Start in Mountain. As you exhale, bend the knees and start to sit in an imaginary chair behind you. Feel the weight in your heels and keep the chest lifted. Cross your wrists in front of your legs. As you inhale, straighten the legs and open the chest as you bring your arms out to the side. Keep your elbows bent and fingers up. Continue to move with the breath.



Crane in Flight helps with opening the heart and chest and counteracting any slouching that you might have been doing throughout the day.

Down Dog at the Wall: Stand facing a wall at arm's length away from the wall. Bring your hands onto the wall with the fingers pointing up. Step back one step until you are leaning into the wall as if you were in a push-up position. Start to bring the tailbone back as your chest and head start to drop through your arms. Hold for a few breaths.

Down Dog at the Wall is used to help



stretch the shoulders and upper back. Doing it against the wall (versus the floor, as they do in yoga classes) helps to protect the wrists and hands.

SEATED STRETCHES FOR DRUMSET

Seated Cat and Cow: Sit at the edge of your chair, feet fully on the ground, and find Mountain pose in your upper body. Bring your hands to your knees. As you inhale, start to lift the heart and the chest while gently letting the head drop back (Cow). As you exhale, start to round your back and let your shoulders open around the body. The head can start to drop forward (Cat). Continue through a few rounds of breath.



Cat and Cow helps to stretch the upper back, lower back, chest, and neck.

Seated Twist: Sit at the edge of your chair, feet fully on the ground, and find Mountain pose in your upper body. Twists begin at the base of the spine and work up to the crown of the head. Begin twisting to the right, bringing your left hand across the right knee and your right hand on the seat back. Hold here for a few breaths. Untwist starting at the head and working back down. Repeat on the other side.



Twists are great for your spine and core. Twists help to bring fresh blood and oxygen into the body.

HAND AND WRIST STRETCHES

Moving with the breath and interlacing fingers: Sit or stand in Mountain. As you inhale, bring your arms out to the sides and overhead. Press palms together as you exhale your hands down to your heart. On your next inhale, interlace fingers and press hands out in front, palms facing out. Continue to move your hands overhead, palms up. Repeat as many times as you like, always moving with the breath.



This movement is great to loosen up the fingers, wrists, and shoulders.

Prayer Hands: Bring your hands, palms together, in front of your heart. Start to rotate your fingers and wrists until the fingers point forward. Take a few breaths here. Return your hands back to prayer position. As you exhale, start to release your hands down. Try to keep your hands and fingers together as long as possible before they separate.



Prayer Hands pose is used to loosen up the wrists and fingers.

Fist Wrist Stretch: Find a comfortable seated position and bring your palms to face up. Make fists with your hands and bend the wrists in towards the arms, flexing the wrists. Without changing the bends in your joints, turn your arms over and press the top of your hands into your legs. Feel the stretch travel through the backs of your hands and wrists. Hold for a few breaths. Release and gently shake out your hands.



The Fist Wrist Stretch helps to stretch out the wrists, hands, and forearms.

HIP OPENERS FOR TIMPANI PLAYERS

Sunflowers: Come into a wide leg stance, pointing your toes slightly out. As you inhale, bring the arms overhead and keep the legs straight. As you exhale, bring your hands to your thighs, bend your knees over your ankles, and hinge forward at the hips. Your spine is now parallel to the ground. Inhale, hinge your upper body back to center, straighten your legs, and bring your arms overhead. Continue through a few rounds of breath.



Sunflowers help to open the hips, groin, and shoulders. They also help to warm up the body by using some of the bigger muscles throughout the movement.

Kneeling Lunge: From a standing position, bend into a forward fold, keeping a bend in the knees and release your hands to the ground. Step the right foot back and let the right knee come to the ground. Your left foot is in front, knee is stacked over the ankle. The right leg is back, top of the foot on the ground and the hip is slightly in front of the knee.



Inhale and bring your arms overhead or to your front thigh. Feel the stretch in the front of the right hip. Take a few rounds of breath and release the hands down. Either switch sides or go into Lizard pose.

Kneeling Lunge is a great stretch for anyone who is seated for long periods of time because it helps to open the front of the hips and the glutes.

Lizard: From your Kneeling Lunge, bring both hands inside your front leg. You can keep the arms straight or start to bend the arms to sink deeper into the stretch. For another variation, you can tuck the back toes and lift the back knee off of the ground, straightening the leg. Release and do other side along with the Kneeling Lunge.



Lizard is another great hip opener. It is perfect for anyone who sits for long periods.

MISCELLANEOUS POSES

Camel: Start in Mountain pose. Make your hands into fists and bring them into your low back. Start to lift your heart and chest up to the sky as you come into a back bend, elbows pointing back.

Camel stretches your chest and shoulders and brings you into a nice backbend, which is a counter pose to any forward bending and leaning over.



Shoulder Stretch with Strap: Stand in a Mountain pose. Hold a strap between your hands, keeping the hands shoulder width apart. As you inhale, bring your arms and strap overhead. Once directly overhead, see if you can bring the hands a few inches back while keeping the arms straight. On exhale, release the arms. Repeat as many times as you would like.

Cobblers: Come to a seated position on the floor. Feel your sitz bones (in your buttock) underneath you. Start to bend the knees and release them out to the sides as you bring the soles of your feet together. Feel free to stay here or start to hinge at the hips and forward



fold. Hold wherever you feel the stretch and breathe into the stretch.

Cobblers pose helps to stretch the hips, glutes, and low back.

Supine One-Leg Stretch with Strap: Find a comfortable position on your back. You can have your legs straight on the ground or bent.

Bring a strap around the ball of the right foot and bring that leg into the air. Keep the leg straight as you hold on to the strap and release your upper body onto the ground. Start to point and flex the right foot, observing how it changes the stretch.



Then, release from the pose and switch sides.

This stretch helps to keep your back supported while giving you a nice hamstring and calf stretch.

CONCLUSION

The yoga poses described in this article are meant to be a starting point for individuals to begin exploring yoga and the numerous ways it can be beneficial to percussionists. Before starting any type of exercise program, be sure to talk with your doctor to make sure you are healthy enough to begin this or any type of exercise program. The best way to ensure you are doing these or any yoga poses correctly is to work with a trained yoga instructor either one-on-one or in a class setting. Yoga classes are offered in most areas and have differing levels depending on the level of intensity and experience you

have with yoga. If you do any type of yoga pose or exercise and you feel pain, stop immediately to avoid injuring yourself.

Sherri Fleshner has practiced yoga for over 15 years and has been teaching yoga since 2011. She has trained through YogaFit and the Living Yoga Program. She is a RYT-200 and has specialties in Therapeutic Back Care, Pre-Natal/Post-Partum, and seniors. She encourages her students to really listen to their body and to push themselves, but be mindful of their limits. Sherri also plays viola and violin.

Dr. Brad Meyer is the Director of Percussion Studies at Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, Texas). He is also a member of the PAS Health & Wellness Committee and Secretary for the Texas PAS Chapter. More information about Dr. Meyer can be found at <http://www.Brad-Meyer.com>. **PN**

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