

Empower_Move_ment

Mindfulness and Mobility

Empower_move_ment is the approach to a holistic form of movement that empowers you to know how our bodies move and function through direct experience. It is movement as a form of wellness, movement as a path to self-awareness, movement as a way to learn your capabilities, as well as movement as a form of self-expression. Mindfulness and Mobility focuses on movements to help bring awareness into our bodies.

This program is aimed at individuals who wish to have a more holistic practice. The exercises and drills are meant to help students to increase their body awareness. You will begin with very simple and slow movements that are highly accessible. This program is accessible for most levels of practitioners as my goal is to be able to improve the quality of movement for anyone seeking. I use these exercises as a way to improve my awareness for my other physical practices (Acroyoga, Hand Balancing, Acrobatics, and Dance) so it holds value even for those who are already very physical.

The purpose of this program is meant to help you to develop a more holistic connection to your body, breath, and self. I have put photos here to show the directions of movement. It is important that you do not try to mimic my movements, do your best to read the instructions, and then allow yourself space to feel into your body and how it would accomplish that task. Think of the movements as a way to research your body. The connection to yourself and your breath is the foundation of this practice. Do your best to use the exercises as a way to build greater awareness of your body. Think of each movement as a tool to help you learn to feel into your musculature, skeleton, and energy. Be sure to breathe deeply and if you find that you lost connection to your breathing just pause movement until you are refocused onto your breath.

Do your best to practice each day, no need to do the whole program every day just start with a small habit. Begin with a practice of centering which is the first exercise on the list. Then you could move into spine mobilization, then you may continue to move through the exercises until you feel ready to move on. You will also find a list of exercise combinations that you can follow in the Facebook group. On some days you might have more time and energy, on those days do the complete set of exercises. On days when you feel short on time, stressed, or tired still take some time to do the centering and still move through as many of the exercises as you have time or energy for that day. If you begin to move in your own way or get inspiration to explore the exercises differently than I describe them that would be great too, as a big part of this program is to remind you how to listen to your body. To come back to the ability to just move freely with fewer restrictions and fear...

Note that this program is meant to be about how you feel inside. So do your best to move with as much ease as possible. It is meant to empower you to move in YOUR body exactly as it is today, and begin to move forward towards a better connection to yourself and your body.

One last thing before you commence, when we begin the work of getting connected with ourselves and our body it can be at times challenging to make the connections. If you are having trouble feeling something know that it will come with time. Just spend a few breaths focusing on the area and if nothing comes up revisit it next time you practice.

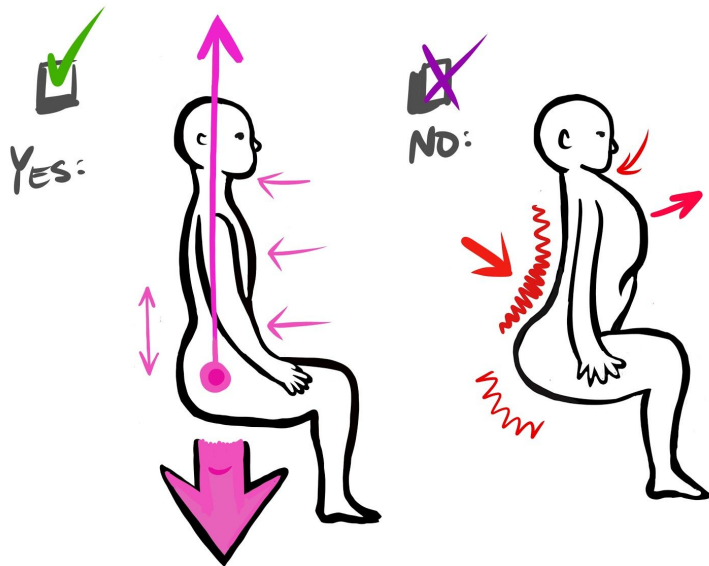
The exercises labeled in **BLUE** can be done by most people, if you have injuries or medical conditions best to check in with your health care practitioner before doing anything new to you. The exercises labeled in **PURPLE** are more challenging and you may need to do the **BLUE** labeled exercise for some time before you add **PURPLE** exercises to your routine.

Building awareness of how our spine moves

The spine moves in 7 directions. Flexion, extension, side flexion left and right, twisting left and right, and axial extension. **Flexion** is forward folding, forward rounding of the spine which tones the core and stretches the back. **Extension** is back-bending which tones the back muscles and stretches your front body and core. **Side flexion** is side bending and tones one side and stretches the other. **Twisting** is when we twist our hips and our shoulders in opposite directions twisting the spine.

Axial extension is the lengthening of the spine. This action is a bit harder to achieve best to try while seated and focus on pressing down through your hip bones and up through the top of your head at the same time. This motion is the act of creating more space between each vertebra or lengthening your spine. You may need to practice this one as it is a part of all four roll-ups. You can begin seated on a chair or on the floor, whichever way you can sit up with a straight spine. Next, close your eyes and feel into your spine. You will focus on lengthening from the base of your spine the tailbone. Visualize an upward flow from all four directions that travels up your spine and out through the top of your head. (this could be practiced any time you are seated to help improve your posture and strengthen your core and back)

Practice exercise,



Notes:

1. Centering

Make sure to be in a space where you feel comfortable. Lay on your back with your legs and your arms in a position that feels comfortable for your hips and shoulders. Close your eyes and begin to focus on breathing. Just slow inhales and exhales. Allow your body to completely settle into the floor. Centering is a great place to practice shifting your focus and energy through your body. Allow your focus to move to the place of least effort in your body first (somewhere with increased tension or pain will usually draw you in). Take time to just allow your attention to stay with this spot in your body. Do your best to just be an objective observer, no need to figure out how to change anything. Avoid labeling the sensation as good or bad, practice being ok with your current state, that way you can be present with your current state. Next, scan throughout your body and notice the areas that you may be more challenging for you to feel. When you feel like taking a stretch like you do when you wake up in the morning this is the best time to start moving through the program. Any movements you are doing as a part of this program should have a feel similar to centering, meaning that you are feeling and shifting your attention into your body as you do different movements.

Spine mobilization

The 4 roll-ups

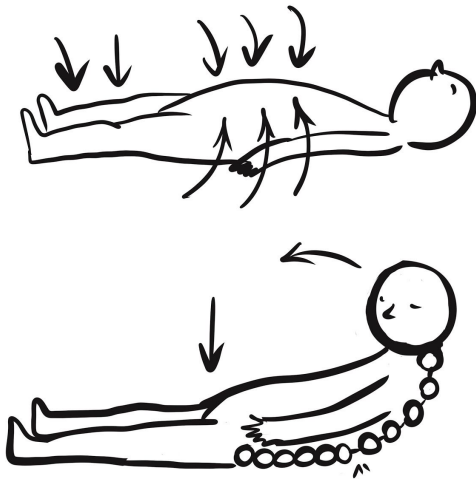
Complete 3 rounds on each side with a full breath in between sets. All of the roll-ups should be done without feeling any acute pressure (pinching or sharp sensations) in your spine. If you feel anything like this it is important to not continue to move forward with the exercise. If you feel acute pressure or pain in your spine, please think more about adding more space in that area (axial extension) as well try to calm your muscles as well as pause motion and continue slower. If there is still a sense of sharpness or pain that is worsening please discontinue the program until you check in with your practitioner (doctor, chiro, physio, or shaman).

2. Flexion roll up

You can begin laying on your back and from here bring your attention into your neck and upper spine. Begin to tuck your chin and feel your upper spine move into flexion, then continue by shifting your attention from your neck to your upper back, allow space at each point to feel how your body responds to the command you have given it. Give time to each spot you focus on to move to its fullest capacity before moving to the next place. As you lift try focusing on the floor and how the pressure shifts as you slowly rise. Every vertebra above the point of contact will raise, **lengthen**, and curve, the ones below will stay heavy and grounded until your focus lands on them. Move to an edge that is challenging but not creating excess tension in your body. Remembering to lower with equal control and focus. (image on the following page.)

Visualization - Try visualizing a line that travels the length of your spine that from the top begins to roll into a circle at the pace that your body can follow. As you reach the edge slowly unroll back to a straight line.

Try to move slower on each repetition...



Notes:

3. Side Flexion roll-ups

Start on your left side, left arm extended forward right arm rests on your side body. Legs can be extended, and it is ok if the legs lift off the floor as a result of the roll-up. Allow your head to lower before you begin. Begin by focusing your attention into your neck, then start to curl up by slowly lifting your head, giving yourself space and time to lift as high as is comfortable before shifting your attention to your upper rib still curling up. A reminder that every vertebra above your point of focus will raise, **lengthen**, and curve to your edge. continue to roll up as high as you can without changing planes, or using momentum. Again remember to lower with equal focus and control. Then repeat on the other side.



Notes:

4. Extension roll-ups

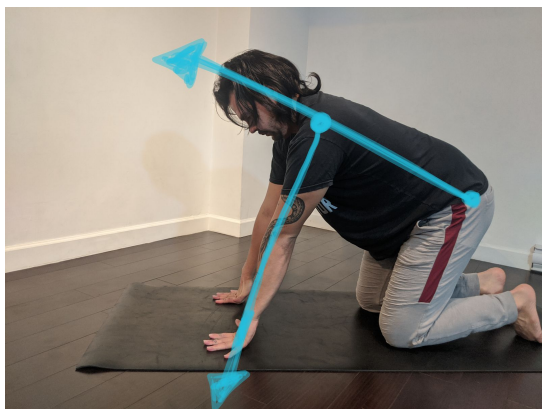
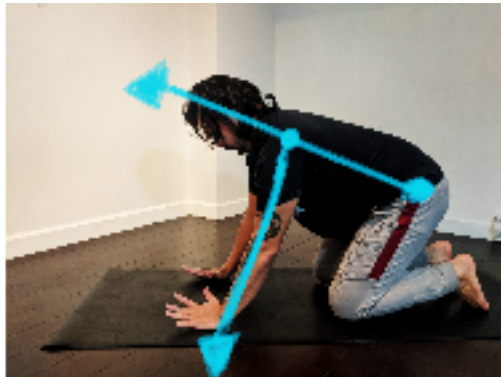
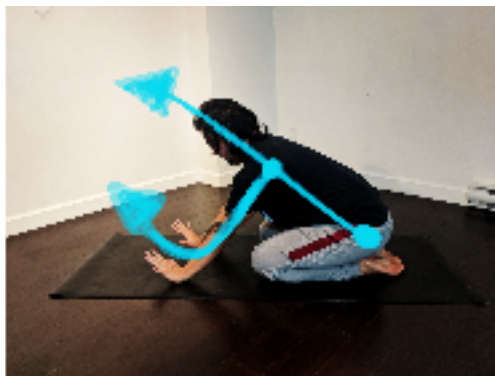
Begin laying in a prone position (front body) forehead connected to the floor if it feels comfortable (alternatively you can have your chin on the floor). Begin by bringing your focused attention into your neck. Then begin to roll up by sliding your chin forward, once your neck is at its maximum range, bring your focus lower down your spine following the movement of your neck, allowing each vertebra the time it needs to move fully before shifting to the next place. As you shift your focus down your spin remember that all vertebrae above your focal point will raise, **lengthen**, and curve. Continue the movement through as you roll up as high as you can without momentum or the help of your arms. Again be sure to move with equal focus and control on the way down too.



Notes:

5. Palm Circles

Begin with the heel of your hands connected to the floor and fingers pulled back as far as you can move. Press into the floor and focus on the point of connection with the floor. Then While focusing on this point begin to shift the pressure towards the outer edges of your hands at the same pace with both hands. As you move to the outer edge focus the point at the heel of your hand first then slowly move up towards your pinky finger knuckle. Continue to shift your focus and pressure through each knuckle one at a time. Lifting the heels of your hands as high as possible as you come up to the knuckles. Once you come to your index finger try to give some pressure through the inner edge of your palm as you make your way back to the start. Do five circles in one direction, and five circles in the other direction. Try to focus as much of your attention as you can onto the point of contact with the floor, as well move at the same pace with your hands.

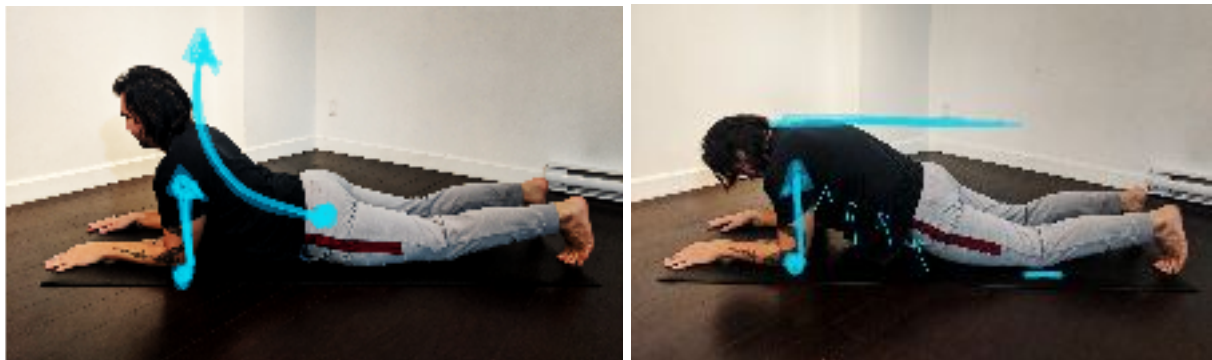


Notes:

Shoulder Stability And Range of Motion

6. Elbow plank roll-ups

Begin in a prone position with your elbows under your shoulders and hips resting on the floor. As in a plank but with your hips resting on the floor. Begin to sequentially lift your spine while pushing down through your elbows. Try to focus on each vertebra lifting as high as possible before shifting your attention to the next one. There is no need to lift your whole spine, this is meant to slowly condition your shoulders and core. If at any point there is pain in your shoulders or excessive tension pause and see if you can move slower or maybe it is your edge for the day. If you do happen to lift all the way to your pelvis then you can lift your knees into a plank as well. On the way down make sure to lower from the bottom back up to the top one vertebrae at a time as best you can.



Notes:

7. Low Push up rolls ups

This is identical to the elbow plank roll up, except it is adding in more work for your arms. Take this one much slower as it does add much more pressure to your shoulders. Also if you are doing the elbow plank version that will help to build strength for this variation. Begin in a low push up position, press into the floor with your palms, and begin to lift your spine just as you did in the elbow plank roll-up. This variation be sure not to extend your arms, keep your elbows bent at a 90-degree angle. Just as in the elbow plank be sure to lower slowly back down from the bottom up. (images on the following page)



Notes:

8. Wall Shoulder opener

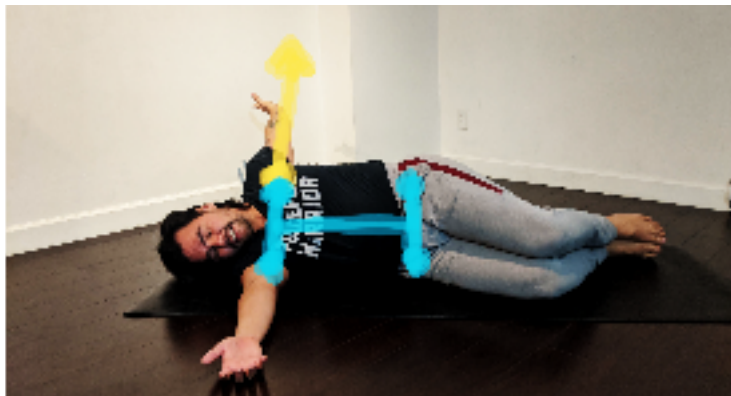
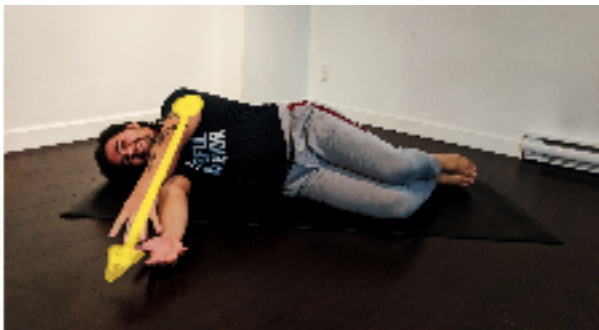
Begin with your feet one foot away from the wall. Place your upper back and head against the wall. Lift your arms until the backs of your hands connect to the wall or as close as you can make it with your arms straight. Next, keep your hands on the wall as you begin to slowly press one vertebra at a time to the wall. Just as in our other spine focused exercises you want to do your best to move sequentially and keep your focus in your body. You will make your way towards your hips. Pausing at any point that your arms and hands start to move away from the wall you can stop and return to the start position. This movement is especially important for those that need to open their shoulders to do handstands.



Notes:

9. Shoulder circumduction

Begin Laying on your right side with your hands together extended in front of you at 90 Degrees. Next, bring your focus into your left shoulder, and relax your right shoulder as it will not be the focus. Your left shoulder will be the focus of this side. Keep your left palm down as you slowly move your arm up, making sure to reach through your fingers so your shoulder and arm are fully active and extended. As your arm reaches an overhead position try to keep your palm facing down as long as you can, eventually you will need to very slowly rotate your palm to face up as you continue to reach behind you. Be sure to keep your shoulders vertically stacked through the full rotation. Once you reach the beginning position go the opposite direction before changing sides.

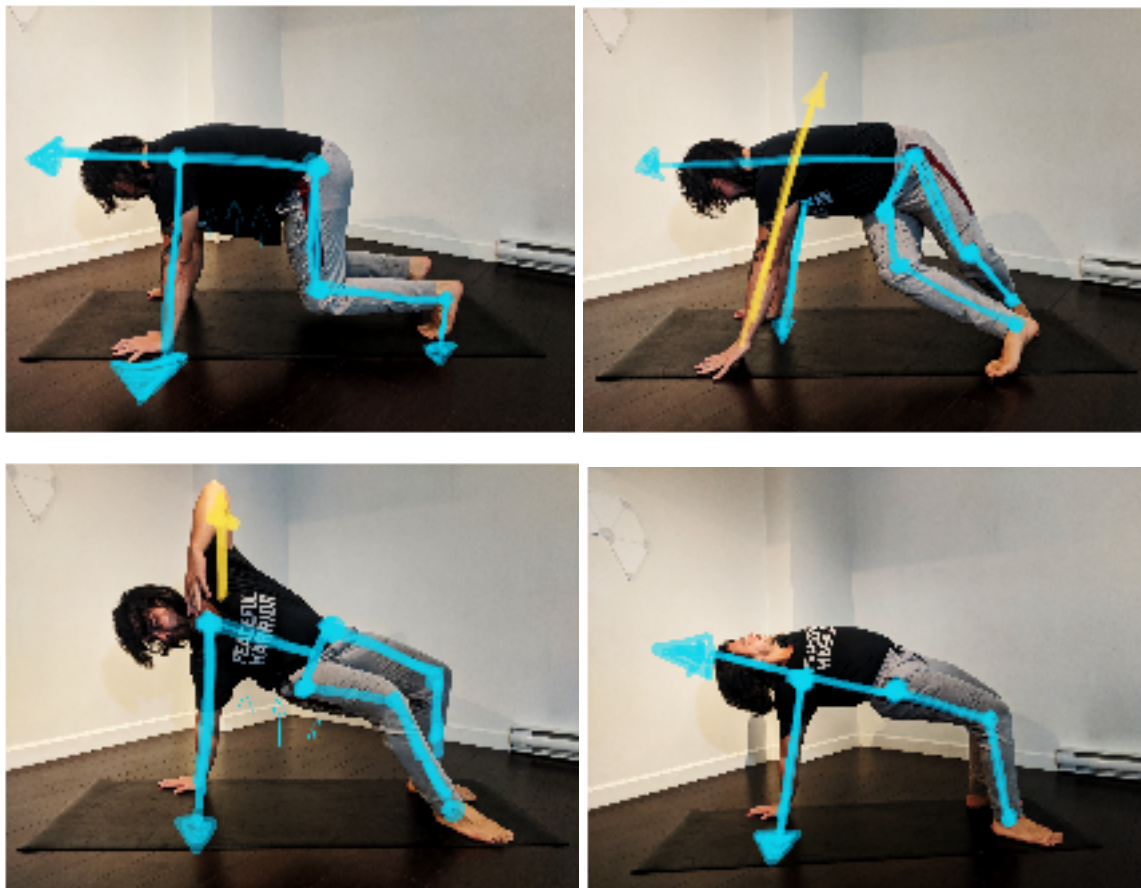


Notice the hips and shoulders stay vertically stacked throughout the motion.

Notes:

10. Shoulder Single Arm Range of Motion

Begin on all fours with your knees lifted, and legs bent. Push all four points of contact into the floor and lift the front of your body into your back. If you are very new to weight-bearing you can take your time shifting into one arm support of your body weight. To do this slowly shift more of your weight to the right and as you do push more through your feet and your right arm making sure to keep your shoulders **protracted**. You will notice that some pressure will come out of your left hand, at first no need to even lift your hand. Then shift to the left and repeat the steps. After you feel like your shoulders and arms can handle the full weight on one side. Then you can do the same weight shift to the right side only this time you can cross your right foot to the left side which will allow you to twist your hips to face up like in a bridge, as your weight comes onto your right arm and through your core. Then focus on moving your left arm more open as you begin to slowly work towards stacking your shoulders first and then maybe opening your chest up towards the ceiling. *As you do this please know that you can pause at any point and build up your range of motion over time no need to do it all on the first day.* Come back slowly to the start position and switch sides.



Hip and Leg Mobility

Internal and External rotation

11. Laying window wipers

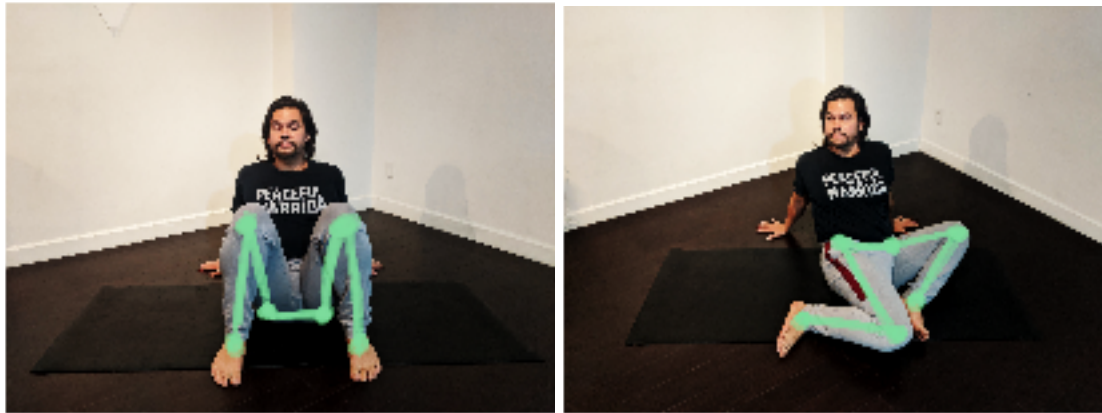
Begin laying on your back with your knees bent knees touching and your feet wider apart, make sure you do not feel any pain in your knees. Then take a moment to drop your focus down into your hips knees and ankles, and relax your body. Next, you can very slowly move your knees both to the right moving both knees towards the floor, they may not make it all the way down. When you are moving to the right your left hip is moving into internal rotation and your right hip is moving into external rotation. Move as far as you can make sure that you do not feel any pain in your hip, knee, or ankle joints, (pain meaning sharp sensation). Then come slowly to the start position and go the other way. Move back and forth at least 3 times *SLOWLY* in each direction. This exercise is meant to help you build a stronger connection to your hips knees and ankles. It should feel very light and as you move back and forth you can do your best to become more relaxed.



Notes:

12. Seated Window Wipers

Begin seated knees apart and bent have your right foot in front of you, and your left foot behind you. This means that your right leg is in an externally rotated position and your left leg is in an internally rotated position. Please make sure that your hips, knees, and ankles are free from pain before beginning to move. Have your hands on the floor behind you to support some of your weight. Then begin to slowly move both knees up at the same pace just like in the Laying variation of wipers. Move from right to left and left back to right. Just as in the laying down variation make sure this movement is a relaxing one. (images on the following page)

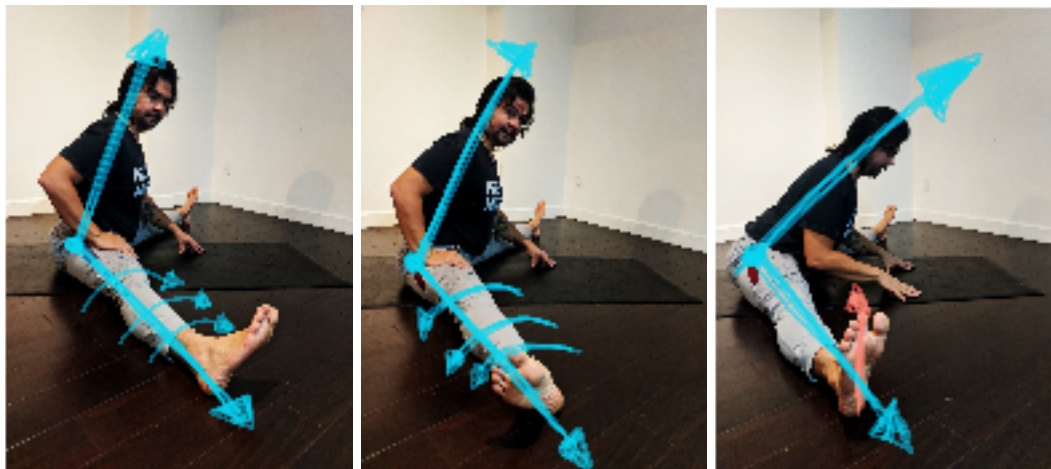


“Eventually after some practice, you may no longer need the support of your hands to do this exercise, no rush to get there just do what feels good in your joints and body.”

Notes:

13. Pancake with Rotation

Begin Seated with your legs straight and as wide apart as feels comfortable. Sit with your spine straight, if you are not able to sit fully straight you might sit with your back on the wall to start. Then you can focus first on your right leg, you will try to roll your right leg internally (inner knee/ big toe towards the floor) hold for 5 seconds. Then roll your right leg Externally (outer knee/ pinky toe towards the floor) hold for five seconds. Next, follow the same instructions for your left leg. After doing both legs try to move forward a few inches toward your forward fold, while holding your feet like in the third image below. . When you stop moving hold your body in the position and repeat the internal and external rotation holds on both legs, then try to go a bit deeper into the pancake.



Notes:

14. Forward Fold / Squat Range Builder

Begin standing in a forward fold. Have your feet parallel to each other, as your feet will be the point of connection for this drill, it's important that through this exercise that you keep your feet in the same position. Press down into the floor through your feet, at the same time press your elbows into your legs with your arms bent and palms facing up. Next simultaneously push your elbows down as you lift your hips, moving deeper to your edge in the forward fold, this should feel very active though your whole body. Once you reach your edge you can stay in the forward fold, you can begin to sit your hips down towards a full squat, some will feel this is “easy” if you have very open hips. Try to make sure that at no point during this movement that you are resting in a squat, all of the muscles in your legs and hips should work to the bottom and back up. This is when you need to watch and feel into your feet, if you notice your toes turning outwards pause on sitting any lower for now. Just lift slowly back up into a forward fold and repeat. Your range will change with each repetition very minimally.



Notes:

15. Side-Unders

Begin standing with your feet wider than your hip-distance apart (the wider apart your feet the more challenging this exercise will become). Slowly begin to shift yourself to the right as you shift to the right make sure to push extra through your right foot and until most of your weight is over your right foot. Then you can pick up your left foot and stand on one leg gather your legs and keep your left knee bent. Next, bend your standing leg touch your left toes to the floor, and slide your left foot back to the start position. From here begin to shift your body through the middle but imagine you are going under a branch so you will need to squat low and bring your chest down as you pass through the middle. Once you are more to the left begin to lift your chest and your right leg slowly. Again gather your legs and knee your right knee bent and foot off the floor. Move side to side a minimum of three times.



Notes:

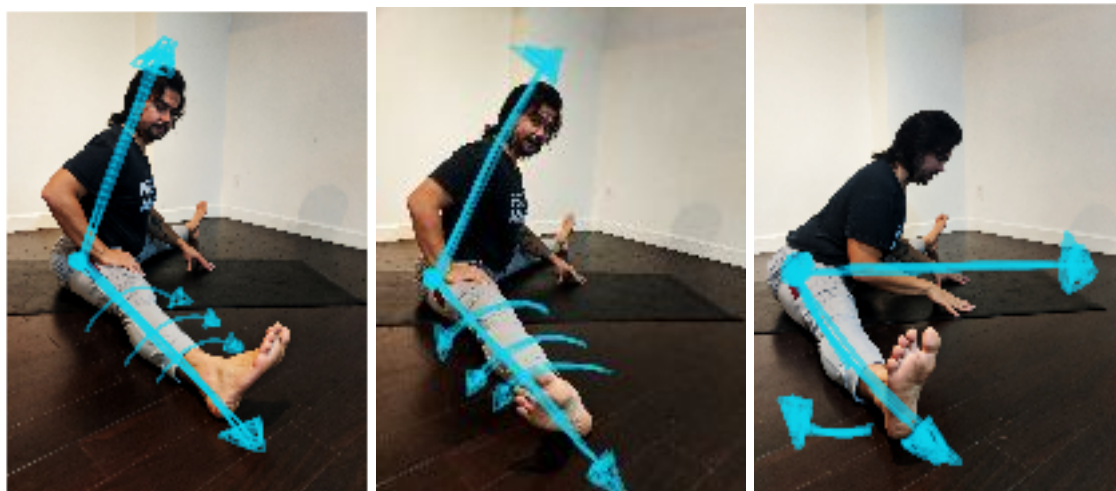
“Important note for the side-unders, make sure that you feel that you are using your muscles on all sides of your legs. You can check by trying to bring your attention into the areas you are not sure about.”

Splits All Ways

“Working on splits may not be needed for everyone, if you are doing the program for health and just to get your body moving again these last two are not needed. After some time doing the previous exercises, these will become safer and more accessible.”

16. Center Splits

Begin seated with your legs straight and as wide apart as feels comfortable. Then repeat the steps from the Pancake drill, only after you do the internal and external rotation holds on both sides, you will attempt to gently push your hips slightly forward while pushing your feet away from you. (you can also do this with your feet against the wall)



Notes:

17. Front Splits

For this exercise, you will need to have socks on and be on a floor without carpets preferably. Begin with your right leg in the front standing on your left knee (I would recommend padding under your left knee). Next very slowly slid your right foot forward making sure to keep your hips neutral, so no internal or external rotation on the front or back leg. Slide to an edge that you can pull yourself slowly back in.

“Please move less than your full splits you will not just be using flexibility you will also be putting your muscles under strain to get stronger as well. You might start out moving a very small distance that you can build up over time. Perhaps even being in the starting position will challenge your balance.”



Notes:

18. Relaxation

The last exercise is best done lying in a comfortable position, be sure that once you choose the position you will be still. Begin by focusing on your breath, Next just focus on observing your body in stillness. Have the intention of relaxing more fully and let your attention scan through your body to bring a softness to each area you focus on. You may want to play a song or put on a timer so you can choose a length of time 5 mins, although 15 mins are best to give yourself time to fully relax.

Conclusion

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me. I have put much care into its creation of this program. I enjoy doing the exercises as a way to help me slow down, breathe, and listen. They have helped me to move with greater ease through the practices that I love. I hope that they bring you a sense of wonder about your body, as well as a sense of empowerment as you begin to strengthen your connection to your body, mind, and spirit. If any questions arise at all, post them in the Facebook group. As well feel free to reach out to me personally at devonfrench87@gmail.com.