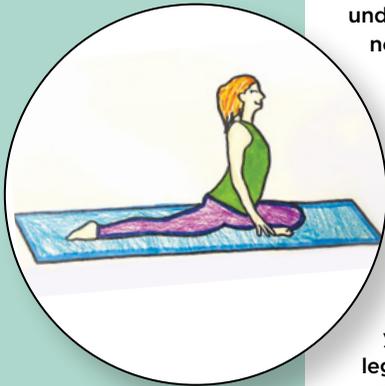


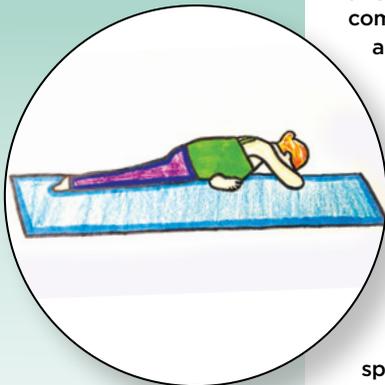
mat and your spine and neck gently lengthening forwards. Allow your neck to feel comfortable and relaxed. You can close your eyes and take 5-10 deep breaths here; feel the chest expanding gently with each breath. When you are done, bring both hands on top of each other and allow your forehead to rest back on top of your hands.

5. PIGEON POSE OR RAJ KAPOTASANA

This is a wonderful pose to stretch the lower back, achieve some hip opening, and release any pressure in the piriformis muscle. It is a slightly more advanced pose. If you have undergone total hip replacement, this pose is not for you. If you have any major limitations in hip movements due to arthritis or any injury, talk to a yoga teacher who can offer some preliminary poses to slowly prepare you for the pigeon pose.



Begin in downward dog pose on your mat, with your buttocks elevated and weight spread evenly across both palms and soles of the feet. If you cannot maintain flat feet, raise up onto your toes. Shift your weight onto the left leg and bring the right knee in toward the belly and down to the mat. Let your right ankle fall somewhere in front of your left hip as your left leg slides back comfortably without any discomfort of hips or knees. Untuck your left toes. Add cushioning or support under your right hip if needed to keep hips level. Inhale as you rise up and lengthen your spine, using yoga blocks or supports under your hands for comfort. Stay in this pose for 5-10 breaths with a focus on expanding your chest.



For a deeper stretch after lengthening your spine, come down to the mat with your chest and forehead. You can place your arms back by your side or rest your forehead on both hands in front of you and exhale tension from your right hip for 5-10 breaths. Repeat on the other side.

As you stretch the piriformis muscle you will feel a nice release, allowing more space for the sciatic nerve and releasing excessive pressure on it. If the cause of your sciatica is nerve impingement related to piriformis tightness, you will feel immediate relief using pigeon pose. Take time to come out of the pigeon pose slowly and mindfully. You can rest in child's pose after or allow yourself to go into shavasana (corpse pose), lying on your back on the ground with your eyes closed.

Illustrations by Sana Iyer, a 6th grade student at Northborough Middle School

Ritu Kapur is an occupational therapist, a Yoga teacher and the owner of Sohumi Yoga and Meditation, who has offered weekend and day-long yoga retreats in New England for the past 8 years. She is currently offering live online group and private yoga classes. Visit www.sohum.org or email Ritu.Kapur@Sohum.org.

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