

## Clever Yoga Tricks

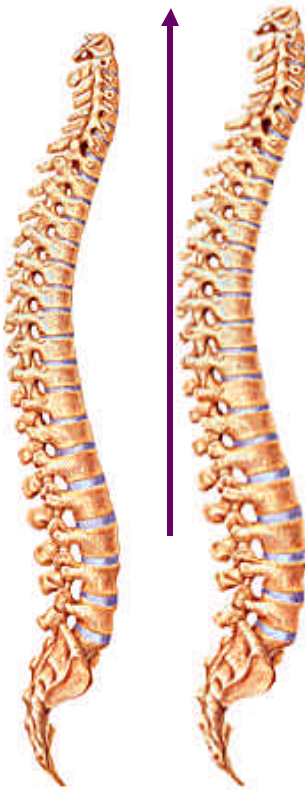
### Elongation of the Spine

We all have the image in our minds of the yogi who bends forward like a piece of paper folding in two. Then the legs and arms zip in and out of that folded frame, until, *voilà!*, Yoga Pretzel.

OK, well, maybe they've practiced a bit. However, much of what they do isn't about practice or noodle-like flexibility or sitting on mountain tops. It's just a bit of know how.

Included in that know how are certain fundamental principles that give your better extension and reduce your risk of injury.

#### Starting with the principle of Elongation of the Spine.



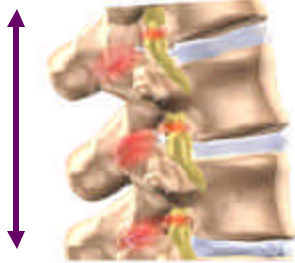
Elongation of the Spine is the action of slightly separating the vertebrae, the bones, in your back. It's what you get when you strap yourself to a Medieval torture rack and tell people to Pull! When they're done, you walk away taller. However, the same results can be achieved much more simply than that, with far less help from modern technology.

Think of your spine as a series of pearls on a string. The pearls are held together by knots in the string, but the string itself is slightly elastic. If someone pulls gently on the string, the entire string gets a little longer, and the pearls separate a bit.

The same thing happens if you stand a little bit taller. Imagine that elastic string going up the center of your spine and coming out the top of your head. Imagine someone pulling on it. You 'grow' a little bit taller.



With your spine, the bones that protect your spinal column have ridges. If you bend backwards, sooner or later, these bones bump into each other and stop you from bending any farther. However, if you stand a little taller, separating the bones a bit, then you can bend backwards even farther before the bones stop you.



### **This elongation or spreading has several effects:**

? By separating the bones in your back, your vertebrae, a little, you can fold backward and twist much more before those bones bump into each other and stop you.

? Elongation takes some of the pressure off your lower back. That means you can fold forward and backward farther before your lower back has had enough of this, thank you very much.

So, you can see that Elongation of the Spine will play an important part of, standing poses, sitting poses, forward bends, back bends and twists. And, what you might not expect, is it plays an important part of reclining poses and in good breathing as well. This is because an elongated spine takes pressure off the lower back, so you can lie down more comfortable. It also opens up your chest and abdomen more, which allows better breathing.



### **How Spine Elongation Should Feel**

Elongation isn't about willing yourself to be 10 feet taller. It isn't meant to feel like *work*. All you're doing is feeling the very, slightest separation between your vertebrae. You should feel a fraction of an inch taller and you'll probably feel straighter, but not like your muscles are working harder. Your breathing might feel a little looser. Your head and neck are 'floating' on top of your shoulders.

### **See our notes on:**

Sitting well; Standing well, (Mountain Pose 1 and Mountain Pose 2); the basics of Twisting poses; and the basics of reclining poses.