

I know, not the most glamorous yoga posture, but Lion pose is unique for its ability to release tension where your spinal column joins your skull. It releases muscles and tissues that connect your upper spine to your head. That's great for helping posture, breathing and relieving headaches. More importantly, once these muscles become toned and relaxed, your upper neck will feel a lot looser. It will feel like your head is floating on top of your spine, which is more how your head and spine should be with each other. As you release these muscles, you will have better communication up and down the spinal column and better circulation between your head and your body. Lion is also the 'counter pose' or 'complementary pose' for Butterfly Breathing; (it stretches the muscles in the opposite direction). So it's important for fluid movement, good breathing, a healthy spine, clearer thinking and better balance.



Personally, I think this pose also promotes a sense of daring and adventure! More points if you can do this one in public or even in front of a mirror! Beauties of this pose aside, Lion is almost impossible to teach – it inevitably gets the entire class laughing! So if you're serious about getting to finish the Lion stretch, I suggest you find ways to do it in private. (Although, if you want to do it at a stop light, it could make quite a conversation piece for the people in the car next to you!)

Try it at home, then the kids and the dog all want to join in. (The dog will think you're playing and will want to lick you!) The key to this pose is to really 'go for it'. Imagine the back of your tongue trying to reach all the way out into the light of day!

Main Benefits: Loosens neck, jaw, connection to head, creates looser breathing.

Body Parts Used by This Posture: Neck, Shoulders (Trapezius), Eyes, Face, Jaw, Throat; optional fingers, arms & toes.

Combines Well with: Butterfly Breathing, Neck Press, Neck Stretch

Best Breathing Theme Matches: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 15a, 15, 15b, 18

Best for Flexibility or Strength: Flexibility & Strength

Best if Movement Oriented or Static: Static

Traditional Pose Type: Extremities

Energy Center Used: Throat, (and somewhat Third Eye)

Builds You Up for: Butterfly Breathing, Neck Press, Neck Roll, Neck Stretch, Dead Bug, Standing Leg Stretch 2 & 3, Breathing Exercise 18, Relaxed Breath 2, Breathing Warm Up 1 & 2

Warms You Up for: Butterfly Breathing, Neck Press, Neck Roll, Neck Stretch, Dead Bug, Standing Leg Stretch 2 & 3, Breathing Exercise 18, Relaxed Breath 2

Good for These Practice Goals: Arthritis; Singing; Voice Work; Better Breathing; Chair Friendly, Office Friendly; Energy Healing; Flexibility of Face, Neck, Trapezius; Strengthening of Trapezius & Face; More Energy, Pregnancy Yoga; Senior's Yoga; Clearing, Cleansing & Energizing of Throat & Third Eye Chakras; Warm Up for Throat & Third Eye Chants; Meditation Warm Up

Recommended for These Health Conditions: Frozen jaw, frozen shoulders, asthma, chronic headaches & migraines, headache or migraine happening at the moment of doing your routine, hypothyroidism, menopause & pre-menopause, pregnancy - throughout, rhinitis, TMJ, whiplash recovery

Avoid Under these Health Conditions: Not for people with compromised necks, including those with fresh whiplash and those with osteoporosis or arthritis in their necks.

Start

Standing, sitting, lying down
(Standing or sitting are best)

- Take a moment to settle into place
- Reach your arms well out to your sides and spread your fingers wide.
- So that you feel a stretch starting all the way up your fingers, up your arms, up your shoulders, along your neck and into your jaw. (This step will help the Lion go more deeply into the back of your jaw.)

**As you breathe out**

- Open your jaw wide
- Tense up your neck muscles
- Pop your eyes open wide
- Stick your tongue out as far as you can



Tip Think of it as the back of your tongue trying to come to the room to say 'hello'. The front of your tongue can stay loose and relaxed.

Hold for several breaths. (3 breaths is great.)

Each breath in, breathe in slowly, allowing air to slowly roll over your tongue & dry it out. (!)

Each breath out, bring your tongue more and more into the room.

You'll Feel This In

The back of your mouth, your neck, your jaw, even your upper shoulders.

Optional Extension

Before you release the pose

- Take a breath to bring your tongue all the way to the right, (reaching for your right ear).
- As you breathe out, try to see if you can lick your right ear. (Of course, you won't be able to, but the attempt will give your tongue a really good stretch.)
- You will feel this deep inside the left of your mouth.
- With your next breath in, bring your tongue all the way to the left, (reaching for your left ear).
- As you breathe out, try to see if you can lick your left ear.
- You will feel this deep inside the right of your mouth.

Then fully release the pose.

Common Errors

Pointing the tongue forward or up. This reduces the stretch in the back of the mouth.

Tips

- Before you go into the pose, make sure you swallow any extra spit you have in your mouth, drying out your mouth as much as possible.
- Make sure you breathe in and out strongly, with lots of air passing over your tongue. This will keep your tongue more dry and help you avoid drooling like a puppy!

Encouragement

Do not go to the point of pain! This is especially important if you have a compromised neck. You can still get lots of benefit from this pose by going lightly with it.

Great Combinations Using Lion**Lion & Toe Stretches**

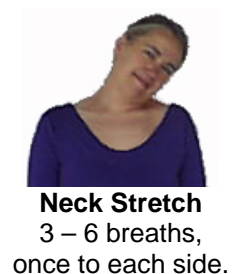
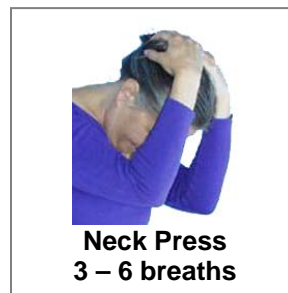
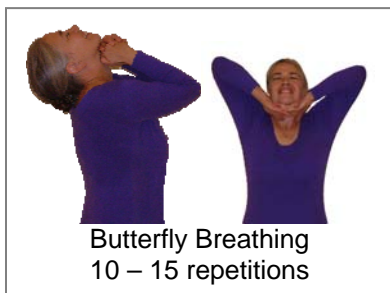
Get three stretches-in-one by sitting on your toes while you do the Lion, and keeping your fingers spread as well. With each breath out you go more and more deeply into Lion and let your weight drop more and more (if you dare) onto your toes. In between rounds, let your face and hands rest while you kneel on flat feet. **Hold the pose combination for 3 – 8 breaths each time.**



Or, hold the pose combination, then rest; then repeat, only with your tongue to one side of your mouth; then rest; then repeat, drawing your tongue to the other side of your mouth.

Lion & Butterfly Breathing, Neck Press & Neck Stretch.

Lion is the natural complement to Butterfly Breathing. Together they give your neck and shoulders the chance to fully release. Together, they will improve your breathing and re-energize you. Add the Neck Press and some Neck Stretches in there and you're good to go.

**Yoga Snack**

For a quick, refreshing boost, do the *Lion* while you're doing the dishes, waiting for the bath to run, watching TV, lying in bed, even driving in traffic or while you're riding an elevator (alone).