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Program Overview

Our mission is to *improve the health and well-being of everyone we touch*.* We do this by providing unique older adult fitness programming to eligible health plan members nationwide. These members receive basic access to any participating location in our SilverSneakers network, most of which offer our signature classes.

SilverSneakers signature group exercise classes are multi-level and equipment-based. They are designed to be appropriate for both sedentary and active Medicare-eligible individuals, and welcome persons of all skill levels and abilities while fostering a safe and positive social atmosphere. The true goal of our class formats is to help participants to perform better and more confidently the necessary activities of daily living (ADLs). We achieve this goal by targeting increases in muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance and flexibility.

We are glad that you have decided to learn more about SilverSneakers and hope that you’ll continue to share your passion for healthy living with the eligible members who visit your location. We welcome you to a nation-wide community of instructors committed to maintaining the highest standards of exercise participation and retention in the fitness industry.
What is SilverSneakers Yoga?

SilverSneakers Yoga is an older adult group exercise that specifically targets flexibility, range of movement, balance and mind-body integration. While not required by contract, we recommend all participating locations offer one or more Yoga classes per week in addition to Classic, Cardio, Circuit and Splash.

SilverSneakers Yoga is a blend of Vinyasa Yoga, Viniyoga and Iyengar Yoga. Vinyasa Yoga combines poses into a flowing series that creates warmth and energy within the body. Viniyoga is a therapeutic style that adapts poses to an individual’s needs. Iyengar Yoga is a technically-correct style that focuses on precise alignment and posture. SilverSneakers Yoga also incorporates more traditional stretching exercises for a variety of movement options.

SilverSneakers Yoga is appropriate for every “body.” The class offers light- to moderately-intense rhythmic and static range of movement choreography and progressive breathing exercise instruction. Be prepared to accommodate any participant regardless of disability or skill set.

SilverSneakers Yoga Goals and Benefits

Our goals in SilverSneakers Yoga are to:

- Increase flexibility and range of movement
- Improve balance and core strength
- Increase muscular endurance
- Reduce stress
- Use the breath more effectively
- Improve an individual’s sense of well-being in a group setting

The numerous benefits of this universally-accessible format include:

- Improved posture
- Increased flexibility and strength
- Better balance and stability
- Maintenance of bone strength
- Decreased back pain
- Improved digestion and elimination
- Improved circulation and respiration
- Strengthened immune system
- Improved sleep
- Greater body awareness, appreciation and acceptance
- Elevated mood, and better mental clarity and function Integration of body, mind, and breath
Class Guidelines and Format

Class Description
Participating locations must follow SilverSneakers’ brand usage guidelines on all printed materials. Please duplicate the following class description on your group exercise schedule:

SilverSneakers Yoga
SilverSneakers Yoga will move your whole body through a complete series of seated and standing yoga poses. Chair support is offered to safely perform a variety of postures designed to increase flexibility, balance and range of movement. Restorative breathing exercises and a final relaxation will promote stress reduction and mental clarity.

Equipment and Setup
- SilverSneakers Yoga is a 45- to 60-minute class and must be taught in a room with a controlled environment appropriate for group exercise instruction. We recommend a minimum of 16 square feet of space per person.
- Every participant must have a SilverSneakers chair for seated and standing support. Elastic tubing with handles and the SilverSneakers ball may provide balance and stretching assistance as needed.
- Participants face the front of the room or face the instructor directly in a semicircle. Never position participants in a circle for class and risk sustained cervical rotation. Teach from a standing position and try to choose different positions in the front of the room to maximize visual contact.
- SilverSneakers Yoga utilizes a modified perceived exertion chart, available on your PL Provider Portal. Ensure that this chart will be visible to all participants for the duration of class.
- Music for SilverSneakers Yoga should create a relaxing atmosphere. Therefore, beat-driven “workout” music is not typically used in this class.

We are “shoe friendly”!
Older adults who are hesitant to participate in yoga classes cite two main objections: getting on the floor and taking off their shoes. Although we do want to respect a participant’s current yoga practice and an instructor’s teacher training or prior teaching experience, we ask that all instructors wear shoes when teaching SilverSneakers Yoga. Help your participants feel comfortable with wearing shoes by wearing them yourself!

If a participant does want to remove his or her shoes, please present these options:
- May remove shoes and socks if using a yoga mat to protect the feet while sitting or standing
- May remove shoes only if using a yoga mat for traction or if the room is carpeted
- A participant may not exercise in socks on a wood, linoleum or other slippery surface because of the risk for falling.
- Diabetics MUST wear shoes during Yoga to avoid potential cuts or bruises.
Class Guidelines and Format cont.

General Choreography Guidelines

- SilverSneakers Yoga choreography must always include options for both seated and standing participants. The chair provides safe and effective support options.
- SilverSneakers Yoga does not offer mat work choreography on the floor.
- SilverSneakers Yoga includes poses and postures to move the spine in five different modifiable directions: torso elongation, flexion, extension, lateral flexion and rotation.

NOTE: All instructors must follow safety guidelines for choosing exercise for participants with osteoporosis. Refer to your Core Knowledge manual for further information.

Pre-Class Instruction, PE Chart and Goal-Setting

The SilverSneakers Yoga Perceived Exertion Chart is different than the charts used in all other SilverSneakers classes in that it more accurately describes levels of difficulty rather than exertion. The number 2 on the chart has both blue and orange colors. Therefore, participants may describe perceived difficulty by color rather than by number. It is “okay” if a participant finds himself in 3 or the “red zone” if he is losing his balance, for example.

Review the Yoga perceived exertion chart prior to the start of class and set expectations for receiving feedback throughout the workout. You can download a copy of this chart from the Resource Center in the course module and order a full-size chart for use in class from the PL Provider Portal at your participating location.

For participants new to yoga and seasoned practitioners alike, setting goals or “intentions” for one’s individual workout may be quite different than in other kinds of group exercise. Here are some helpful cues to set the stage for the Yoga experience.

- Be accepting of your starting point, wherever that may be. Self-acceptance grows with practice.
- Practice yoga with patience, intelligence, positivity and persistence.
- Tune into your inner wisdom.
- Honor your body by celebrating your capabilities and respecting your limitations.
- Cultivate love and acceptance for your body, without judgment. Let it be your teacher.
- Move slowly, giving your brain a chance to create new pathways and patterns between your mind and body.
- Find the expression of each pose that is right for you – we are not competing with our neighbors.
- Feel free to come out of a pose or take a break at any time.
- If you are unfamiliar with a pose or sequence, watch first before practicing.
- Always be aware of your pain-free range of motion and follow all physician directives.
- If you have pain, numbness or dizziness, please modify the movement or rest.
1. Breathing Exercises (5-10 minutes)

- Participants begin class seated. Practice two to four breathing techniques during this segment. Breathe in and out through the nose OR breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth with pursed lips. Closing the eyes or simply lowering the gaze will help to eliminate distractions.
- Breath awareness is one of the most important aspects of SilverSneakers Yoga. Focusing on the simple act of breathing brings our focus to the present moment and helps to clear and calm the mind.
- Since respiration is closely linked to both the nervous and cardiovascular systems, offer guidance to class members who are unaccustomed to deep breathing.

Cueing Tips

- “Breathe deeply and slowly, without strain or struggle.”
- “Our breathing should feel smooth, steady, and continuous.”
- “Use the breath to soothe and calm your body, mind, and spirit.”
- “If you can hear yourself inhaling, you are trying too hard.”
- “Lengthen your spine so the air can flow unimpeded.”
- “Try breathing down low into your belly and ‘quieting’ the chest.”
- “Deepening the breath can unlock the tension that binds your body”
- “When focusing on the breath, you take yourself to a safe place.”
- “Let go of any cares, worries, concerns or responsibilities.”
- “Never force the breath. Breathe in silently and lengthen each exhalation to prevent hyperventilation. If a breathing exercise causes strain, discomfort, dizziness or lightheadedness, return to normal breathing and simple relaxation.”

REMEMBER: The most important part of a breathing exercise is the exhalation. A complete exhalation is essential for transporting impurities and toxins out of lungs. The lower part of our lungs is seldom sufficiently emptied and tends to accumulate air saturated with waste products. Using the abdominal muscles to squeeze inward and upward against the diaphragm during exhalation helps rid the lungs of these waste products. Complete exhalations promote a decrease in residual volume (i.e., the amount of air remaining in the lungs following maximal exhalation.)
Basic Exercises

This breathing technique may be practiced sitting back in the chair. Maintain a relaxed and erect posture.

**Acknowledge the Breath:** Without manipulating or altering the breath in any way, become aware of each inhalation and each exhalation. Breathe quietly and without effort.

**Abdomino-Diaphragmatic Breathing** (Abdominal Breathing or Belly Breathing): Place one hand on the belly and gently draw it in with each exhalation. Allow the belly to rise under your hand with each inhalation.

These breathing techniques are best practiced sitting forward in the chair. It is important to sit tall, maintaining a natural lumbar curve. You may place a ball at the lower back for additional support:

**Thoraco-Diaphragmatic Breathing** (Diaphragmatic Breathing): Sit tall and engage the lower abdominal muscles. Place hands on the rib cage with the middle fingers close together. Inhale – expand the rib cage under the hands. The middle fingers move apart as the rib cage expands – release the expansion of the rib cage. The middle fingers move closer together as the expansion releases.

**Barrel Breath:** Clasp the hands and rest them on the thighs. Inhale – breathe deeply into the ribcage and lift the arms up to shoulder height. The arms are shaped as if encircling a barrel. Exhale – lower the arms. (Option: After the shoulders are warmed up, arms may be lifted overhead.)

**Complete Breath (Three-Part Breath):** Inhale – breathe into the belly, then bring the breath up into the rib cage, and finally into the chest. Exhale – release the breath from the chest, then release the rib cage expansion, and finally draw in the abdominal muscles. The inhalation fills the lower lungs first, the middle lungs second, and the upper lungs last. The exhalation releases the breath from the upper lungs first, the middle lungs second, and the lower lungs last.

2. Warm-Up and Range of Movement Conditioning (10-15 minutes)

- Participants may sit or stand. This segment prepares the body for the Muscular Endurance and Balance segment by increasing core temperature, stimulating oxygenated blood flow and promoting joint elasticity.
- Begin the warm-up with the larger muscles of the shoulders, hips, thighs, abdomen, chest, and back before progressing to the smaller muscle groups. Emphasize excellent posture.
- Coordinate movement with breath. Perform one movement with the inhalation (generally an “upward” movement) and one movement with the exhalation (generally a “downward” movement.) Repeat each movement sequence or *vinyasa* four to six times.
- For those new to the practice of coordinating movement with breathing, inhaling and exhaling with specific movements can be daunting. Make participants aware that *breathing continuously throughout* class is most important. Coordinating movement with breath takes practice and will come with time.
The Five-Segment Class Format cont.

3. Muscular Endurance and Balance (15-20 minutes)

- Fall prevention is a major focus in all SilverSneakers group exercise classes. The isometric contractions and increased muscle tension needed for each balance pose increase muscular strength and endurance when performed in a continuous manner. (Please see the Yoga for Fall Prevention document in the Resource Center for more information.)

- Participants may sit or stand for this segment. For members who remain seated or have lower-body range of movement and/or stability issues, emphasize upper-body movements.

- Hold balancing poses such as Warrior II and Triangle for two to three breaths or approximately five to ten seconds. Counting down from five slowly is an effective way to let participants know that it is almost time to come out of the pose.

- Before practicing vinyasas, teach each movement individually and then combine all movements with the breath into a flowing sequence.

- Offer support options for balancing poses: e.g., use the chair or place the toes of the non-supporting foot on the floor.

4. Muscular Endurance and Balance (10-15 minutes)

- Participants may sit or stand for this segment. Hold these stretches for three to five breaths or approximately ten to thirty seconds for greater gains in flexibility.

- Encourage even, continuous, focused breathing with lengthened exhalations. Use the breath to “go deeper”, but always avoid forcing a stretch.

5. Muscular Endurance and Balance (10-15 minutes)

Participants must sit for Final Relaxation. Close the eyes or lower the gaze to eliminate visual distractions. Final Relaxation promotes stress reduction and helps both body and mind to fully absorb the benefits of the yoga practice.

Cueing Tips

- “Focus on the breath and breathe quietly.”
- Consciously relax one area of the body at a time.
- Simply listen to music. Ask your participants what they experience.
- Visualizations: “Embrace yourself with compassion and acceptance.”
- Positive affirmations: “I am strong and confident.”
- Stretch muscles commonly associated with stress: neck, shoulders and back.
- Inspirational or motivational readings, poetry. (See Relaxation Quotes in the Reference Center.)
Gentle Choreography Options

**Modified Forward Fold:** “Sit forward in your chair with your feet comfortably wide. Hinge forward from the hips to 45 degrees and rest your forearms on your legs allowing your upper body to relax. Bow your head, slightly tucking your chin, to release tension in the neck. Breathe into the belly and diaphragm. This is also called the Breath-Saver Position and can be used whenever feeling short of breath.”

**Eye Relaxation:** “Sit back in your chair and warm your palms by rubbing your hands together. Cup your warm palms over your eyes to relax muscles and relieve tension.”

**Gratefulness:** “Sit back in your chair, place your hands over your heart, one on top of the other. You can close your eyes or lower your gaze. Think of all the things in your life for which you are thankful. Draw those treasures close to your heart. With an inhalation, open your eyes and spread your arms wide to share this positive energy with those around you. Give your smile to your neighbors.”

**Massage Wrists and Hands:** “Sit back in your chair and massage the inside of your right wrist with your left thumb. Massage your right palm with your left thumb. Massage each finger on your right hand from the base to the tip. Pull and lengthen each finger on your right hand. Repeat on left hand, then place both hands on your thighs with the palms facing up.”
Safety Guidelines for Contraindicated Movements

Every instructor is responsible for making “risk versus benefit” decisions in exercise selection. This responsibility is heightened for older adult exercise due to the wide variety of disabilities, diseases and musculoskeletal challenges a group setting presents. **Instructors must not teach movements and/or exercises identified as contraindicated for the SilverSneakers Fitness Program as exercises.**

- **Inversions requiring the head to go below the heart**
  Avoid poses such as:
  > Downward Facing Dog
  > Forward Bends or Folds
  > Big-Toe Pose (*Uttanasana*), as a forward fold

Arm balances or other poses requiring members to get down on the floor, including headstands or handstands, Peacock Pose, Dolphin Pose, etc.

- **Overuse of a joint or muscle group**
  Avoid sustained shoulder extension or abduction in poses such as:
  > Warrior I
  > Warrior II

- **Sustained knee flexion**
  Avoid sustained poses such as:
  > Chair Pose
  > Extended Side Angle Pose
  > Revolved Side Angle Pose

- **Double leg lifts**
  Avoid seated exercises with both feet (unsupported) off the floor. When modifying poses to a chair, avoid:
  > Staff Pose
  > Big Toe Pose (both legs extended)
  > Boat Pose

- **Full squats or “deep knee bends”**
  Avoid poses with the angle of knee flexion less than 90 degrees from a standing position:
  > Garland Pose
  > Easy Pose
  > Yogi Squat (chair pose with extreme hip hinge so thighs and chest are parallel to the floor)

- **Excessive hyperflexion and/or hyperextension of joints:**
  > Neck hyperextension = cervical extension greater than 30 degrees:
    > Camel Pose with chin lifted
    > Upward Salute Pose

*(cont.)*
Yoga Postures cont.

- **Excessive hyperflexion and/or hyperextension of joints (cont.):**
  - Excessive flexion of the shoulder joint greater than 180 degrees
  - Forced hyperflexion of the wrist = greater than 90 degrees:
    - Backs of hands at waist with elbows pressing back
  - Forced hyperextension of the wrist = greater than 90 degrees:
    - Heart Center (*Anjali Mudra*) with elbows lifted
  - Forced knee hyperflexion:
    - Standing Half Lotus Balance with hand pulling foot into groin
    - Preparation for Dancer Pose
  - Forward flexion from a seated position at the hip greater than 45 degrees:
    - Straddle Stretch with hip hinge greater than 45 degrees
  - Forward flexion from a standing position at the hip greater than 90 degrees:
    - Pyramid Pose with hip hinge greater than 90 degrees
  - Hyperextension of the lumbar spine at the waist greater than 30 degrees:
    - Camel Pose with lumbar extension greater than 30 degrees

*NOTE: Degrees of movement and joint angles are determined from anatomical position. Forced hyperflexion or hyperextension of a joint angle is applying external force to achieve a greater range of motion and/or hold a joint position.*

### Safety Guidelines for Contraindicated Breathing Exercises

**Constricted Thoracic Breathing**

Though not an exercise in and of itself, be aware that shallow, rapid, and irregular respiration indicates constricted thoracic breathing. It is often associated with stress and tension and overstimulates the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. Excessive stimulation of the “flight or fight” response causes the body to maintain an unnaturally high heart rate and blood pressure, leads to problems with digestion and elimination, and can cause cold, clammy hands and feet. Continual sympathetic discharge stresses endocrine, immune and sexual functionality. By practicing Abdominal, Diaphragmatic and “Three-Part” Breathing, one can greatly reduce the habit of *unconsciously* engaging in this type of respiration.

**Suspension of or Holding the Breath**

Remind class members to *breathe*. Our goal is to teach our members to breathe smoothly and evenly during the flow of *asanas*. Participants are often tempted to “hold” the breath when “holding” a pose.

(continues)
Safety Guidelines for Contraindicated Breathing Exercises (cont.)

Fiery breathing techniques:

Includes Bellows Breath (Bhastrika) and Breath of Fire (Kapalabhati). Avoid any technique that encourages forceful inhalations, or rapid and forceful exhalations. The pressure created during these techniques increases blood pressure and is potentially dangerous for anyone with a heart condition or glaucoma.

What is “Heart Center”?

Heart Center (Anjali Mudra)

Heart Center is a position of the hands or mudra used to calm the mind, relieve stress, reduce blood pressure and lower heart rate. As the hands are brought together at Heart Center, they connect and balance the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

You will find in our postures and vinyasas that we often “return to Heart Center” as a way to begin class, to begin or end a flow of movements, or to simply come to place of calm during practice.

Different disciplines, styles of teaching and beliefs can all be incorporated into this simple gesture. Whether you wish to call it Heart Center, Anjali Mudra, Namaste, or Prayer is up to you and the wishes of your participants. Just remember to keep your elbows at your sides and avoid hyperextension of the wrist. Also, feel free to simply place your hands on your hips if there are any objections to this gesture.
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* Indicates highly recommended