

# Come Into Clarity

How yoga helps breast cancer patients find balance again, on and off the mat

Yoga offers powerful **self-healing tools** for women with breast cancer—from diagnosis and treatment through recovery. How you practice yoga is as important as what you practice, so be sure to:

\* Balance effort with relaxation. \* Treat yourself kindly. \* Challenge yourself—but never strain in a pose. \* Consult your physician if you have any questions about the appropriateness of any of these postures. \* Incorporate any or all of these poses into your daily healing routine, in any order that makes sense to your body and emotions at that moment.

## LEGS ON THE CHAIR POSE (VIPARITA KARANI)

Lie on your back, and put your legs on a chair in front of you. The chair height should allow your buttocks and lower back to rest comfortably on the floor. Stay here with your arms outstretched or on your belly for as long as you like, breathing normally (or try the three-part yoga breath on page 66).

**OPTION:** Lie on the floor with your legs up the wall instead.

**BENEFITS:** Great for insomnia, worry, and nausea

## FISH POSE (MATSYASANA)

Place two foam blocks on your mat a few inches apart. Rest your head on one, and place the other between your shoulder blades. Open your arms out to the sides, and relax completely, breathing normally (or try the three-part yoga breath on page 66). **BENEFITS:** Releases tension postmastectomy by stretching the front of the shoulders and chest, and lifting the spirits.

## COW FACE POSE (GOMUKHASANA)

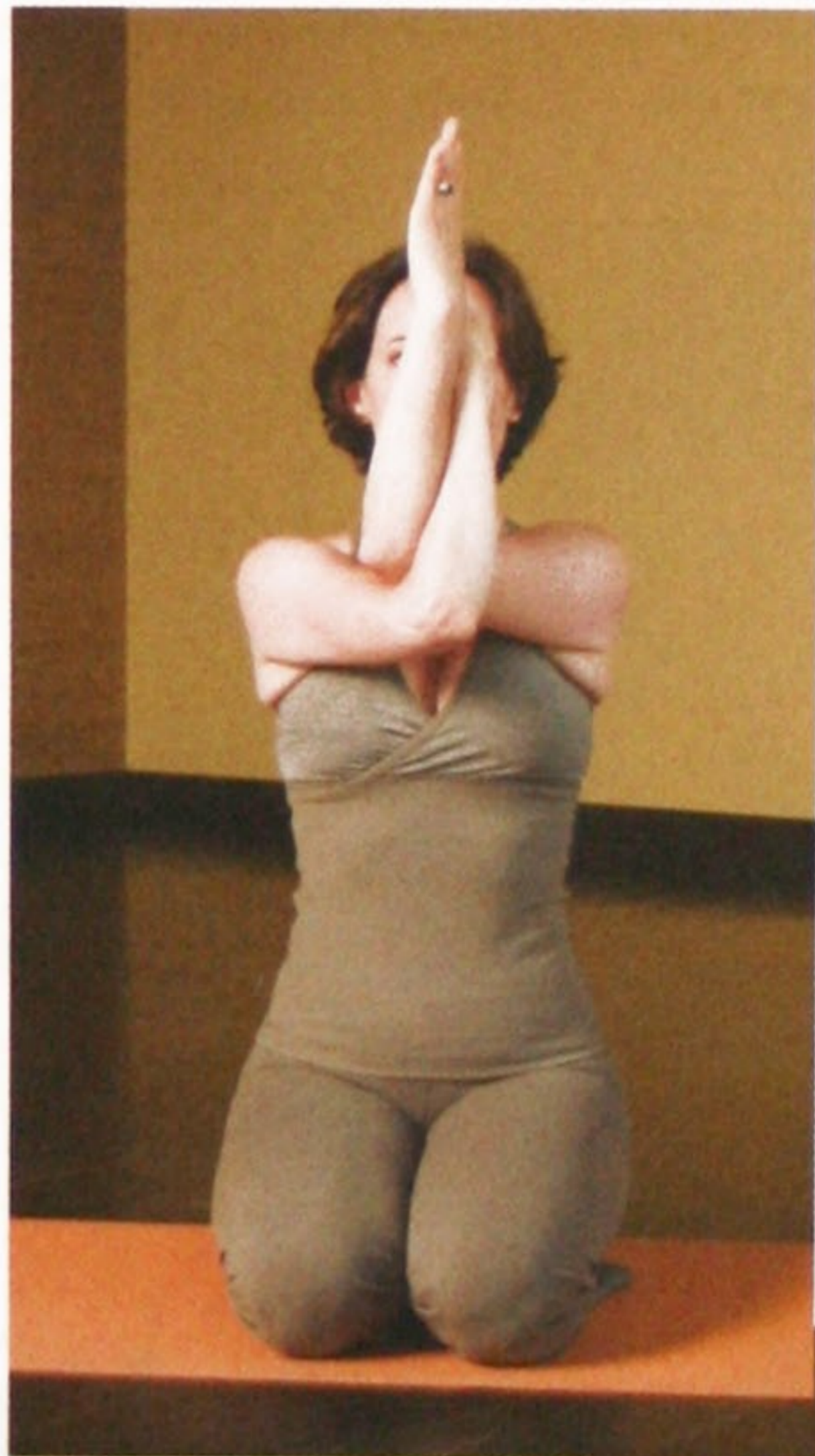
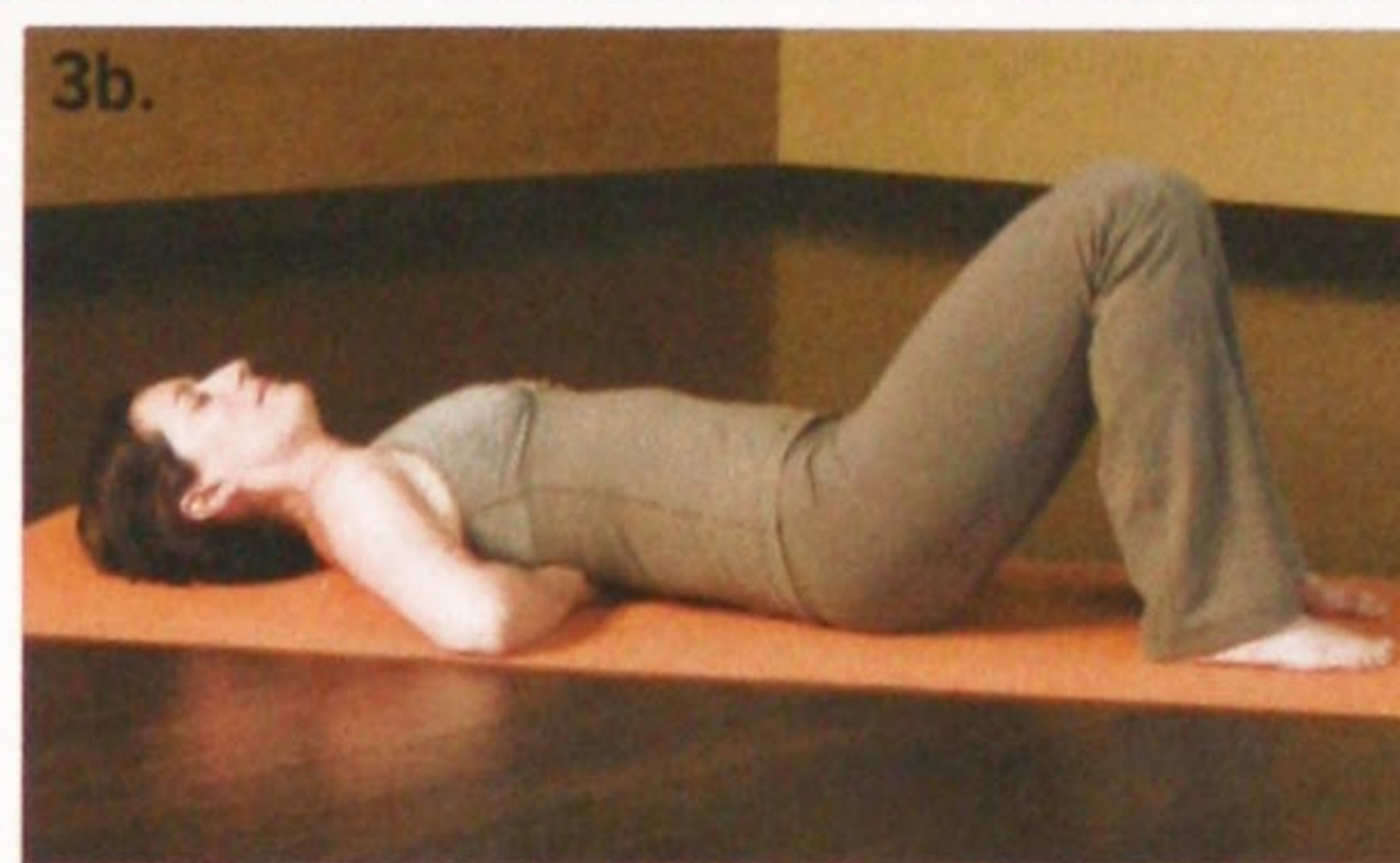
Reach your right hand behind your back with palm facing outward, and bend your elbow so your hand is between your shoulder blades. Now, lie down on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Gently roll the shoulder down toward the floor—a very big stretch for those with tight shoulders. If this is too intense, slide your hand down toward the small of your back.

**BENEFITS:** Stretches the front of the chest, opens the shoulder, and lifts the spirits.

## EAGLE POSE (GARUDASANA)

Sit on your heels (or stand up). Bring your right arm underneath your left, and wrap your forearms around each other. You may or may not be able to touch your hands together. Inhale your hands away from your face; exhale your hands toward your face. Do this several times, and reverse arm position (left arm underneath).

**OPTION:** Too much of a stretch? Wrap your arms



- 1. legs on the chair pose
- 2. fish pose
- 3. cow face pose
- 4. eagle pose
- 5. arms overhead
- 6. tree pose

Model Laura Kupperman is a yoga teacher and breast cancer survivor.

## Three-Part Yoga Breath

Lie down on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.

**Part one:** Place your hands on your lower belly. Inhale deeply through your nose into the lowest part of your lungs, expanding your abdomen against your hands. Exhale completely, and feel your hands fall as your belly deflates. Repeat for two or three breaths.

**Part two:** Place your hands on your rib cage. On the inhalation, feel your ribs expand out to the sides, like an accordion. On the exhalation, feel them relax back.

**Part three:** Move your hands up under your collarbones and feel the movement of breath in this uppermost portion of the lungs.

**Put it together:** Now, relax your arms by your sides, and practice this complete, three-part breath: Inhale deeply so that your belly rounds, rib cage expands, and collarbones broaden. On the exhalation, release all the old, used air, so that everything softens and your body rests gently on the ground. Repeat for several breaths, and then return to breathing normally. —Carol Krucoff

## TREE POSE (VRKSASANA)

Stand tall. Imagine sending “roots” down through your legs as you lengthen up through the crown of your head. Find a focal point for your gaze at eye level to help you balance. Then send those roots down through your left leg as you pick up the heel of your right foot. If you want more of a challenge, turn your right knee out to the side, pick up your right foot, and place it against the inside of your left leg (anywhere on the leg except at the knee). Stay for three to five slow deep breaths, and repeat on the other side.

**OPTION:** Lightly touch a chair or a wall with one hand to help you balance.

**BENEFITS:** Helps with balance and strength. An emotional respite. ■

—Poses courtesy of Carol Krucoff and Laura Kupperman

around your chest, and give yourself a hug. Extend your arms out to the side as you inhale; now exhale and give yourself another hug. Reverse arms. Do this several times, adding a smile to your face. **BENEFITS:** Excellent for external rotation of the shoulder, which helps post-surgery. Also helps you honor and love yourself just the way you are.

## ARMS OVERHEAD

(URDHVA HASTASANA)

Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart. Lengthen your spine so that your shoulders are over your hips, ears are over your shoulders, and chin is parallel to the ground. Release your tailbone toward your heels. Inhale, raise your arms up toward the sky, keeping your shoulders relaxed.

Exhale, bring your arms back down. Repeat several times.

**OPTION:** On days when you're fatigued, lightly rest your back against a wall. Or face the wall and “walk” your hands up the wall as high as they can comfortably go.

**BENEFITS:** Gives a stretch to the inner shoulders and armpits, and gets energy flowing through the whole body.

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