

The Happy Body Happy Brain Quick Fix for Actors



Prepared by Lori Shyba
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Your body and your brain will thank you for improving their service in aid of dramatic art. This is not the only actors' quick fix in the world. But it's an approach that provides positive results by addressing four areas of mind/body needs: Cardiovascular aerobic conditioning, Muscular strength building, Brain function optimizing, and Yoga pranayama breathing and asana stretching (including inverts). All in about 30 minutes. This handout will provide you with a step-by-step outline of sample exercises, a reason why each exercise works to aid your ability as an actor, and a suggested training program to carry each phase of the quick fix into a full workout or practice session.

ACT I Cardio Intervals

Intervals of Aerobics/Easy stretch; Aerobics/ Tadasana and Sun Salutation; Cross Crawl Aerobics/Eagle Pose Balance

15 minutes minimum (in intervals):

Scene One Intervals: Aerobics to Easy Stretch (5 minutes)

Aerobic component

Sample of an easy aerobics section is simply to begin with a power walk around the room and establish an eight walks breathing pattern for inhale/exhale. When the breath is established for four sets of inhale, exhale, add arms shaking loosely up on the inhale and shaking loosely down on the exhale and eight walks (inhale/exhale). Four sets.

Take this to a simple jog using all the space available -- trying to keep the breathing pattern intact. Keep the body loose, pump the arms and relax the hands as if you're holding a potato chip. Take three to five laps.

Walk from wall to wall across the room 3 times back and forth.

Tip: If there are people littering the space doing their own quick fixes or other things, just keep to the perimeter of the room in a light jog or brisk power walk. Or you can simply do this whole aerobic component outside or in hallways.

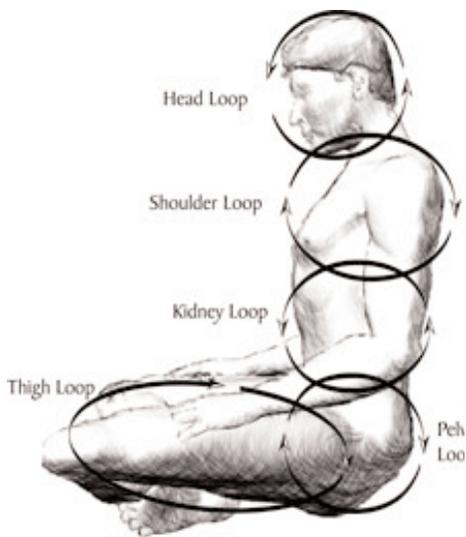
Stretch component

Stand facing a wall and position your feet about two feet away from the wall. Feet together, toes facing straight ahead. Reach as far as you can above your head, press the wall and at the same time, bring the toe of your right foot in towards the wall, bending the right leg. Keep the left leg straight and keep the hips squared straight ahead. Keep the shoulders down and press through in the heart. Hold for 15 seconds and then take the other side.

Partner work (optional)

One person does the wall work and the other checks alignment of squared hips to the wall.

From here, turn to the side and stretch out the side body by hooking one foot behind the other and leaning out the hip as far as it will go. Hold for 10 - 15 seconds and then so the other side. Think of pulling ribs to hip on shortened side and extending up through the armpit on extended side.



Anusara Body Loops
from www.anusara.com

Scene Two Intervals: Aerobics to Tadasana and Sun Salutation

Aerobic component

Sample of this would be to start with locomotion (jog or power walk) around the room for about two to three laps and then execute combinations of slides sideways across the floor (two sets with left lead then right lead); karate kicks (two sets with left lead then right lead) and other combinations that might arise from the demands of an acting role you are currently working on. Take another lap or two of the room and then slow to a walk and come to a comfortable standing position.

Partner work (optional)

One person stands and leans over, the partner gives a good swift back and shoulder rub. Let out some sound. Then switch.

Body Awareness component (Yoga based)

Stand with the bases of your big toes touching, heels slightly apart (so that your second toes are parallel). Lift and spread your toes and the balls of your feet, and imagine you have extra toes growing out of the sides and back of your feet. Firm your thigh muscles and lift the knee caps, without hardening your lower belly. Imagine the four Anusara loops as in the picture -- the pelvic loop, the kidney loop, the shoulder loop and the head loop. Each loop envisions how muscular and organic energies should flow in a way that provides alignment for the body as a while when integrated with the action of the other loops.

The loops work by working together, fine-tuning the core strength and extension of the entire body.

Press your shoulder blades into your back, then widen them across and release them down your back. Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight toward the ceiling. Widen your collarbones. Hang your arms beside the torso.

Bring your hands up above your eyes, press the head against the hands, take three deep inhale exhale cycles imagining ocean waves moving toward the shore on the inhale and away from the shore on the exhale. Pay attention to the spot on your forehead between your hands. Lower your arms and continue to visualize the body loops and the ocean waves.

Vocal work (optional):

On exhale relax the throat and start with a MMMMM sound changing to an OOOOOO sound concentrating on the spot on your forehead -- letting the sound resonate from that place. Breathe in Ujaya breath. Three sets.

Then take two sets of Sun Salutations (surya namaskar -- see handout) working with the right leg moving back first and forward first on the first set and the left leg on the second. An alternative is to hop the feet back and forward on the lunges. Hold the downward dog position for 5 breaths each time and alternate presses into the heels if you wish. Try to keep the Ujaya breath going throughout this section.



Scene Three Intervals: Cross Crawl Aerobics to Eagle Pose Balances

Aerobic component

Start by reaching arms out and down and gradually work your way up higher to a reach -- extending the movement to opposite toe on floor and then slowed down slightly with opposite toe reaching right up off the floor. Increase speed again and swing both arms in same direction and then shasé side (3-steps) taking arms up and around in a circle.

Take it to a march and then lift the elbow to the opposite knee. 20 times.

Body Awareness component (Yoga based)

Garudasana (Eagle)

1. Stand in Tadasana. Incorporate Ujaya breathing. Bend both knees deeply and shift your weight to your left foot. With your next exhalation, cross your right leg over your left and wrap it around the left leg, hooking your toes on the inside of your left calf muscle. Keep your left knee bent deeply to accomplish this.

Keep your thighs squeezing together and turn the tops of your thighs inward as you sink a little lower, bringing an arch into your lower back. Then do a small 'Cat Tilt' with your pelvis, scooping your tailbone down toward your heels and forward into your body. This will shift your weight back toward your heels and you will feel your thighs working more strongly.

Cross your left arm over the right at the elbows. When the right leg crosses over the left leg, the left arm crosses over the right, and vice versa. Always the opposite leg and arm are on top.

Bend the elbows, pointing your fingertips up toward the ceiling. Bring your right fingertips around to place them in the palm of your left hand at the root of the thumb. Move your hands away from your face until your forearms are vertical. Then inhale and lift your elbows until they are level with your shoulders.

With your next exhalation, keep your heart lifted and broaden your shoulders away from your ears, stretching the tops of the shoulders

Keep your eyes soft and looking forward, your breath smooth and soft.

2. To Warrior 3. On an inhale, extend the right leg back, taking arms to airplane and keeping both hip bones facing toward the floor. Try taking the leg a bit higher and swing the arms up overhead like the photo.

3. To Tree Pose. (Vrksasana)

Stand in Tadasana. Shift your weight slightly onto the left foot, keeping the inner foot firm to the floor, and bend your right knee. Reach down with your right hand and clasp your right ankle.

Draw your right foot up and place the sole against the inner left thigh; if possible, press the right heel into the inner left groin, toes pointing toward the floor. The center of your pelvis should be directly over the left foot. Rest your hands on the top rim of your pelvis. Make sure the pelvis is in a neutral position, with the top rim parallel to the floor.

Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor. Firmly press the right foot sole against the inner thigh and resist with the outer left leg. Press your hands together Namaste. Gaze softly at a fixed point in front of you on the floor about 4 or 5 feet away.

Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Step back to Tadasana.

Repeat the entire sequence on the other side.

End of Cardio Interval Series.



Transition: Ujaya breathing. Chadaranga Dandasana -- Sun Salutation holding downward dog position. Drop the knees to the floor so you're on all fours -- knees and hands and the back into Child's Pose.

ACT TWO -- FLOORWORK

Note: If you are keeping your quick fix down to about 20 minutes, you can pick and choose the floor work -- maybe do odd numbered exercises one day and even the next.

From Child's Pose come into:

1. Cat and Cow -- (Yoga based + muscle building -- Lats and Gluts)

- Phase One -- On all fours, knees and hands. Make sure legs are hip width apart, not wider and hands are under your shoulders, elbows soft. CAT: Round your back so that your back points toward the sky, your head drops down to your chest and your belly goes in. Then do the opposite. COW: Slightly arching your back (you should have a curve in your lower back now), hips and head up belly out. Four sets.
- Phase Two -- Extend your right arm and left leg and hold for two breaths. Then left leg, right arm, 2 sets on each side.
- Phase Three -- Bring right knee to left elbow and extend to phase two position. Then other side. Two sets on each side.

2. Burro

Sitting with legs crossed or in Hero Pose (haunches) unroll the folds of your ears slowly and then pull firmly down on your earlobes.

Vocal and face -- Stick the tongue out with a big "Blaaa"

3. Owl

Squeeze the trapezius shoulder muscles firmly with the hands and hold for big inhale and exhale. Look all the way to the left, centre, then look all the way to the right, centre, look down, centre, look back, centre, tip side centre, other side, centre.

4. Vocal --- Big yawn, laugh.

5. Core Work Boat Pose (Core muscle building plus yoga)

- Phase One -- Starting feet flat on floor knees bent and hands cradling head.

Slowly roll up and back.. Four times.

- Phase Two -- As phase one except taking alternate shoulder to knee. Four sets.
- Phase Three -- Feet flat on floor, flat back. Lean back slightly keeping flat back. Raise one foot off the ground, then the other and balance. Straighten legs if you can. Slowly "sink the boat" -- roll down slowly. Three sets.

6. Push Ups -- (Good Ol' Upper Body Muscular Strength Building)

Starting with one arm pushups, progress to pushups from the knees and then from the feet. 20 times.

7. Twist -- (Yoga)

Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Bend your knees, put your feet on the floor, then slide your left foot under your right leg to the outside of your right hip. Lay the outside of the left leg on the floor. Step the right foot over the left leg and stand it on the floor outside your left hip. The right knee will point directly up at the ceiling. Exhale and twist toward the inside of the right thigh. Press the right hand against the floor just behind your right buttock, and set your left upper arm on the outside of your right thigh near the knee. Pull your front torso and inner right thigh snugly together. Press the inner right foot very actively into the floor, release the right groin, and lengthen the front torso. Lean the upper torso back slightly, against the



shoulder blades, and continue to lengthen the tailbone into the floor. You can turn your head in one of two directions: Continue the twist of the torso by turning it to the right; or counter the twist of the torso by turning it left and looking over the left shoulder at the right foot. With every inhalation lift a little more through the sternum, pushing the fingers against the floor to help. Twist a little more with every exhalation. Be sure to distribute the twist evenly throughout the entire length of the spine; don't concentrate it in the lower back. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation, return to the starting position, and repeat to the left for the same length of time.

8. "I am a good person" Stretch

Simple variation -- Sit tall with a flat back and extend the legs in front of you. Cradle the right leg in toward your body maintaining a flat back. Say the words "I am a good person." Tuck the leg into the inner thigh of the other leg, reach up and take the body toward the extended leg, touching the extended foot with both hands. Same thing on the other side.

ACT THREE -- Inverts against the wall

Modified Handstand.

On all fours with feet against the wall, push into a downward dog position. From there, engaging the core like mad, place one foot against the wall approximately at a 90 degree angle (depending on your hamstring flexibility) and then bring the other foot up along side. Take five deep inhalations exhalations and work your way up to ten breaths. As you gain confidence, extend one leg straight up in the air and then the other. (Because of the shift in the centre of gravity, you may actually find this easier on your shoulders.) Slowly come down into child's pose.

Handstand against the Wall

As you develop balance and shoulder strength, you can try kicking up into a full handstand against the wall. Partners can help to facilitate this

ACT FOUR -- Meditation and Breath Awareness

Anjali Mudra is an excellent way to induce and seal in a receptive state of awareness -- especially useful when trying to clear your own ego and sense the inner rhythms of a character you are discovering.

Sit comfortably in cross legged position (or in corpse pose if this is difficult). Close your eyes and bow your head slightly, drawing the crease of the neck toward the center of your head. Lift your sternum into your thumbs and lengthen down along the back of the armpits, making the back elbows heavy. Allow thoughts to pass through your consciousness but don't hang onto them. Allow your hands to wrap around the lower ribcage. Five full inhalations and exhalations concentrating on allowing the breath to fill and expand the ribcage. Hook the thumbs under the armpits then five inhale exhalations allowing the breath to fill and expand the sternum/upper chest area. Move the hands to the upper trapezius area between the shoulderblades. Five inhalations, exhalations concentrating on allowing the breath to affect that specific area. Lower your hands to knees (if cross legged) or to your sides (if in corpse pose).

Inhale deeply, filling first the lower ribcage, then sternum chest area and finally the upper back. As you exhale, allow the breath to leave the upper back first, then the chest, then the ribcage. Five sets of this breathing pattern. If you wish you can "channel" your dramatic character to discover the inner rhythm. Open your eyes and wiggle your fingers

END OF THE QUICK FIX -- NOW ITS TIME FOR THE HARD WORK OF BEING AN ACTOR