

If You Want Killer Abs, Practice These 10 Yoga Poses for Abs

by Jessie Benson

Having a strong core is a beautiful thing, and not just because it makes for Instagram-worthy yoga pics. A strong core helps you maintain support and control of our body in all of your daily activities, from picking up the kids to hitting the gym. These yoga poses for abs will improve core strength, help reduce strain on the spine, and prevent injuries by improving posture and balance.

So, even if you have a bit of padding shielding your six-pack abs, it's still important to build strength in your core from the inside out. Yoga is the perfect tool to help build that strength!

Almost every single yoga pose from standing balance postures to seated twists require (and also build) abdominal strength and stability.

In standing yoga postures, such as Triangle Pose, the deepest abdominal muscles, the transversus abdominis are fired up as they stabilize the torso and the spine. When we do several yoga poses in a sequence, we are working the core muscles from every single angle, making them activate and engage with every movement and transition.

Practice These 10 Yoga Poses for Abs



Plank

- Start in Tabletop Pose, and align your wrists directly under your shoulders
- Come to the balls of your feet as you extend your legs behind you, lifting your knees off the mat (it looks like the top of a push-up)
- Slightly tuck your tailbone to activate muscles in the lower belly
- Engage the muscles in your legs, lifting up through the quads to keep your body strong
- Keep your core strong to prevent hips from sagging down or picking up



Dolphin

- From Plank, drop your forearms to the mat, keeping your wrist in line with your elbow and palm on the earth
- Keep elbows directly under the shoulders
- Lift your hips towards the sky, and walk your toes in towards your face – like a Downward Facing Dog on your forearms
- For more intensity, lift hips above the shoulders, relax your heels toward the ground



Dolphin with Leg Lift

- Start in Dolphin Pose
- Walk your feet in towards your elbows to align your hips over your shoulders (or at least as much as possible!)
- Lift your head just enough to maintain a neutral neck – don't look too far forward or back
- Alternate lifting each leg toward the sky



Star Plank

- From Plank Pose, shift your weight onto one hand and transition into Side Plank
- For less pressure on your wrists, drop down to your forearm for a Side Forearm Plank
- Stack your top leg on top of bottom, and slowly lift your top leg away from the bottom leg
- To modify the pose, simply drop to the bottom knee or keep the legs together



Upward Facing Plank Pose

- Begin seated on your mat with legs extended long in front of you
- Bring your hands behind you, palms flat on the mat under your shoulders with your fingers facing your body
- Lift hips upwards and allow feet to fall towards the floor, pressing flat on the ground if possible



Half Bow-Half Locust

- Start lying flat on your belly and reach one hand back
- Grab a hold of the ankle on that same side
- Extend the opposite arm straight out in front of you
- As you lift your chest off the ground, press your foot into your hand and lift up into a Half Bow Pose
- Simultaneously lift the opposite leg and arm into a Half Locust Pose



Twisting Boat Pose

- From Boat Pose keep your shins parallel to the floor and knees bent (for a more advanced variations you can straighten the legs)
- Hold Boat Pose for one breath with arms extended straight out in front of you
- Twist to one side, opening your arms wide
- Come back to center and repeat on opposite side



Floating Triangle

- Begin in Triangle Pose and extend the bottom arm straight out in front of you
- Bring the top arm over your head, with your bicep close to your ear
- Imagine holding a giant beach ball over your head



Chair Pose

- From Mountain Pose, bend your knees and lower your thighs to be parallel with the floor
- Sit your hips straight back as if sitting into a chair
- Keep arms extended overhead and torso long as you reach your tailbone down toward the floor and crown of head up to the sky
- Keep your core engaged (imagine drawing your belly button in towards your spine)



Warrior III

- From Mountain Pose extend your fingertips above your head
- Draw one knee towards your chest
- Begin to kick your lifted foot behind you
- Reach your hands forward in front of you
- Imagine making a capital "T" shape with your body; your torso and extended leg should be parallel to the floor



When you hit the mat, chances are whatever body part you are aware of is one that's not happy. Whether it's a cramping hamstring or a stiff back, muscles speak eloquently about exactly how they feel.

Tendons and ligaments are more the strong, silent types. It's easy to forget they're even there. You can't see most of them like you can with a major muscle group. You might not even be aware when you are training them—unless they're injured. And, like muscles, they can take a long time to fully repair.



Utkatasana (Chair Pose)

Benefits: This pose stretches your Achilles' tendons.

How to do it: Begin in Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Lift your arms until they are in line with your ears. Exhale and bend your knees, trying to get them close to a sitting position. Engage your core. Hold for 30 seconds to one minute, then release.

Padangusthasana (Big Toe Pose)

Benefits: Yoga Journal claims, "This pose gently lengthens and strengthens even stubbornly tight hamstrings."

How to do it: Stand straight with your feet about six inches apart. Contract your thigh muscles and hinge forward from your hips. Try to move your head and torso as one unit as you bend forward. Grasp your toes with your index and middle fingers, then wrap your thumb around them.

If you can't reach your toes, Yoga Journal suggests passing a strap under you're the balls of your feet and holding it in your hands. Think about lifting from your hips to elongate your hamstrings and flatten your back.

Feel the hollowing out of your lower abdomen as your torso comes closer to your thighs. Allow your elbows to bend to the sides so that you can carefully draw your upper body to your legs. Take care not to round the back or compress the neck.



Supta Dwi Hasta Padasana (Reclining Both Hands to the Leg Pose)

Benefits: forward bend, core, and lengthens hamstrings

How to do it: Lay with your back on the floor. Slowly raise one leg as far as is comfortable. Using both hands, or a band, or a strap, gently pull the upright leg towards your head. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds. Gently release leg to the floor and repeat with the other leg.

Once again, lift the first leg and stretch. You should be able to stretch it just a wee bit further this time. Hold the stretch. Gently release leg to the floor and repeat the posture with the other leg.

Become conscious of your tendons as you move through your practice. Perhaps that means staying up on the ball of your supporting leg during some Warrior poses or lunges. Perhaps it means taking an extra wrist stretch in Tabletop by rotating the right fingers back to the right knee and stretching back to your heels until the palm slightly lifts from the mat (repeating on the left side).

Use visualization while you're preparing for your practice to see the beautiful network of the tissue softening and lengthening—or repairing. The benefits will not only help you stretch your tendons but also to feel where that "edge" is for deepening your practice.



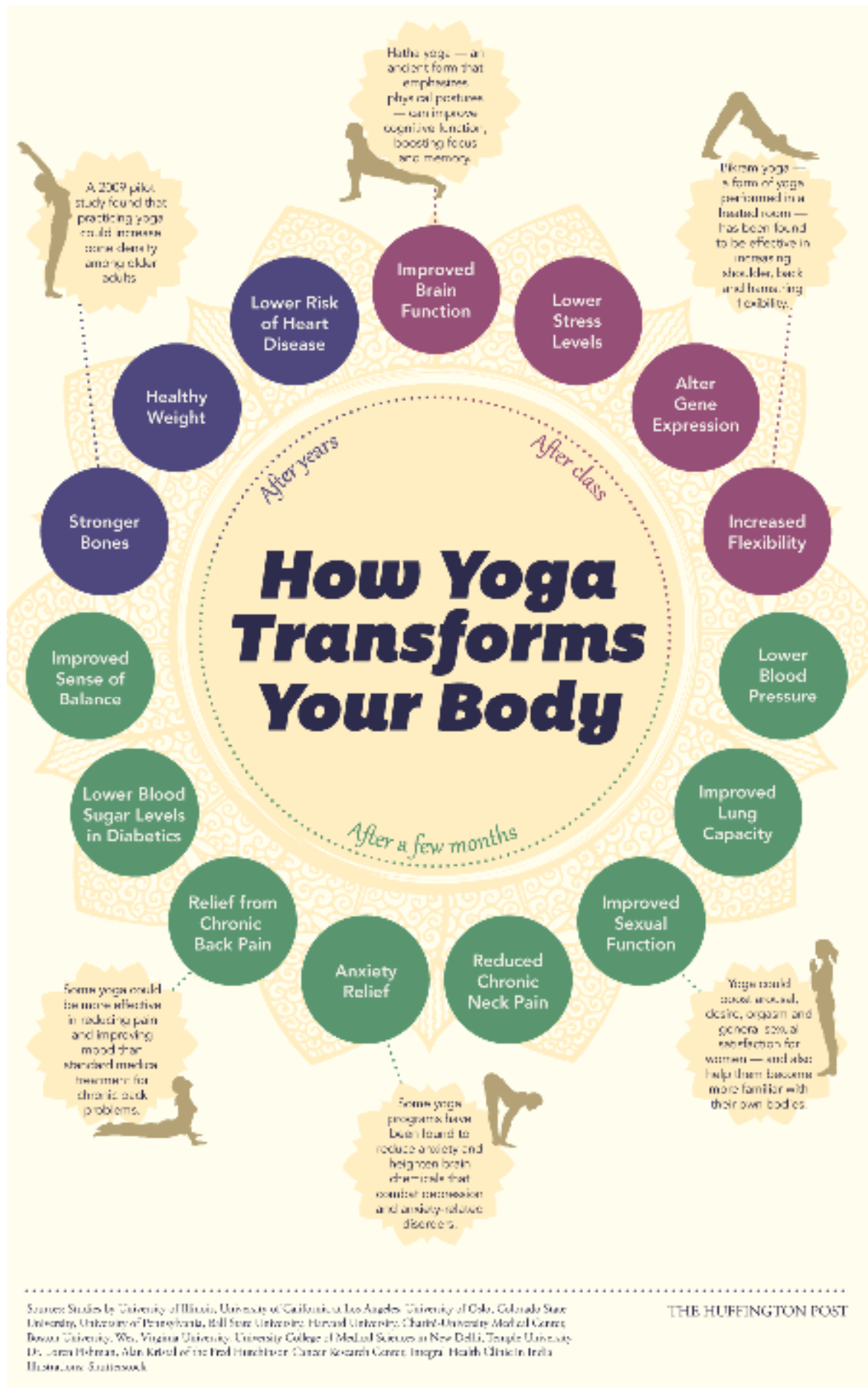
Downward Dog

Fold forward at the waist. Bend your knees, and walk your hands forward until your body is like a mountain: the front body forms one slope, hips are the peak, and your legs form the other slope. At first, keep your knees bent and focus on lifting your hips high — your mountain peak. Then gently (and gently is the key), pedal one heel at a time toward the ground. Slowly, over time, your heels will come closer and closer to the earth and may perhaps land. This provides a phenomenal stretch for achilles, calves, and the entire backs of the legs. Remember: never force a stretch. Take time, and breathe. Weight your palms and feet evenly.



Half Splits

Start in a lunge position with your right knee forward, left knee landed on the ground. Then shift your weight backwards as your right toes lift and you come onto your front heel. From here, hand can come onto blocks or the floor. Bow toward your leg without rounding your spine. For a deeper stretch, continue into the splits by walking your left leg back.



The Eastern practice of yoga has become a modern-day symbol of peace, serenity and well-being in the West. More than 20 million Americans practice yoga, according to the 2012 Yoga in America study, with practitioners spending more than \$10 billion a year on yoga-related products and classes.

The mind-body practice is frequently touted for its ability to reduce stress and boost well-being, but it also offers wide-ranging physical health benefits that rival other forms of exercise. While the scientific research on yoga's health benefits is still young, here's what we know so far about its potential effects on the body.

After Class

Improved Brain Function. Just 20 minutes of Hatha yoga — an ancient form of the practice that emphasizes physical postures rather than flow or sequences — can improve cognitive function, boosting focus and working memory. In a University of Illinois study, participants performed significantly better on tests of brain functioning after yoga, as compared to their performance after 20 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise.

Lower Stress Levels. Yoga's stress-busting powers may come from its ability to lessen the activity of proteins that are known to play a role in inflammation, according to a study published last year from University of California, Los Angeles researchers.

Alter Gene Expression. A small Norwegian study suggested that yoga's many healthy benefits might come from its ability to alter gene expression in immune cells.

Increased Flexibility. A recent Colorado State University study found that Bikram yoga — a form of yoga in which a series of 26 postures are performed for 90 minutes in a heated room — is linked with increased shoulder, lower back and hamstring flexibility, as well as greater deadlift strength and decreased body fat, compared with a control group.

After A Few Months

Lower Blood Pressure. People with mild to moderate hypertension might benefit from a yoga practice, as a study from University of Pennsylvania researchers found that it could help to lower their blood pressure levels. Researchers found that people who practiced yoga had greater drops in blood pressure compared with those who participated in a walking/nutrition/weight counseling program.

Improved Lung Capacity. A small 2000 Ball State University study found that practicing Hatha yoga for 15 weeks could significantly increase vital lung capacity, which is the maximum amount of air exhaled after taking a deep breath. Vital lung capacity is one of the components of lung capacity.

Improved Sexual Function. A 2009 Harvard study published in the *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* showed that yoga could boost arousal, desire, orgasm and general sexual satisfaction for women. Yoga can also improve women's sex lives by helping them to become more familiar with their own bodies, according to a review of studies published in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, as reported by CNN.

Reduced Chronic Neck Pain. A German study published in *The Journal of Pain* showed that four weeks of practicing Iyengar yoga (a type of Hatha yoga that stresses proper alignment and the use of props) is effective in reducing pain intensity in adults suffering from chronic neck pain.

Anxiety Relief. A 2010 Boston University study showed that 12 weeks of yoga could help to reduce anxiety and increase gamma-aminobutyric (GABA) levels in the brain (low levels of GABA have been linked with depression and anxiety disorders).

Relief from Chronic Back Pain. Researchers at West Virginia University found Iyengar Yoga to be more effective in reducing pain and improving mood than standard medical treatment among those with chronic lower back problems.

Steady Blood Sugar Levels in People with Diabetes. Adding yoga to a typical diabetes care regimen could result in steady blood sugar levels, according to a 2011 Diabetes Care study. Reuters reported that just three months of yoga in addition to diabetes care resulted in a decrease in body mass index, as well as no increases in blood sugar levels.

Improved Sense of Balance. Practicing an Iyengar yoga program designed for older adults was found to improve balance and help prevent falls in women over 65, according to a 2008 Temple University study.

After Years.

Stronger Bones. A 2009 pilot study by Dr. Loren Fishman showed that practicing yoga could improve bone density among older adults. "We did a bone mineral density (DEXA) scan, then we taught half of them the yoga, waited two years, and did another scan," Fishman previously told *The Huffington Post*. "And not only did these people not lose bone, they gained bone **Stronger Bones**. The ones who didn't do the yoga lost a little bone, as you would expect."

Healthy Weight. Researchers from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle found an association between a regular yoga practice and decreased weight — or at least a maintained weight — among more than 15,000 healthy, middle-aged adults. "Those practicing yoga who were overweight to start with lost about five pounds during the same time period those not practicing yoga gained 14 pounds," study researcher Alan Kristal, DPH, MPH, told WebMD.

Lower Risk Of Heart Disease. As part of a healthy lifestyle, yoga may lower cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar, according to Harvard Health Publications.

How to Avoid Injury in Yoga: Every Body Is Different

By Dhanya Fernando, Yoga Coach



Honor your body's limits and it will follow your instructions. I like to exercise the notion that prevention is better than a cure, as well as the idea that yoga should be practiced with a mindful observation for the limits of our bodies.

In a yoga class, the quality of your poses matter more than the amount of poses you go through. **And by learning how to honor the poses and our bodies, we can prevent needless injuries.**

All Bodies Are Different

Yoga postures have often been thought of as a form of exercise. But from an ancient perspective, they are not merely exercises, but techniques that place the physical body in positions that cultivate awareness, relaxation, concentration, and meditation.

But for most of us, the typical yoga class experience goes something like this:

1. You arrive on the mat and perform a certain pose because the instructor says so and your neighbor seems to be doing it pretty well (at least in your eyes).
2. You realize you aren't able to go as far in a pose because you're experiencing some discomfort.
3. You don't want to look like a wimp because you think the whole class might be looking to see how far you have gotten in your pose so you push too far. (Everyone else is thinking everyone is looking at them, too, by the way).

The truth is, no one is looking at you. Yoga isn't a team effort so the whole class need not synchronize. It's an individual effort to see what your body can perform that day. **How you approach and perform each pose will be the benefit you get from each class.** This can be done by paying attention to the instructor and the cues he or she is giving.

"Yoga isn't a team effort so the whole class need not synchronize. It's an individual effort to see what your body can perform that day."

It's important to keep the competitive mind and ego by the door and work with what your body can do. We can appreciate a beautiful yoga photo, but that doesn't mean we need to recreate that shot with our own bodies. We must all remember there is a balance. **Even after years of dedication and practice, some poses may never be right for my body, and I doubt that all poses will be right for you as well.** The acceptance of this simple fact can be our motivation to respect that all bodies are different.

The Dangers of Overstretching

Most often, the causes of injuries in yoga are overuse and overstretching. **Overstretching is the reason many people do yoga one day and don't show back up on the mat the next.** It's not that they don't want to. It's that they can't because they overdid the stretch at the last session and are probably in pain.

One of yoga's great gifts is the increased ability to understand and listen to our own body. But this awareness takes time and can be clouded by the encouragements of teachers and other students who may not realize when we are overreaching. **To avoid injury, your body may compensate by using a weaker muscle to get into a certain pose. Over time, this will lead to misalignment or injury.**

When a muscle is being lengthened, it's not just the muscle cells stretching out, but also the surrounding connective tissues. When we say we're stretching a muscle, the actual stretch comes from these connective tissues. **When too much of a stretch happens, the tissues will lose elasticity and become less functional.** This means it will not return to its original shape once it is overstretched. Over time, this will lead to muscle weakness.

"Our bodies are built uniquely. Therefore, work with where you are, not from where you think you should be."

Connective tissues have good blood circulation that can facilitate recovery, but when we continually overstretch, the soft tissues surrounding the muscle, including tendons and ligaments, become susceptible to developing micro tears. **If we don't change our practice, these micro tears will lead to larger tears and eventually to injuries.** Regardless of whether our bodies are tight or flexible, during yoga practice, it is easy to go beyond our means and take a stretch to a level that may develop these kinds of tears without notice.

Our bodies are built uniquely. **Therefore, work with where you are, not from where you think you should be.** The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons believes the rewards of yoga outweigh the possible physical risks, as long as you perform with care, moderation and according to your individual flexibility level.

Tips to Prevent Yoga Injuries

- **Discuss any known illness or injury with your instructor prior to class so he or she can recommend modifications.** Serious muscle damage and injuries can result if proper precautions are not taken, especially for people with preexisting musculoskeletal conditions.
- **There is no such thing as a perfect yoga pose.** Be patient and gradually build to the pose that best suits your best ability.
- **Learn how to practice yoga poses with correct alignment** - not by looking at your neighbor but by listening to the instructor. Some teachers might make adjustments, but if they don't, feel free to approach them after class to ask about how to improve certain poses.
- **Invest in a private session or two.** You can polish your yoga practice, learn your strengths and weaknesses, get feedback, and work on challenging poses.
- **Use props as a modification for poses where there is tightness.** They will help you to feel the pose better in order to engage the correct muscles.
- **Select a class level appropriate for you** and where you are in your practice.



Summary

In addition to every body being different, also remember that every day is different. **On any given day, our bodies might not be able to move in the same way we did yesterday or a week ago.** Pay attention to how your body feels each day and do not go beyond your limits. Be mindful.

by Liz Rosenblum

For most of our lives, we take our backs for granted. But at some point in just about everyone's life, our backs revolt and remind us that they need love and attention too. Thankfully, for many of us, the pain is only temporary. But for others, it can be much more debilitating—and much more frustrating.

In severe cases, medical attention may be necessary, but if your pain is less severe, yoga may be able to help by strengthening the back, stretching it and improving circulation to the spine and nerves. Here are some yoga postures for back pain.

Cat/Cow



Starting in tabletop position on your hands and knees, alternate between arching your back and rounding it as you push down on the floor with your hands and tops of your feet. These postures help to massage the spine, while also stretching the back and the torso. These postures are a great way to keep the back limber—and happy.

You have many options when it comes to twisting postures. One of the basic and effective ones is Marichyasana C. Keep your left leg straight and bend your right leg so your foot is flat. Place your right hand on the floor behind you for support, like a tripod, and twist so you can hook your left elbow over the right thigh. If this is too much, you can also grab hold of your right knee and twist to look over your right shoulder. Other options are to bend the left leg under you or bend both legs and let them fall to the side then twist in whichever way your knees are facing.



Spinal Twist

Downward Dog



There's a reason Down Dog is one of the most iconic postures in yoga. It can rejuvenate your entire body. Start in tabletop and raise your hips so your body is in an upside down V position. Relax your head and neck and draw your inner thighs toward the back of the room. Spreading your shoulder blades apart will stretch your upper back even more, and reaching your hips up and back will help to open your lower back. Breathe for five to seven breaths.

From Shoulder Stand, bend at your hips to bring your toes or top of your feet to the floor. Your hands can remain against your back for support, or you can clasp them together, keeping your forearms on the floor. Hold this as long as is comfortable to get a powerful stretch in your shoulders and spine. If this is too much, you can place a chair behind and you rest your feet on the chair.



Plow Pose

Seated Forward Fold



It's easy to do a Seated Forward Fold in a way that won't benefit you, but doing it right can open the lower back and offer relief from stiffness and pain. From a seated position with your legs extended forward, reach for your shins, ankles, or feet, bending at the hips. Instead of rounding your back, continue to reach your sternum forward, lengthening the torso. If this hurts your back, bend your knees as needed.

10 Yoga Postures For Back Pain continued

Not only is Child's Pose an amazing way to relax, it can also stretch your entire back and your hips. Start on all fours, keep your arms forward and sit back so your butt is resting just above your heels. Hold and breathe deeply, feeling the breath reach all the way into your hips. The more you extend in either direction, the more you'll feel relief.



Eagle Pose



This more advanced posture requires balance and strength, but it can help to stretch and open your entire back. From Mountain Pose, with your knees slightly bent, lift your right leg and reach your right thigh over your left. Point your foot toward the floor, and either stop here and balance with your toes on the floor, or hook your right foot behind your left calf. For the arms, bring the right arm under the left and, with elbows bent, bring your palms together. You'll get a powerful stretch by drawing your elbows up and hands away from your face.

Locust is a great way to strengthen your back and buttocks. Lie on your stomach with your arms beside you, palms up, you and your forehead flat on the floor. Slowly lift your head, torso, arms, and legs away from the floor. As you do this, your thighs should be rotated in slightly and you want to feel your body elongate from head to toe. Hold this for 30 seconds to a minute. If you're up for it, relax and repeat two to three times.

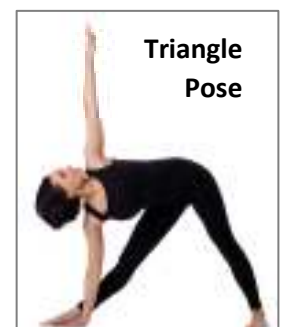


Bow Pose



Lying face down, reach your hands toward your ankles and grab hold one at a time. Slowly lift your chest and thighs away from the floor by drawing your chest forward and the back of your thighs toward the sky. This posture is a wonderful way to strengthen the back muscles, but if you have a back injury, take this easy as it can be intense.

Back pain can be helped, and in some cases prevented, with stretching and strengthening—and Triangle Pose can do both. Stand with your feet about three feet apart and parallel to each other. Rotate your right foot so the right heel is in line with the arch of the left foot. With your arms extended to the side, tilt at the hip to reach your right hand toward the ground, on either side of your foot. Rotate your body to the side and reach the fingers of your left hand toward the sky. Gaze at your left hand (as long as it doesn't hurt your neck!) and hold for five to seven breaths before switching sides.



When it comes to back pain, prevention is key to a long and pain-free life, but **listening to your body** is also extremely important. **Don't force any posture** that could cause injury. If your pain is extreme, you may want to seek medical attention.

Timothy McCall, M.D. Updated: APR 12, 2017 Original: AUG 28, 2007

Looking for reasons to try yoga? From increased strength to flexibility to heart health, we have 38 benefits to rolling out the mat.



1. Improves your flexibility
2. Builds muscle strength
3. Perfects your posture
4. Prevents cartilage and joint breakdown
5. Protects your spine
6. Better your bone health
7. Increases your blood flow
8. Drains your lymphs and boosts immunity
9. Ups your heart rate
10. Drops your blood pressure
11. Regulates your adrenal glands
12. Makes you happier
13. Promotes a healthy lifestyle
14. Lowers blood sugar
15. Helps you focus
16. Relaxes your system
17. Improves your balance
18. Maintains your nervous system
19. Releases tension in your limbs
20. Helps you sleep deeper
21. Boosts your immune system functionality
22. Gives your lungs room to breathe
23. Prevents IBS and other digestive problems
24. Gives you peace of mind
25. Increases your self-esteem
26. Eases your pain
27. Gives you inner strength
28. Connects you with guidance
29. Helps keep you drug free
30. Builds awareness for transformation
31. Benefits your relationships
32. Uses sounds to soothe your sinuses
33. Guides your body's healing in your mind's eye
34. Keeps allergies and viruses at bay
35. Helps you serve others
36. Encourages self-care
37. Supports your connective tissue
38. Uses the placebo effect, to affect change

Maintaining a regular yoga practice can provide physical and mental health benefits

Learn about the different types of yoga and how it can be used as a tool to help you stay healthy.

Like yoga, the osteopathic approach to wellness focuses on your body's natural tendency toward health and self-healing.

"The purpose of yoga is to build strength, awareness and harmony in both the mind and body," explains Natalie Nevins, DO, a board-certified osteopathic family physician and certified Kundalini Yoga instructor in Hollywood, California.

While there are more than 100 different types, or schools, of yoga, most sessions typically include breathing exercises, meditation, and assuming postures (sometimes called asana or poses) that stretch and flex various muscle groups.

"As an osteopathic physician, I focus a lot of my efforts on preventive medicine and practices, and in the body's ability to heal itself," says Dr. Nevins. "Yoga is a great tool for staying healthy because it's based on similar principles."

Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine, or DOs, focus on prevention by examining how your lifestyle and environment impact your health, rather than just treating your symptoms. They also complete extensive postgraduate and clinical training before becoming fully licensed physicians. Compare physician training requirements to those required for other types of clinicians.

Beginners welcome

Because there are so many different kinds of yoga practices, it is possible for anyone to start. "Whether you're a couch potato or a professional athlete, size and fitness levels do not matter because there are modifications for every yoga pose and beginner classes in every style," says Dr. Nevins. "The idea is to explore your limits, not strive for some pretzel-like perfection. It is a great way to get in tune with your body and your inner self."

Physical benefits

"The relaxation techniques incorporated in yoga can lessen chronic pain, such as lower back pain, arthritis, headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome," explains Dr. Nevins. "Yoga can also lower blood pressure and reduce insomnia."

Other physical benefits of yoga include:

increased flexibility	increased muscle strength and tone
improved respiration, energy and vitality	maintaining a balanced metabolism
weight reduction	cardio and circulatory health
improved athletic performance	protection from injury

Mental benefits

Aside from the physical benefits, one of the best benefits of yoga is how it helps a person manage stress, which is known to have devastating effects on the body and mind. "Stress can reveal itself in many ways, including back or neck pain, sleeping problems, headaches, drug abuse, and an inability to concentrate," says Dr. Nevins. "Yoga can be very effective in developing coping skills and reaching a more positive outlook on life."

Yoga's incorporation of meditation and breathing can help improve a person's mental well-being. "Regular yoga practice creates mental clarity and calmness; increases body awareness; relieves chronic stress patterns; relaxes the mind; centers attention; and sharpens concentration," says Dr. Nevins. Body- and self-awareness are particularly beneficial, she adds, "because they can help with early detection of physical problems and allow for early preventive action."

By Gabrielle Harris April 25, 2013

"For breath is life, and if you breathe well you will live long on earth." ::Sanskrit Proverb

"The nose is for breathing, the mouth is for eating." Proverb

Yoga is all about breathing. This came as a bit of an eye opener and for years I really never understood why. Gradually as I did more yoga I collected some tips and facts about breathing which are useful even if you don't practice yoga. I became a big believer in the power of the breath after a chiropractor pointed out to me that my shoulder pain of over a year was being caused by breathing through my mouth as I talked. With one simple breathing exercise the pain went away for good.

10 INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BREATHING

1. Ancient yogis believed we only have so many breaths for our life. If this is so why not stretch our life out a bit longer by taking slow and deep breaths?
2. Breathing is the only autonomous system of the body that we can also control. This means that the body governs it but we can change how we breathe through **conscious breathing practices such as pranayama.**
3. Our breathe is an indicator of our mood and our mood is an indicator of our breath. **This means that if we change how we breathe we can change our mood.** It also means that when our mood changes so does our breath.
4. We breathe in and out of our nose during a yoga practice for a few reasons but the main one is that when we breathe like this we can't take in so much air or expel so much air. So if we have to resort to opening our mouth to get more air it is an indicator that we have stepped into stressing or pushing our bodies. **When we practice yoga, we don't want to stress our bodies by doing open mouth breathing.** Our practice should be a balance of effort with ease.
5. When we breathe we are either right nostril dominated or left nostril. You can find out which is more active by wetting your thumb and holding it to the right then the left nostril. The yogis believe that when the right is more open or breathing more smoothly we are more driven by the sympathetic nervous system which means we are more fired up, more active and aroused. Dominance in the left nostril tends to happen when we are relaxed and at ease. The dominance changes around every 20 minutes during the day. Single nostril breathing can help regulate left and right sides thereby creating balance in our nervous system
6. Breathing more slowly and taking longer breaths can reduce your appetite. **People who breathe quickly or rapidly often overeat.**
7. It is normal to take around 12 cycles of breath per minute. Asthmatics and people who hyperventilate can take in double this amount of breaths. This leads to taking in more oxygen but expelling too much CO2. When your CO2 is decreased you can't get as much oxygen setting up a cycle whereby you breath even faster.
8. There are some common breathing habits that we have that we may not even know about. They are; Only breathing into the chest. Inhalations stronger than exhalations, breath holding, mouth breathing, reverse breathing (where the diaphragm rises instead of falls on the inhale) and over breathing.
9. **Mouth breathing can contribute to the following: misaligned bite, bad breath, snoring, sleep apnea and night-time urination.**
10. The lungs are enormous. The right lung is larger than left lung. The left lung is made up of two lobes while right is made up of three lobes. If you laid out the lungs flat they would cover a tennis court (about 70 square meters!).

Benefits of Nostril Yoga Breathing

by Kreg Weiss April 27, 2008



Breathing is a crucial element in Yoga whether one is doing Yoga poses (asanas) or just meditating. There are wide variations in breathing styles, rhythms, and structures. These variations all come into one basic purpose—to generate greater connection to energy flow, to manipulate the presence and function of prana (life-force energy), and to enable a stronger foundation of internal balance (mind, body, and spirit).

The variations of breathing patterns and styles can often be daunting and overwhelming to new participants to Yoga. However, often the more simple of breathing forms can provide the greatest rewards and benefits. As one of the simplest forms of breathing, basic nostril breathing yields a wealth of benefits.

- By breathing through the nostrils, the inhaled air becomes moistened by the nasal passages. The nasal passages have light coatings of moisture and mucous that is picked up by the passing air. This moistened air is then better received by the tissues of the bronchial passages and lungs.
- When we inhale through the nostrils, the air has more passages to pass through than by inhaling through the mouth. This extra time flowing through airway passages warms the air. Again, this nasal flow prepares the air better for the lungs.
- The nose contains a lining of hairs. These hairs assist in removing air borne particles and other foreign matter that may be undesirable for the lungs. This filtering acts as a secondary support system to the cilia (micro hair-like projections) in the bronchial passages that gently propel mucous and air particles out of the airways.
- When we exhale out of the nose, we retain the warmth of the breath. Inhaled air is greatly warmed in the lungs. During our Yoga practice, we want to conserve this heat energy so it can be transferred into the muscles and tissues. When we exhale through the nose, the heat in the air is transferred to the walls of the nasal passages rather than being lost. This heat then can move into the blood vessels and circulate back into the body.
- Breathing through the nose can aid in developing a slower, more focused breath. By elongating the breath, we can establish a more profound inner gaze and meditative state whether we are doing Yoga postures, lying in relaxation (savasana), or enjoying time in meditation.

By starting with basic nostril breathing, we can build a powerful foundation to our practice. Through this simple breathing, we understand the benefits of breathing and develop an appreciation for more advanced breathing practices (pranayama). At the beginning of your practices, avoid rushing into Yoga flows. Embrace the time to establish your breath first. Feel the texture of the breath moving through the nose and passages. Experience the sense of connection, presence, and focus that nostril breathing provides.

9 Poses to Prevent Bunions & Relieve Bunion Pain



by Doug Keller

By adding a few foot strengtheners to your asana routine, you can ease the pain caused by bunions—or prevent them from developing in the first place.

A bunion makes the foot unstable and wobbly in balancing postures. To stabilize the pose we often lock the knee—and avoid the needed work in the foot.



Rediscover the Standing Poses

The toe exercises are particularly effective and important to practice in the standing poses of hatha yoga. Asanas in which the ankle is neutral, such as the front foot in bent-leg poses like **virabhadrasana (warrior pose) 1 and 2** and **parshvakonasana (side angle pose)**, provide the best opportunity for effective work.



Warrior 2

In standing poses in which the front knee is bent, such as in the warrior poses, keep your front shin vertical—without letting your knee extend beyond the heel—and ground your weight in the center of your heel as you practice lifting, spreading, and extending through your big and little toe.

This strengthens the arches at the inner and outer edges of the foot and realigns your toes. Practice this while slowly bending and straightening the knee, and you'll find that these actions in your foot help your knee to track properly, and can even release tightness in your hip, particularly as you work the little toe side of your foot.



Side Angle

The fundamental poses of hatha yoga provide an opportunity for a complete workout for your feet that is highly effective for preventing, slowing, and even halting the progress of bunions.

Standing poses in which the front ankle is extended, such as the front foot in **trikonasana (triangle pose)** and **parsvottanasana (intense side stretch pose)**, also challenge you to ground and extend through the big toe, since you have to reach more strongly through the big toe while keeping the



Intense Side Stretch

mound of the toe grounded. This can be more comfortable than bent-knee poses, since there is far less pressure on the bunion—and thus less pain—and the stronger work leads to greater benefits for your knee as well as for the big toe muscles, provided that you're careful not to lock (i.e., hyperextend) your knee. Keep a tiny “microbend” in your knee as you work with your foot.



Triangle

Poses in which you balance on one leg, such as **ardha chandrasana (half-moon pose)**, are the most challenging. They can be extraordinarily difficult for people with bunions, especially because of the tendency for the knee to lock and the arch to collapse from the bunion. The bunion makes the foot very unstable and wobbly, since the bones of the foot are unable to stabilize, and thus we often lock the knee to stabilize the posture—and avoid the needed work in the foot. Instead of succumbing to this habit, practice keeping a microbend in your knee and lift your toes to shift your weight back onto the heel. This will strengthen the arch and prevent locking in the knee as you spread your toes



Half Moon

as much as possible for balance. The toe exercise of extending both your big and little toes becomes especially challenging—and effective—when you’re balancing on one foot, and it’s easy to experience how the actions of the foot are closely related to the health of your knee.

Working the Feet in Yoga Poses



Down Dog

Downward-facing dog allows you to work strongly with the lift of the arch as you spread and extend through the toes. As always, keep a microbend in your knees to prevent them from locking, and keep your heels hovering above the ground. This will strengthen your feet while still stretching your calves and hamstrings.

Urdhva mukha shvanasana (upward-facing dog) or bhujangasana (cobra pose) stretches the fronts of your ankles and strengthens the toe extensors, especially if you reach straight back through your big toes (so that the inner edges of the feet are parallel, rather than sickling), while also bringing your little toes down toward the floor. Lightly press all of your toenails—especially those of the big and little toes—into the floor to align and work your feet.



Cobra



Upward Facing Dog



Bridge

Bridge pose (setu bandhasana) strongly works the arches and toes as long as you keep your thighs and feet parallel. If you work your feet as described in this article, there’s no need to turn your feet inward as students are sometimes instructed to do. The work you’re doing in your arches and toes while keeping the inner corners of your feet grounded will keep you from splaying your feet outward.

Seated forward bends provide an opportunity to work the feet without experiencing the painful consequences of bearing weight on a bunion.

Last but not least, **seated forward bends** provide an opportunity to work the feet without experiencing the painful consequences of bearing weight on a bunion. Place a yoga block at the sole of your foot and a strap around the block, so that you can work the actions of the foot as if you were standing on the floor. Press through the toe mound (especially beneath your big toe) and into the block, keeping the block square while working your toes.

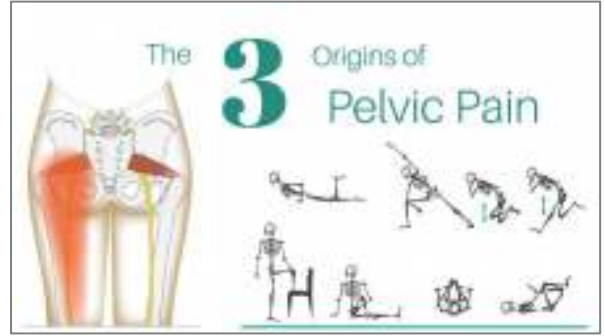


Seated Forward Bends

In conclusion, the fundamental poses of hatha yoga provide an opportunity for a complete workout for your feet that is highly effective for preventing, slowing, and even halting the progress of painful bunions. It takes a little extra effort and attention, but your practice as a whole will benefit from it, even if your feet don’t (yet) show any signs of bunions. When you add a little warm-up and workout for your arches and toes, yoga will keep your feet happy and healthy.

by Olga Kabel

Having a literal pain in the butt is not a fun experience; it can make walking, sitting and sleeping difficult and uncomfortable. It is certainly something that one would want gone as soon as possible, yet sometimes we unknowingly exacerbate the issue by trying to stretch the injured area. There is a special name for these types of practices: *anga bangha*. It basically means that you want to do something good but end up hurting yourself. Today we will explore three types of the pain in the butt and how you can avoid making your practice *anga bangha*.



Pain in the butt #1: Lower butt pain.

Many years ago I was preparing for a fitness competition and my routine included a split. One day, being young and silly, I plopped into the split right off the bat and heard “Crrkhh” at the bottom of my right buttock. “Hmm, I thought, that didn’t sound too good”. I did manage to get out of the split, but ended up limping for a couple of weeks and then dealing with the pain in the butt for months afterwards.

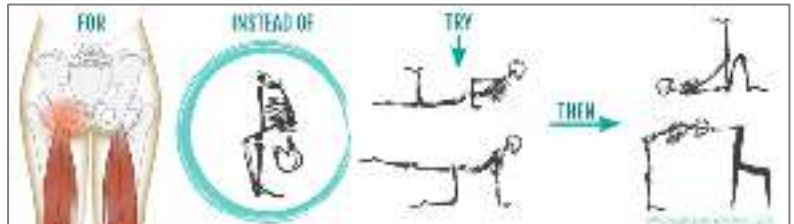
Location: This is the pain that you experience right in the crease of the buttock at the back of the thigh. It might give you trouble when you walk, but becomes especially pronounced when you bend forward with legs straight.

Offender: Hamstring tendon(s)

Reason: This type of pain is usually a sign of an injury to the tendon(s) that attach your hamstrings to the pelvis. It is usually a result of pulling on the hamstrings too enthusiastically, especially if they haven’t been warmed up properly. When yoga practitioners insist on keeping the legs straight in forward bends and then force themselves into a pose, they may end up injuring the tendon. Yoga teachers who demonstrate a lot in their classes are also at risk, since they are more likely to go into a difficult posture without proper preparation.

Common remedy: Here is the paradox: When the tendon becomes injured, the hamstring muscles naturally contract, trying to prevent further damage to the tendon. And we think, my hamstrings feel tight and painful; if I only stretch them the pain will go away. So instead of allowing the tendon to heal, we keep reinjuring it by actively stretching the hamstrings. This cycle can go on for a very long time.

Better solution: Give your tendon(s) a chance to heal. This means contracting the hamstrings to increase circulation to the area, bending the knees generously in the forward bends and only very mild stretching, if any. Once the acute phase has passed, you can begin to add gradual stretching.



Pain in the butt #2: Outer/upper butt pain.

I have a client who came to me complaining about the pain in the hip that interfered with her walking and sleeping. She has been to a physical therapist who suggested core strengthening, an orthopedic surgeon who diagnosed her with piriformis syndrome, and a licensed massage therapist who treated her for a tight iliotibial band. After careful exploration we have determined that the location and symptoms of her pain were pointing toward the weakened abductor muscles (the muscles on the outside of the thigh), which caused a displacement of the pelvis and a host of muscle compensation patterns. We began to work on strengthening her abductors and shortly after her pain was gone.

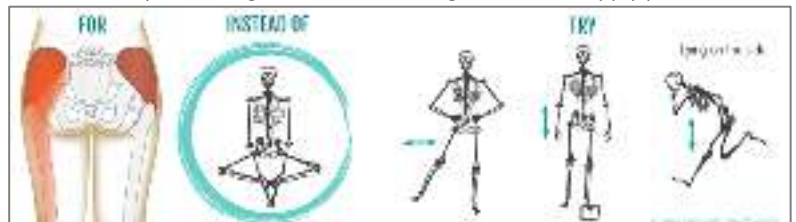
Location: This type of pain usually shows up in the upper or outer buttock area and can resonate down on the side of the leg. It usually gets worse during walking and while lying on the affected side at night.

Offender: Weak abductor(s), tight ilioitibial band can be a contributing factor

Reason: This pain is often due to some sort of an asymmetrical movement pattern that goes on for an extended period of time.

Common remedy: This pain is often perceived as an IT band issue and remedied by stretching the IT band or using the roller to apply pressure to it. This can be very useful, but it does not address the root of the problem – weak abductors. Until those are strengthened, the issue will continue to pop up.

Better solution. You need to strengthen the abductors by using them in the stabilizing role (standing on one leg) and moving role (moving the leg out to the side, preferably against gravity).





Pain the butt #3: Central butt pain.

When the Body Worlds exhibit came to town, one of the reasons I went was to check out the structure of the hip, since I do not have ready access to cadavers. Yes, it was creepy at times, but also fascinating. For example, I was amazed at how big the sciatic nerve is – yes, it's the longest nerve in your body, extending from the lower spine all the way down into the foot, but it's also very thick – about the thickness of your pinky finger – between your spine and hip area.

Since the nerve is so big and long, it can get pinched at various locations causing all-too-familiar sciatic pain. Two common sites of impingement are the lower back (between the lumbar vertebrae) and underneath the tight piriformis muscle.

Piriformis is a small muscle that can cause a lot of trouble if it gets tight. It sits deep within the hip and its job is to rotate the hip externally and to abduct the leg when the hip is flexed. Tight piriformis by itself can cause the pain in the butt, but the situation becomes worse if it presses on the sciatic nerve that passes underneath (and for some people right through) the piriformis muscle.

Location: The pain can show up in the middle of the buttock, in the lower back or anywhere along the pathway of the nerve. It can also manifest as numbness or weakness in the leg.

Offender: Herniated disks, bone spurs on the vertebrae or tight piriformis muscle

Reason: Sitting or driving a lot, degenerative changes in the spine with age

Common remedy: If the sciatic pain is due to a herniated disk, it is a much bigger issue and is beyond the scope of this post. Core strengthening under the guidance of a physical therapist would be the best solution. If the pain is due to the tight piriformis muscle, we can work on releasing the muscle tension. The most commonly recommended pose for the tight piriformis is [Pigeon Pose](#). Unfortunately, for many people with this type of pain [Pigeon Pose](#) is too much, too soon. [Pigeon Pose](#) places the piriformis in the maximum stretched position and pulls strongly on the sciatic nerve as well. This means that if the pain is acute, [Pigeon Pose](#) can make it feel worse.

Better solution: It makes much more sense to utilize our usual Contract-Relax-Stretch principle.

Step 1. We begin by contracting the surrounding muscles (particularly gluteus maximus) to increase the blood flow into the general area.

Step 2. Then we can gently contract the piriformis muscle itself, asking it to relieve the chronic contraction (only if it doesn't cause pain) in combination with gentle stretching. Poses like [Virabhadrasana 2](#), [Utthita Parsvakonasana](#) and versions of clam shell (lying on your side with your knees bent and lifting top knee off the bottom knee) will contract the piriformis. A simple standing twist with a chair and [Ardha Matsyendrasana](#) (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose, Half Spinal Twist) would be good options for stretching it since they place your leg into flexed/adducted position without the external rotation element, which is milder for piriformis.

Step 3. When you are ready to add the external rotation element to your stretching, it's better to choose [Thread-the-Needle Pose](#) (Supine Half Lotus) Pose instead of Pigeon, or [Gomukasana](#) (Cow Face). Or you can practice Gomukasana on your back instead of in a seated position, which will apply less leverage against your piriformis. Only after practicing those will you be ready for Pigeon or Gomukasana (and some students won't be ready for a long time if ever).

In addition, it makes sense to relieve chronic contraction in the adductors, since tight adductors can internally rotate the leg, placing additional stress on the piriformis muscle. Tight hamstrings can also irritate the sciatic nerve, so it is useful to relieve tension there. Keep in mind, that even the simplest hamstring stretches can be very painful to a student with sciatica, so it's best to follow the same principle for hamstring work that we've outlined in Pain in the butt #1. So there you have it. Keep in mind that sometimes there can be multiple things going on, so if your pain persists despite your best efforts, it's probably time to seek professional help.



Benefits of a mind-body practice without the risk of falling

Chair Yoga

By Sarah Klein, Health Writer, February 11, 2025



What is chair yoga?

Chair yoga is exactly what it sounds like: yoga that is performed while seated in a chair. Every pose, breathing exercise, or meditation is done while sitting down. The term may also be used to describe yoga positions that are done while standing but holding onto a chair for added support.

Could chair yoga be right for you?

Anyone can try chair yoga. But it's especially helpful for anyone who has difficulty balancing, standing for a long time, or getting up from or down on the floor, where yoga is traditionally performed. Chair yoga is also a great option for a quick stretch if you'll be sitting for a while, such as on a long car or plane trip or at your desk during a busy workday.

Benefits of chair yoga

- ✓ Lower stress
- ✓ Reduced risk of heart disease
- ✓ More stable blood sugar
- ✓ Less anxiety and depression
- ✓ Less back and arthritis pain
- ✓ Sharper memory
- ✓ Better sleep
- ✓ Greater happiness
- ✓ Weight loss

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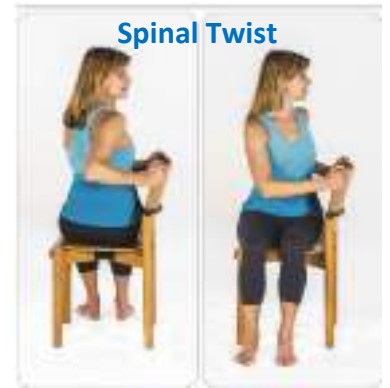
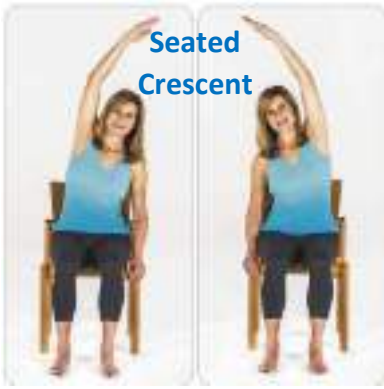
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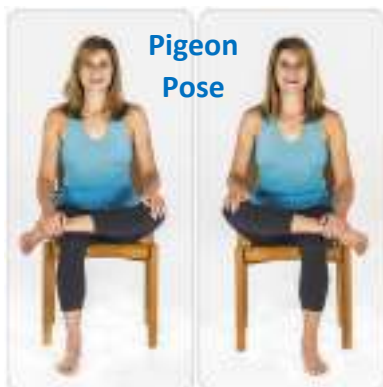
SAMPLE POSES

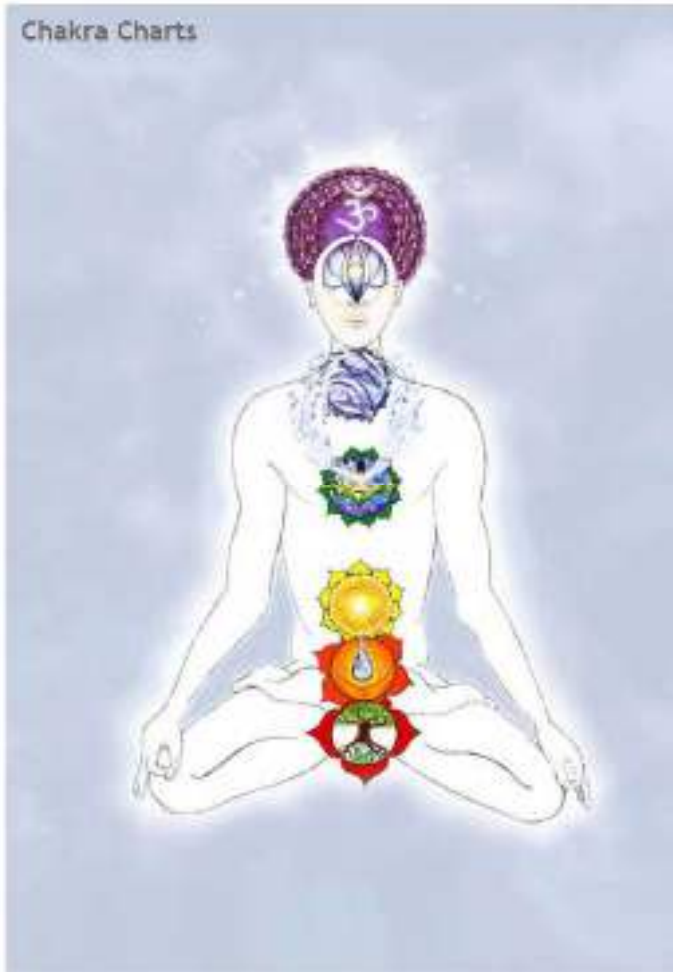
Chair Yoga



SAMPLE POSES

Chair Yoga





- Within the body exist a series of seven major energy centers, called chakras.
- The word chakra is Sanskrit for "wheel".
- Each chakra relates to a unique aspect of our being.
- Anatomically, the seven major charkas are located either along, or just in front of, the spine



MULADHARA

at the base of the spine

A balanced **MULADHARA** Chakra leads to feeling grounded, centered, committed and independent, having energy and vitality, strength and stillness, able to digest foods well.



SVADHISHTHANA

At the base of the pubis between the genitals and the sacral nerve plexus

A balanced **SVADHISHTHANA** Chakra leads to feeling compassionate, friendly, intuitive, vital, sexual, satisfied, prosperous, having a sense of belonging and humour.



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MANIPURA

At the Abdomen

A balanced **MANIPURA** Chakra leads to feeling energetic, confident, intelligent, decisive, productive, good digestion, mental focus



AJNA

Between the eyebrows (Third Eye)

A balanced **AJNA** Chakra leads to the ability to think reality into existence, imagination, intuition, concentration and focus



ANAHATA

At the heart

A balanced **ANAHATA** Chakra leads to feeling of completeness and wholeness, compassionate, empathic, friendly, optimistic, motivated, nurturing, outgoing



SAHASRARA

at the Crown of the head

A balanced **SAHASRARA** Chakra leads to the feeling at one with the universe, open-minded, intelligent, thoughtful, understand and learn information more easily.



VISHUDDHA

At the Throat

A balanced **VISHUDDHA** Chakra leads to creative and expressive, constructive communication, contentment, centered, conscious listening, positive self expression

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by Becky Striepe



Poor circulation can cause all sorts of problems in your body like fluid retention and swelling in the lower extremities. Often the causes of poor circulation are out of our control, but one way to improve your body's circulation is with exercise. Check out these yoga poses to help get your heart pumping and your blood flowing!

Swelling is more than a cosmetic concern – it can be very uncomfortable. Exercise can't always totally cure the effects of poor circulation, but it can definitely help give you some relief.

For example, my pregnancy is causing some swelling in my feet and ankles, and practicing yoga helps bring that swelling down visibly. I recommend following this up with a warm bath with plenty of epsom salts. You can also try elevating your legs on cushions in the evening, so they are above your heart. Let gravity help you!



7 Yoga Pose for improving blood circulation: One of the most important functions in the body is the circulation of blood. This supplies blood, oxygen and nutrients to the brain and other organs. Good circulation promotes healthy skin, cell growth, energy and cognitive ability. Poor circulation may cause numbness, dizziness, nerve damage, tissue damage, muscle cramps, blood clots, varicose veins and can lead to peripheral artery disease (PAD).



Virabhadrasana – Warrior Pose –

Warrior pose for improving blood circulation. Warrior pose stretches the muscles of arms, shoulders, neck, legs, and groin favoring muscle contraction and relaxation. Such tone up muscles encourages circulation. Furthermore, the joints of the legs, the waist and those of spinal cord and neck get curved exactly in opposite direction, regulating the blood circulation in those joints.

Salamba Sarvangasana – Shoulder Stand –

Shoulder stand pose for improving blood circulation. Shoulder stand is a part of Hatha yoga, where all pressure is exerted on the neck, shoulders and back of the head. As the body remains straight from feet up to shoulder with legs at the 90-degree angle from the floor, blood flows from lower part of the body towards heart for oxygenation. Peculiar shoulder stand position improves supply of fresh blood to the brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat.

Viparita Karani- Leg's Up Pose –

Legs up pose for improving blood circulation. Inverted body position with leg's up is just opposite to our normal standing or sitting posture. Gravity effect pushes impure blood from legs and pelvis towards heart and improves circulation.

Uttanpadasana with Both Legs

Uttanpadasana with Both Legs for improving blood circulation. Vertical position of both legs stretches thigh muscles facilitating blood circulation. In this pose, you raise both legs up without the support of a wall.

Shavasana- Corpse pose –

Shavasana improving blood circulation. Shavasana is one of the best relaxing poses, where a body looks like a dead body. Whenever a body is in action, it requires more oxygen, which is gained through increasing circulation. Increased circulation favors increase in respiration.

Deep Breathing

– While breathing in, the diaphragm, a major respiratory muscle is pulled down. This minimizes the chest pressure and increases abdominal pressure. An increased abdominal pressure compresses the abdominal veins, a type of blood vessels and pushes blood upward in chest and heart.

– While breathing out, the diaphragm reverts back in its normal position, which minimizes abdominal pressure. Reduced abdominal pressure drains blood from both legs toward abdomen and improves venous return to the heart.

Kapalbhati -Skull Shining Breath –

Kapalbhati improving blood circulation, Kapalbhati, a process of fast exhalation and jerky inhalation is another type of breathing useful in maintaining a flow of blood. Peculiar exhalation and inhalation contracts and relax the abdominal muscles and diaphragm.

Unlike in deep breathing, during exhalation, blood is pushed from an abdomen upward in the heart. While in inhalation, the blood from legs drain into abdomen and go to the heart in next round.

Five Tips to Prevent Dizziness in Yoga

Getting a little woozy while practicing yoga isn't uncommon. The sensation can vary from an almost pleasant, slightly intoxicated feeling (like the rush after the first swallow of a good glass of champagne) to nausea accompanied by a frightening feeling that the room is spinning out of control. In severe cases, students can even pass out. Although occasional wooziness while practicing yoga is no cause for alarm, if you regularly experience lightheadedness—during yoga or not—check with your doctor. If she gives you the green light to continue practicing, here are five strategies that may help.

1. **Eat a small meal before class.** Yoga teachers generally recommend that students not eat for three hours before practicing asana. It's not bad advice, as long as you're not hypoglycemic. If your blood sugar tends to be on the low side, eating a light meal or a protein bar before class may make a world of difference.
2. **Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.** People who get woozy when they stand up or when they move their head from below to above their heart often suffer from postural hypotension. Drinking lots of water before class helps pump up the blood volume and seems to keep blood pressure more stable.
3. **Practice in the afternoon or evening.** Many of my clients with dizziness issues have significantly fewer problems if they practice later in the day. I can't fully explain why, other than that increased food, fluid, and daily activity all probably contribute.
4. **Move slowly.** Sudden transitions result in lightheadedness. Coming out of a forward bend, moving from the floor to standing, even sitting up from Savasana. Make each transition slow, mindful, and focused on the breath.
5. **Keep your head above your heart.** This one is tougher, because it involves modifying the postures. Instead of going fully into a forward bend, try going halfway or keeping your chin slightly lifted. Sometimes a small change in form fixes the problem.

There are many causes for lightheadedness, including medication side effects, inner ear issues, low blood pressure, and low blood sugar. Some of them are much trickier to deal with than others. **Remember: always check with your doctor if you have a health-related concern in yoga class.** Once your health care provider says all is well, try one of these five tips. They have helped many of my clients continue their practice with comfort and ease. I hope they help you, too.

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I Feel Dizzy After a Standing Forward Bend in Yoga Practice

Question: Sometimes coming up out of postures like the standing forward stretch with clasped fingers outstretched behind I get a little dizzy (occasionally have needed to rest against something for support). Sometimes it feels like I am swaying gently side to side as well. What is the dizziness/ light headedness symptomatic of?

Answer: What's happening to you is quite common, and it is usually related to blood pressure. People with low blood pressure are especially susceptible, but it can happen to anyone. A sudden reversion to the upright position can cause a significant lowering of blood pressure in the chest and head, a shift that's more than the body's circulatory system can compensate for gracefully.

Try either or both of these remedies:

1. **Come out of the forward bend very slowly,** using several breaths to exit.
2. As you come out of the pose, **keep chin to chest.** Even once you're upright, keep chin to chest for several breaths before straightening your neck.

For most people, either or both of these remedies are all that's needed. If the sensation continues, it may be prudent to **stay in the forward bend for a shorter length of time.**

Can Yoga Cause Vertigo? Here's How To Beat The Vertigo

Forward Fold (Uttanasna) is an incredibly relaxing and rejuvenating yoga pose. But, if you're hanging over your legs and suddenly return to an upright position too quickly, you're likely to feel real faint, real fast. Standing up too quickly from a forward bend can cause a surge of blood to rush down into the legs and abdomen, leaving too little blood to fill the heart. Don't worry though, your body is smarter than you think, and quickly corrects this by constricting your blood vessels to amp up the pressure in your body.

If vertigo during your flow is a common problem, here are a few ways to keep the dizzy vibes to a minimum.

First, always remember to **hydrate properly throughout the day**. Being dehydrated can cause blood pressure instability and unpleasant vertigo during your yoga flow. Once you're hydrated, make sure you're **moving slowly through your sequences**, especially the more challenging poses you haven't quite perfected yet.

This might mean **taking your sweet, sweet time as you move out of inverted poses**, as well as remembering to always rest in child's pose afterward. For **forward folds**, be sure to carefully **rise up, vertebrae by vertebrae**.

Above all, remember that there's no need to rush whatsoever when you're doing yoga, even if you're in a class and it feels like you're "lagging" behind. Your teacher's instructions are simply a guide, never a command. Get to the next pose on your own time, **listening to your body only**.

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4 Tips to Cure Dizziness during Yoga

Recently I've had a couple of students ask me about feeling dizzy during yoga. Vinyasa Yoga or Flow Yoga has a lot of postures that reverse your blood flow more rapidly than classic Hatha yoga. Moving from **Standing forward bend (Uttanasana) to Mountain pose (Tadasana)** can cause dizziness if you stand up too quickly.



Basically any transition that goes from a standing forward bend that is held for longer than an minute to standing posture can cause dizziness for those who already have low blood pressure.

If you tend to get dizzy here are some modifications you can try.

1. When coming up from a forward bend, **come through a half-lifted position and stay there for a breath**. **Firm your leg muscles**, this will pump blood towards the heart. Also **come up on an inhale**.
2. If you still suffer from dizziness, **skip some of the forward bends in vinyasa and stay in the half-lifted position longer** and step back to plank from there. Also, you can take more **Child's Poses** instead of Downward Dogs each time.
3. Instead of taking Standing Wide Legged Forward Bend (Prasarita Padatonasana) **take a seat**. Just sit down and enjoy the wide legged seated bend instead.
4. Deep breathing can also contribute to dizziness. Continue to breath, but **take a more normal breath**. **Make sure not to hold the breath**, because this can cause dizziness as well.



by Jennifer Williams-Fields

Adho Mukha Svanasana – Downward-Facing Dog is the ultimate back of the body stretch. This includes the hamstrings, gastrocnemius (calf muscle) and Achilles tendon in the legs. To make Downward-Facing Dog even sweeter for the feet, add in alternating gentle heel raises by bending one knee as you push the opposite heel to the ground. If your heels don't touch the ground, place a rolled up blanket or yoga mat under the heels for support.



Runner's Stretch – Come into a low lunge with your right foot forward. Keeping your back toes tucked under, drop your left knee to the mat and shift the hips back towards the heel. Flex your right foot and hinge the upper body over the front knee. Hands on blocks will provide extra support here and allow for a deeper hip hinge.

Virasana – Hero's Pose. From a kneeling position, press the tops of your feet into the mat as you bring yourself down between your legs. Knees should be pointing forward for proper alignment. If your hips can't comfortably reach the floor without straining the knees, place a bolster or blanket between your legs to raise the height of your seat. If this stretch is too intense for the feet, a rolled blanket under the ankles can provide some relief.



Vrksasana - Tree Pose with a block. Standing on a block in tree pose will destabilize the standing foot and help to strengthen both the primary and assister muscles. Standing on the block will also better enable you to evenly distribute the weight among all four corners of the standing foot. Be sure you don't grip your toes around the block or allow the standing hip to sink down. Although a cork block will provide more stability here, a foam block is better to help feel proper weight distribution. (Practice by the wall at first.)

Baddha Konasana - Bound Angle Pose. With your feet placed together, you'll really be able to see if you have flat feet or high arches. Placing a tennis ball between your feet to gently roll back and forth will help stretch fascia.



Viparita Karani - Legs Up the Wall with a V stretch. Taking the legs wide into a V shape provides a gentle stretch for the abductor muscles. Tight inner thigh muscles can overload the foot arch causing pain or an imbalance in the feet during walking. Legs Up the Wall also relieves edema of the lower extremities as well as providing for the force placed upon the feet during the day.

Foot Massage for Tired Feet

For a bonus treat for your feet, practice self-foot massage regularly. Add a few drops of essential oils to any oil or lotion you use for a foot massage for added luxuriousness. Chamomile, lavender and eucalyptus each have anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties. Find a comfortable place to sit and rest your foot on the opposite knee.



Using both hands, walk your thumbs up the center line of your foot. Use firm but gentle pressure, spending a little extra time on any tender pressure points you find. Rub the bottom of each toe, and then gently pull the toe upward.

Using the heel of your opposite hand, firmly rub the arch of the foot in a circular motion. Do the same on the ball of the foot and the heel.

Again using the opposite hand, rotate your ankle in a circular motion, alternating directions. Flex and point the foot a few times and then use gentle light strokes along the top of the foot.

Finally, weave the fingers of your opposite hand through the toes of your foot to separate them. Spread the toes wide, but don't exert too much pressure between them. Switch and repeat on the other foot.

You are definitely not alone if you get foot cramps in yoga class. These extremely painful cramps are known to strike especially during poses like pigeon and hero where the foot is tucked under and the top of the foot rests on the floor. Foot cramps can be embarrassing when you have to get out of your pose and walk it off. Learn how to prevent and deal with foot cramps.



Causes

A cramp is a sudden and involuntary muscle contraction. You may experience a cramp during positions that stretch the muscles in your foot in ways that it is not used to. Even if you do a lot of yoga, the amount of time you spend with your foot tucked under is pretty small, so cramps can still affect even the most dedicated yoga students. People with flat feet seem particularly affected.

Dehydration is a common contributing factor for muscle cramps. Especially if you are doing hot yoga, you may be sweating and getting dehydrated throughout a yoga session. Or, you may not have replenished with water before starting the class. In addition, muscle cramps can develop due to imbalances in various body salts. These include sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium. If you drink too much water you dilute these salts, so it is best to drink when thirsty during any activity. You may also not have enough salts on board because you have skipped meals, have an imbalanced diet or are taking medications that deplete your electrolytes.

Prevention

Start off right so you are less likely to get a foot cramp during yoga.

Drink Right: An hour before yoga class, drink a large glass of water. After that and during class, drink when thirsty. Contrary to what you might have heard, most people can trust their thirst during exercise. Keep a water bottle handy so you don't put off drinking as soon as you feel thirst.

Eat Right: Eating an hour or more before yoga class may ensure you have enough electrolytes on board. Think of including potassium-rich foods, like bananas, and appropriate amounts of table salt.

Foot Stretches: You may also want to incorporate a few foot stretches into your yoga warm-up so that your feet are as ready as possible for whatever the class may bring. While lying on your back, roll your ankles in both directions. You can do this with your legs straight and point up at the ceiling for a little hamstring stretch or with the knees slightly bent. Then move the feet back and forth between a pointed and a flexed position. This extra attention may help and is a good habit in any case.

Props: You can use a small pillow or a rolled towel under your ankle when you are in child pose or other poses that rest the top of the foot on the floor. This will keep your foot from being less pointed and triggering a cramp. You may also want to tuck your toes under your foot for a portion of these poses so you are stretching the plantar sole of your foot.

Dealing With a Foot Cramp

If you do cramp up, the best thing to do is curl your toes up to stretch out the sole of the foot. In the middle of a pose where you are resting on the top of your foot, tuck them under the foot. Massage your arch until the pain passes. Don't worry about coming out of the pose or feel embarrassed. It's not unusual and won't even register on most people's radar. What you are doing will be obvious to any experienced teacher. You can always mouth "foot cramp" in her general direction for good measure.

As with any pain or soreness that surfaces in yoga class, keep an eye on the frequency and severity of your cramping. If you try the above suggestions and nothing helps or if the cramping gets worse, it's time to talk to a doctor.

Jan 22, 2018, by Abi Carver



What is the groin? The groin is your upper inner thigh. It is closely related to your hip adductors, which are the five inner thigh muscles that lie in between your quads and hamstrings.

These five adductors originate from the pubic and sitting bones. Two are short adductors - the pectineus and the adductor brevis - and attach at the back of the upper femur (thighbone). Two are longer - the adductor longus and adductor magnus - and attach lower down the femur. The longest - the gracilis - attaches below the knee, to the upper tibia (shinbone).

Actions of the adductors

These are many and varied:

- When they contract, the adductors squeeze your thighs together—this is known as hip adduction.
- They assist the hip flexors (psoas and iliacus) and abductors (glutes and TFL) in flexing, extending and rotating your hip.
- The gracilis assists the hamstrings in knee flexion and stabilization.
- They co-contract with the hip abductors to stabilize the hips and pelvis.

Why is your groin tight?

Probably because you've done a whole lot of activities that require you to contract your adductors and comparatively little stretching. This, like most muscular imbalances, unfortunately, is exacerbated by riding, in which you draw your thighs towards each other to control the bike and never have to open them very wide or take them through their full range of motion.

Additionally, your adductors tighten up in much the same way as the hip flexors do from sitting too much, and you may well do or have done sports when you were younger that required running and changing direction quickly, without paying too much attention to your recovery.

What range of flexibility should you have?

Here is a simple test you can do. Lie on your back with butt against the wall and your legs straight up. Allow your legs to fall open (abduct) while maintaining contact with the wall. You should have at least a 90-degree angle between your legs. Overly tight adductors can contribute to pain and dysfunction in the lower back, hips, knees, and ankles, and can make you more susceptible to groin injuries.

Yoga and the groin

Many people don't realize that their groin is tight until they start practicing yoga. In many ways, it can act as a diagnostic tool. In our sessions, we focus as much on hip abduction (pulling your thighs apart) as on hip adduction (drawing them together). I've written before about hip openers, but this is a fairly general term. In a previous article, I described the three different types—outer hip (glute), hip flexor and groin stretches. Today, I'll just focus on the last of these.

Sitting Cross-Legged – Your knees are level with or below your hips (not up by your armpits) and your spine is straight. To achieve this, sit on the edge of some cushions or a block to lift your hips up higher than your knees. This allows your pelvis to rotate forward and bring your spine into a neutral position. In time, your groin will start to release and your posture will improve.



Happy Baby – If you can't reach your feet, hold onto your ankles or shins. Rock gently from side to side and then hold the pose still. Breathe and relax, allowing your groin to let go of tension on every exhalation.



Wide-Knee Child's Pose – Touch your big toes together and bring your knees out wide for this variation of Child's Pose. If your butt doesn't reach your heels, sit back on a pillow or some cushions. Shift your weight from side to side to loosen up your groin, then settle into the pose. Breathe deep into your lower back, letting go of tension on every exhalation.

Shift your weight from side to side to loosen up your groin, then settle into the pose. Breathe deep into your lower back, letting go of tension on every exhalation.

Squat Twist – This variation of the Squat will give you some extra leverage. When your left arm is up, press against the inside of your right thigh with your bent arm to deepen the stretch. If your heels don't touch the ground, you can stay up on your toes or find something to support them on.



Wide-Leg Forward Bend – In this hamstring and groin stretch, it is totally fine to keep your knees bent – don't force it. And if you have lower back issues and have been advised against practicing forward bends, please skip this pose.

Reclining Butterfly – If you support your knees on cushions, you may find that you can let go of more tension, as your central nervous system receives the message that it is safe to relax. Breathe deeply and let gravity do the work.



Sleeping Pigeon – Sleeping Pigeon is a deep hip opener. To really feel it in your groin, inch your front foot forward a few inches before you relax into the pose. Use as many cushions as you need, to support your right hip.

Bending Tree – This variation of Tree Pose ups the ante by shifting your center of gravity. Press down firmly through your bottom foot, engage your core and try to hold the pose as still as you can for 5 breaths.



Extended Side Angle – In this pose, line up your front heel with the middle of your back foot, try to bring your front thigh parallel with the mat and press back firmly through the outside edge of your left foot.



*By Carolyn Gregoire***Modified Eagle**

Relieves upper body tension



When you feel a headache coming on, suddenly the only thing that matters is relieving that tension — and fast. But if you're looking for a solution outside of a pill bottle, consider trying a yogic breathing exercise or a soothing spinal twist. With the ability to help relieve tension, boost circulation, and calm the mind, yoga can be a powerful natural remedy for headaches.

**Cat & Cow**

Relieves tension in the spine, shoulders and neck

Child's Pose, extended

powerful remedy for stress, anxiety and headaches



"Yoga helps to release tension and stress in the body, and the majority of headaches are usually tension-related," Lynn A. Anderson, Ph.D., doctor of naturopathy and certified yoga instructor, tells The Huffington Post. "Yoga gives the individual an opportunity to slow down and relax, and also really improves circulation throughout the body. Anytime you improve circulation, that improves pain and stress."

**Seated Forward Bend**

Boosts circulation

Legs up Wall

Quiets the mind and reduces fatigue

**Knees to Chest**

Loosens the muscles up the back. Release of the pose rushes blood throughout the body.

Seated Spinal Twist

Releases lower back



Specific poses can help target some of the underlying causes of your headaches, like stress and tightness, according to Anderson.

"With yoga, you have oxygen and the blood flow going to the brain," says Anderson. "The majority of your life, gravity is pulling you down towards the earth. Your body flow is all going down and pooling towards your feet. So it's a good idea to get that flow going up in the opposite direction towards the brain — that's what we do with yoga."

Head to Knee

Boosts blood flow and releases tension



If you're feeling a headache coming on — or just need a little stress relief — try these poses.

Deep Breathing

Releases tension in the shoulders and brings more oxygen into the brain

**Corpse Pose**

Quiets the mind and completely relaxes the body

Yoga for Headaches

Bridge Pose

Stretches and relaxes upper back & neck



Getting on your mat when you're suffering from a headache can help relieve some of the symptoms. By adding more circulation to your head and taking deep breaths, you might see improvements.



Big Toe Pose
Calms the brain and helps relieve stress,



Fire Log Pose

Stretches the hip and groin to reduce sciatic pain

Corpse Pose

Quiets the mind, relaxes the body



Dolphin Pose

Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression



Downward Facing Dog

Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression



Extended Puppy Pose

lengthens the spine and calms the mind



Head to Knee Forward Bend

Calms the brain and helps relieve mild depression

POPSUGAR.COM

Cure Headaches With These Yoga Poses

by JENNY SUGAR

If you're not a fan of heading to the medicine cabinet when you feel a headache coming on, then head straight to your yoga mat. Headaches can be caused by a variety of reasons such as tension in your neck, tight shoulders, or back pain, and these yoga poses are designed to gently stretch and open those areas, while circulating blood to your head. You can do one pose, a few, or follow the entire sequence.



Seated Neck Release

Stretches the neck

Relaxed Quarter Dog

Circulates blood to head for headache relief

Grounded Tipover Tuck

Releases tight shoulders often a cause of headaches



Seated Heart Opener

Reduces tension in the back

Happy Baby Pose

Reduces tension in the back and relaxes the mind

Legs up Wall

Instills a sense of calmness

Yoga Helped Eugenia Esquivel Cope With RA. Now She Teaches Others How It Can Restore Every Body.



A couple dozen people in the yoga studio lie back on bolsters, their eyes closed and their arms resting loosely by their sides. “Give yourself permission to be supported,” instructor Eugenia Esquivel says gently. “Give yourself permission to rest.”

Those are sentiments Eugenia takes to heart. The mindfulness she gains from yoga helps her cope with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). And the lessons she’s learned from her journey with RA shape her approach as a yoga instructor.

Yoga can seem intimidating when it is portrayed by photos of people in formfitting clothes doing backbends or headstands. But Eugenia assures her students that yoga isn’t a competitive sport; it’s a personal practice. No matter what physical limitations someone has, poses can be adapted, and there should be no pressure to fit anyone else’s expectations.

“Yoga is for every body. It doesn’t have limits of age or size,” she says. “It’s a practice that is for any- and everybody, any ability.”

A PATH TO HEALING

Eugenia, 49, first felt unexpected soreness in the joints of her toes and balls of her feet about 19 years ago. Then her knuckles swelled, her fingers became hot and tight and she struggled to hold even a toothbrush. She was 30, vice president of marketing for a financial services company and living in Dallas when she was diagnosed in 2000 with RA and ulcerative colitis, both autoimmune diseases.

“The hardest thing for me was not being in control of my body,” she says. She enjoyed working out in the gym, but when it became too hard, she discovered yoga. “I just fell in love with it,” she says. She’s continued ever since and enrolled in yoga teacher training in 2008, although she remained committed to her corporate life.

Her RA went into remission in 2004, and with her rheumatologist’s blessing, she tapered off the disease-modifying drugs she was taking for it. But the RA came back with a vengeance in 2011. Some days, the pain and fatigue would keep her in bed, where she would work with her laptop and cellphone.

Although biologic medications have controlled her RA, she still has had to learn to navigate a world in which she might feel fine one day but struggle to get out of bed the next. She knew



it was hard for some of her friends to understand why she would cancel plans at the last minute – “You wear the mask of being OK and being normal,” she says – and she struggled with feelings of loneliness and loss. Over time, she stopped worrying about how people would respond and focused on friends who were supportive and understanding.

Stress made her RA worse, and when work stress compounded the daily challenges of living with RA and led to more frequent and severe flares, she knew she had to make a change. She left her corporate job in 2015 and took some time off to regroup. Yoga became one of her cornerstones, and she eventually took another yoga teacher training program.

MINDFUL OF GRATITUDE

The physical practice of yoga improves Eugenia’s strength and mobility, while its mindful breathing and principles for living help her avoid stress-related flares.

“It’s that yoga-off-the-mat that has been most beneficial to supporting my arthritis – letting myself be OK with not being able to do what I did yesterday because I know tomorrow’s going to be another day,” she says.

Today, she and her husband live in Atlanta, where she teaches yoga in private sessions and in a studio.

Among her students are people who have experienced domestic violence or other forms of trauma as well as those with physical limitations. Eugenia helps her students modify poses to accommodate their abilities and disabilities. She also encourages everyone to feel grateful for whatever they are able to accomplish.

“It’s easy to focus on what you couldn’t do in class,” she says. “Sometimes you need to be reminded of what your body can do.” —MICHELE COHEN MARILL

INTRO TO YOGA

All you need is comfortable clothing that allows you to move freely, and a positive attitude.

- Start with a gentle or beginner class.
- Tell your instructor about your arthritis and mobility issues.
- Don’t compare yourself to others.
- Focus on what you can do, not on what you can’t do.
- Consider a private lesson or two for advice on modifications.

6 Deep Hip Openers to Try Instead of Pigeon Pose

HIPS

yoga journal

by SARAH EZRIN, AUG 13, 2019

These powerful alternates will help you open your hips in all directions. Many of us could use more hip opening. From sitting to standing to walking, our legs are constantly working to support our upper bodies. All this effort can make hip muscles chronically tight, especially when we're sitting for long periods at desks or in cars.

Understanding Hip-Opening

The phrase “hip-opening” often creates confusion, as many people assume that it's similar to opening a door or book, and therefore limited to taking your legs apart. But opening your hips means creating mobility in all directions. Hips are ball and socket joints, which are the most mobile joints in your body. The head of each thigh bone (femur bone) forms the “ball”, which sits in the socket (acetabulum) of your pelvis. Ball and socket joints also do circumduction, which means moving in all three planes, like when you swing your leg in a circle.

In order to stretch a particular muscle group, you must take your body in the opposite direction of that group’s movement. For example, if you’ve been sitting for long periods, which is hip flexion (taking thighs toward your chest), you’ll want to extend your hip (taking your thighs back) to release your hip flexors.

Your Hips in All Planes of Movement

We are three-dimensional beings. We move in space in many different directions. We can go forward and backward, side to side, and inward and outward. And most of the time, we move in some combination of those directions all at once. For example, to set up our front legs in Pigeon, we must both open our legs to the side and rotate our thigh bones outward.

The anatomical planes of movement help us organize and understand range of motion. They provide a universal language for the body. Imagine going to a different country where their up is down and their left is right! It would make for a fun, albeit confusing trip. Instead, anatomists and body lovers alike use the planes as common vocabulary.



Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)

(1) Begin sitting on your mat. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together, pulling your heels up to your groin to make a butterfly-like shape with your legs. For true abduction (taking your legs apart), use your hands to squeeze your big toe mounds together. Keep your elbows bent and hanging heavily to release your neck. You may remain upright if this is plenty. Otherwise, on an inhalation, lengthen your spine and then on an exhalation (2) fold forward at your hip crease. Try not to worry about getting your head to the floor. Most of us can’t! Instead, lengthen your chest toward the front of your space, while releasing the muscles of your neck away from your ears. Remain for 25-30 long breaths. Inhale to come out with a long spine. Close your legs together and stretch them to straight. *(Stretches the inner-thigh adductors.)*

Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose) legs

Sit on your mat with both legs straight out in front of you. Cross your right thigh tightly over your left, stacking your knees. Pull your right heel back by your hip. This may be plenty. If you have space, bend your left leg and pull your left heel back by your hip. Try squeezing your inner thighs together, which will help to further release your outer hips. Inhale and reach your arms overhead. Then, exhale and fold over your knees. If that is challenging, remain upright on your fingertips, leaving space for your belly to breathe. Stay here for 20 breaths. Inhale to come up to sit. Straighten your bottom leg first and then your top. Switch sides. *(stretches the outer-hip abductors)*





Low Lunge variation

Start in hands-and-knees, or tabletop, position with your hands on blocks. Inhale your right leg back and exhale to step your foot in between your hands. Curl your back toes under and hover your back knee one-inch from the floor. Keeping your knee bent, begin to reach your back heel to the wall behind you strongly. This will almost feel like you are trying to straighten your leg. The key to this release is the opposing forces of the bent knee releasing down and your heel reaching back. Imagine your tailbone is heavy and weighted toward the floor. At the same time, draw your chest bone to the front of your space, and glide your shoulder blades down toward your waist. Remain for 15 full breaths. Return to tabletop before repeating on the left side. (*stretches hip flexors*)

Ardha Hanumanasana (Half Splits)

Put two blocks at the side of your mat within reach. From a tabletop shape with your knees, inhale your right leg up and back and exhale to step your right foot in between your hands. Place your hands on the blocks. Inhale to draw your front hip back, straightening the leg. Slide your front foot and leg forward until your pelvis is in front of your back knee. Flex your right ankle strongly. Inhale to lift your chest and exhale to fold over the straight leg. You may keep your hands on the blocks if that is more spacious, or take your left hand to your right foot, pulling your toes back for more length. Remain here for 15 breaths. Come out mindfully, by first re-bending your knee, returning to a Low Lunge shape. Step your right leg back, bringing your knees together in table. Switch sides. (*stretches hip extensors*)



Wide Supine Twist

Lie onto your back with your knees bent and feet and legs as wide as the mat. Take your arms into a cactus shape. Drop your legs to the left, keeping your thighs apart. Rotate your upper body away from your legs, turning your head and neck to the right shoulder if that is okay on your neck. Otherwise, look straight up to the ceiling. The weight of your top leg provides a release for the internal rotators of that leg. If your knees are healthy, take your right ankle (the bottom leg) and place it atop your left outer thigh, giving yourself an adjustment. Breathe here for 20 breaths. To come out, first uncross your legs. Bring your knees up through the center and take a breath before heading to the second side. (*stretches hip internal rotators*)

Double Pigeon Pose

(1) Sitting on your mat, cross your legs, placing your right shin over your left shin. Your knees and ankles will be stacked. Keep your ankles firmly flexed. If you find that your top knee is poking up to the ceiling or your knee is being torqued, please honor your body and cross your shins in the center instead, resting your knees over the ankles for Sukhasana (Easy Pose). You may remain upright or (2) fold forward at your hip crease. (3) Walk your arms out in front of you, staying high on your fingertips. Keep your buttocks grounded as you inhale and lengthen your spine toward your head. You may rest your forehead on the floor or a block. Remain for 30 breaths. At the end of your last breath, walk your hands back up to lift your torso upright. Lean back and switch the stacking of your legs to repeat on the left side. (*stretches hip external rotators*)



From Ancient Hindu Scriptures To The Modern, Westernized Practice *by Lecia Bushak*

Yoga comes in many shapes and sizes; it has thousands of interpretations and pathways that lead to spiritual awareness, expanded consciousness, transcendence, or simply physical fitness. *Reuters*

Yoga: the trendy practice that your hippie, hipster, or fitness friends rave about. Garbed in yoga pants and carrying colorful mats bought off Amazon, the modern-day "yogi" attends one-hour classes that focus on physical stretching, movement, and detoxing from their busy modern lives. We hear a lot about the benefits of yoga, from its ability to decrease stress, chronic pain, as well as the risk for chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

What we don't hear about as often, however, is the history of yoga. Most people are aware of its Indian spiritual and religious roots, but those tend to get washed out by the manufactured, commodified versions of yoga we see today. Perhaps that's because research on yoga's origins is hard to find, and its history is a complicated, lengthy narrative. In fact, yoga is incredibly complex — even the word "yoga" has taken on hundreds of different meanings and practices throughout the years. What you and I might assume is "yoga" is probably not even closely related to what yoga was thousands of years ago.

"Nearly all of our popular assumptions about yoga theory date from the past 150 years, and very few modern-day practices date from before the 12th century," David Gordon White, a professor of religious studies at the

University of California, Santa Barbara, writes in his paper, Yoga, Brief History of an Idea. "This is not the first time that people have 'reinvented' yoga in their own image."

We can try to delineate the history of yoga — at least a brief one. But a practice so rich in religious, spiritual, and physical meaning would take years or even a lifetime to fully understand, grasp, and manifest.

ANCIENT

3300-1500 BCE. Historians aren't entirely sure when the notion or practice of yoga first appeared, and it's often left to debate. The term "yoga," however, is found in ancient India's earliest known scripts — the Vedas. They date from the Vedic period, which began in 1500 BCE. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the Vedas are the oldest writings of Hinduism and Sanskrit literature.

White notes in his paper that the term "yoga" in the Vedas actually refers to a yoke, as in the yoke over animals — and at times a chariot in the midst of battle. Interestingly, in some of these very early writings, yoga was used to describe a warrior dying and transcending into heaven, being carried by his chariot to reach the gods and higher powers of being.

During the Vedic period, Vedic priests who were ascetic — severely self-disciplined and avoidant of any forms of indulgence — conducted sacrifices, or yajna, in poses that some researchers believe are precursors to the yoga poses, or asanas, we experience now.

3rd century, BCE. In the 3rd century BCE, references to the term "yoga" became more common in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist writings. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the notion of yoga as a spiritual or meditative practice as we know now was referred to as Yogachara (Yogācāra). Yogachara involved eight steps of meditation that was known as "calmness" or "insight."

5th century, AD. For a while, yoga was a loose notion, its meaning difficult to pin down. It was more of a notion of meditation and a religious practice than it was exercise as we know today. But around the 5th century, it became more of an established core idea among Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. First and foremost, these ancient versions of yoga were mostly spiritual practices, revolving around several core values.

The first value involved analyzing one's own perception and cognitive state, understanding the root of suffering and using meditation to solve it. The mind was to "transcend" bodily pain or suffering in order to reach a higher level of being. The second aimed to uplift or broaden consciousness, and the third involved using yoga as a path to transcendence. The fourth was using yoga to enter other bodies and act supernaturally — perhaps the strangest and most mystical one.

This is also where the difference between "yogi practice" and "yoga practice" is differentiated. Yoga practice, as described by White, "essentially denotes a program of mind-training and meditation issuing in the realization of enlightenment, liberation, or isolation from the world of suffering existence," at least in ancient terms. Yogi practice, meanwhile, lies more in the supernatural — i.e., when yogis are able to enter other bodies to expand their consciousness.



A yogi seated in a garden, North Indian or Deccani miniature painting, c.1620-40 Wikimedia

MEDIEVAL

500-1500 AD. During the medieval era, different schools of yoga emerged. Bhakti yoga is a spiritual pathway within Hinduism that appeared during this time, a type of yoga that focused on living through love and devotion toward God.



Statue of Shiva in Bangalore, Karnataka, India, performing yogic meditation in the Padmasana posture, or the lotus position. CC BY-SA 2.0

Tantra was also a genre that arrived around the 5th century, exhibited in medieval Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions. White notes that the Tantras, the medieval scriptures that discussed a new yoga ideology, outlined new goals for those practicing yoga: “No longer is the practitioner’s ultimate goal liberation from suffering existence, but rather self-deification: one becomes the deity that has been one’s object of meditation.”

Interestingly, Westerners today have often associated “tantra” with a sexual form of yoga, but it turns out they weren’t too far off. Some Tantric beliefs involved yogis having sexual relations with low-caste women whom they believed were yoginis, or women who embodied Tantric goddesses. Having sex with them could lead these yogis to a transcendent level of consciousness. Today, gurus who go about doing such things in their yoga or bikram classes aren’t exactly known for their moral or spiritual prowess.

Hatha yoga appeared in Buddhist texts around the 8th century, and it emerged from tantra. It’s known as the common “psychophysical yoga,” a combination of bodily postures, breathing, and meditation — possibly the closest to what we today associate with yoga. The postures in hatha yoga are called asanas. We know some of them now in their English terms — such as cat pose, camel pose, child’s pose, and warrior I pose.

MODERN

1890s. So when did yoga become the regiment of health freaks? For thousands of years, the term “yoga” encompassed many things, most of them religious and/or spiritual. But in the mid-19th century, yoga came to the attention of Westerners, who at the time seemed intrigued by Indian culture. We can perhaps attribute yoga’s popularity in the West to Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu monk who toured Europe and the U.S. in the 1890s to spread knowledge about Hinduism among intellectuals.



Patanjali: At times referred to as the “father of yoga,” Patanjali wrote the Yoga Sutras. CC BY-SA 3.0

Vivekananda was responsible for bringing the Yoga Sutras more into the light, as well. These were writings of Patanjali, comprised sometime around 400 AD to describe what he believed were the main yoga traditions of his time. The Yoga Sutras focused mainly on removing all excess thought from the mind and focusing on a singular thing; but they were later incorporated more heavily than any other ancient yoga writings in modern, “corporate” yoga.

20th century. Hatha yoga as a practice (what we’re most familiar with now) didn’t become a commonplace exercise in the U.S. until the 1930s and 40s, and finally reached a peak in the 60s, when Hindu spirituality became far more popular among young Americans. Numerous Indian teachers of yoga taught classes in the U.S., and in the 1980s it became even more popular due to the first health benefits being reported. This was the first time that yoga was seen as a practice with purely physical benefits, something that can improve your heart health and fitness, rather than bring you to a place of transcendence.

21st century. The popularity of yoga in the U.S. has increased throughout the decades, rising from 4 million in 2001 to 20 million in 2011. Since then, plenty of scientific studies have found that yoga comes with a flurry of health benefits: It reduces high blood pressure, depression, chronic pain, and anxiety. It also improves cardiac function, muscle strength, and circulation.



Yoga is now an international trend, seen as both a way to reach spiritual enlightenment and a form of exercise. Reuters

Today, at least in the Western world, yoga is seen as another exercise class to take at the gym, something that will make your muscles sore for days afterward or at least de-stress you. But perhaps knowing at least a little bit about yoga’s ancient spiritual origins — something that has outlasted thousands of years — will help you glean something even more from it.

December 2014. The United Nations General Assembly marked June 21 International Yoga Day, an annual celebration to incorporate yoga and meditation more into humanity all over the world. As the Dalai Lama notes: “If every 8-year-old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation.”



*Your intention is a dedication that can be incorporated into your life.
It serves as a vehicle that connects Yoga to your life.
Feel lighter, brighter, freer, and more energized by your intention.*

Examples:

- I intend to be strong and steady.
- I intend to stay connected to my breath.
- I intend to open my heart.
- I intend to listen to my body.
- I intend to feel the soft space of my heart.
- I intend to meet my body where it is today.
- I intend to embrace the essence of my practice.
- I intend to grow and flourish in my practice.
- I intend to recognize life is a journey, not a destination.
- I intend to experience strength to overcome challenges.
- I intend to send light and love to my life.
- I intend to manifest happiness naturally.
- I intend to witness Divinity in everyone.
- I intend to lead by example.
- I intend to be open to life.
- I intend to stop taking things personally.
- I intend to forgive others, and myself.
- I intend to love unconditionally.
- I intend to make meditation an important part of my life.
- I intend to make someone smile every day.

The Meaning of “Namaste” by Aadil Palkhivala



The gesture Namaste represents the belief that there is a Divine spark within each of us that is located in the heart chakra. The gesture is an acknowledgment of the soul in one by the soul in another.



Definition of Namaste. Nama means bow, as means I, and te means you. Therefore, namaste literally means "bow me you" or "I bow to you."

How to make the Namaste gesture. To perform Namaste, we place the hands together at the heart chakra, close the eyes, and bow the head. It can also be done by placing the hands together in front of the third eye, bowing the head, and then bringing the hands down to the heart. This is an especially deep form of respect. Although in the West the word "namaste" is usually spoken in conjunction with the gesture, in India, it is understood that the gesture itself signifies Namaste, and therefore, it is unnecessary to say the word while bowing.

We bring the hands together at the heart chakra to increase the flow of Divine love. Bowing the head and closing the eyes helps the mind surrender to the Divine in the heart. One can do Namaste to oneself as a meditation technique to go deeper inside the heart chakra; when done with someone else, it is also a beautiful, albeit quick, meditation.

For a teacher and student, Namaste allows two individuals to come together energetically to a place of connection and timelessness, free from the bonds of ego-connection. If it is done with deep feeling in the heart and with the mind surrendered, a deep union of spirits can blossom.

When to incorporate Namaste into your practice. Ideally, Namaste should be done both at the beginning and at the end of class. Usually, it is done at the end of class because the mind is less active and the energy in the room is more peaceful. The teacher initiates Namaste as a symbol of gratitude and respect toward her students and her own teachers and in return invites the students to connect with their lineage, thereby allowing the truth to flow—the truth that we are all one when we live from the heart.

CHAKRAS



Within the body exist a series of seven major energy centers, called chakras.

The word chakra is Sanskrit for "wheel".

Each chakra relates to a unique aspect of our being.

Anatomically, the seven major charkas are located either along, or just in front of, the spine



MULADHARA

at the base of the spine

A balanced **MULADHARA** Chakra leads to feeling grounded, centered, committed and independent, having energy and vitality, strength and stillness, able to digest foods well.



SVADHISHTHANA

At the base of the pubis between the genitals and the sacral nerve plexus

A balanced **SVADHISHTHANA** Chakra leads to feeling compassionate, friendly, intuitive, vital, sexual, satisfied, prosperous, having a sense of belonging and humour.



MANIPURA

At the Abdomen

A balanced **MANIPURA** Chakra leads to feeling energetic, confident, intelligent, decisive, productive, good digestion, mental focus



ANAHATA

At the heart

A balanced **ANAHATA** Chakra leads to feeling of completeness and wholeness, compassionate, empathic, friendly, optimistic, motivated, nurturing, outgoing



VISHUDDHA

At the Throat

A balanced **VISHUDDHA** Chakra leads to creative and expressive, constructive communication, contentment, centered, conscious listening, positive self expression



AINA

Between the eyebrows (Third Eye)

A balanced **AINA** Chakra leads to the ability to think reality into existence, imagination, intuition, concentration and focus



SAHASRARA

at the Crown of the head

A balanced **SAHASRARA** Chakra leads to the feeling at one with the universe, open-minded, intelligent, thoughtful, understand and learn information more easily.

by Amy Schlinger

Going weak in the knees before a first date is a good thing. Going weak in the knees mid-run? Not so much. Sadly, most of us deal with the second type more often: Knee pain is the number two cause of chronic pain, with more than one third of Americans suffering from it.

Strangely enough, the issue isn't with the knee itself—because it's a joint, it's affected by the muscles surrounding it, like the quads, hamstrings, and calves. "The knee never acts in isolation because of the way the soft structure of the cartilage is designed," explains Jill Miller, certified yoga instructor and creator of Yoga Tune Up.

Typical culprits of knee pain include injury to a ligament (like a torn ACL), weak quads or hamstrings, or a chronic condition like arthritis. Or blame your job: Sitting at a desk all day can create imbalances in the body by weakening the buttock muscles, Miller says. (See a doctor or physical therapist to find out what's causing your particular pain.)

These imbalances can follow you into the yoga studio. Research shows certain yoga poses (especially single-leg balances) can be stressful on the knee, while squatting and lunging postures can improve leg strength and minimize knee adduction. For anyone with knee pain, it's important to practice with awareness and stabilize the knees by actively contracting the muscles around them, Miller says.

That being said, there are several specific poses that can help provide relief—and a few that can be problematic if practiced incorrectly. That's why it's always best to find an experienced teacher you trust and let them guide you. Also be sure to let your teacher know about any injuries or concerns before class, says Steven Cheng, a certified yoga instructor and Greatist expert. Finally, remember: "If a pose doesn't feel good, causes pain, or gives you a sharp sensation in the patella (kneecap), adjust it or don't do it," Miller says.

Best Poses



Chair

Standing with feet and legs together and chest lifted, sit back and down (as if you were sitting in a chair). Keep weight in heels and raise arms up through fingers.

"Your weight is put into your hip sockets to ensure your knees aren't inching out in front of your toes," Miller says. "Plus this move is a whole-body toner, strengthening the hips, thighs, and calves, which makes the knee function better."

Step right foot forward with toes pointing straight, left toes turned 90 degrees to the side, arms out and palms facing up. Bend right knee in a lunge. Place back of left hand on left leg and arch back, reaching right arm overhead and toward back wall, gazing toward ceiling.

This pose activates and strengthens the glutes, quads, and hamstrings—all muscles that help keep the knee in good shape, Miller says.

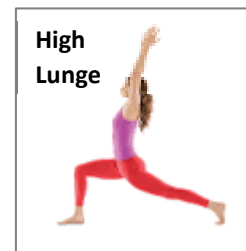
Exalted
WarriorBridge
Pose

Lie faceup. Bend knees and place feet on the ground shoulder-width apart, arms down at your sides. Squeeze glutes and push through heels to lift body off the ground, resting on just shoulders.

"This is a great glute and hamstring strengthener, plus it works the IT band," Miller says. "When the IT band is too lax, you'll end up having knee pain."

Standing at the front of the mat, step the left foot back in a deep lunge, bending the right leg to about 90 degrees. Raise arms straight up and look forward. If your hamstrings are tight, micro-bend the back leg—this is also less taxing on the knees.

"This pose strengthens the glutes, quads, and calves in a stable position," Cheng says. "The balancing aspect further strengthens all these muscle groups that support the knees."

High
Lunge



Eagle Pose

In a standing position, bend the knees and wrap the right leg over the left, balancing only on the left foot. Wrap thighs tightly on top of each other with no space in between. You can wrap your arms the same way (right over left), or simplify with hands in prayer position. (Note: If thighs cannot make full contact, leaving some space is OK, but make sure the effort is still toward wrapping one thigh over the other. If you have trouble balancing, use a wall or chair to support.)

"In this pose, both knees are bent, which keeps them safe," Cheng says. At the same time, wrapping the legs works the inner thighs and calves.

Worst Poses

Start with knees on mat, shoulder-width apart. Place hands on bottom of feet. Arch backward and let head fall back, gazing at the wall behind you.

"This puts a lot of direct pressure on the knees which isn't good for anyone with unstable knees or a history of ligament strain," Miller explain.

Modify: Kneel on a rolled up mat or blanket.



Camel Pose



Hero

Kneel on floor. Open legs wide, pushing feet out to the sides and sit between heels, leaning back as far as possible.

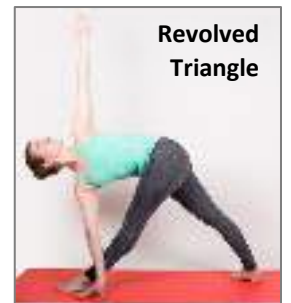
"This is a very extreme position for the knees as it stretches the medial collateral ligaments, or MCL," says Miller.

Modify: Sit on a yoga block, or place a mat or towel above calves.

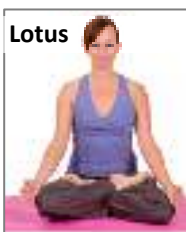
Stand with feet wider than hip-width apart, left toes pointing forward, right toes turned 90 degrees. Reach left arm down and place it on ground outside of right foot. Twist torso and reach right arm up toward the sky.

"This pose is a double whammy," Miller says. "Your front leg is locked out straight and your back hip is turned out, which can put lateral shear forces on the knee."

Modify: Place the back foot parallel to front foot.



Revolved Triangle



Lotus

Sit on the floor with legs straight out in front of you. Bend knees and place feet on opposite thighs with bottom of feet pointing upward.

"This pose requires a great range of motion and rotation from hip, knee, and ankle joints from both legs," says Cheng. "But this pose is particularly difficult on the knees—especially the knee that is on top—and can even be the cause of problems."

Modify: Simply sit cross-legged instead.

Standing upright, lift right leg and bend knee in toward chest. Take right hand and grab hold of right big toe. Slowly extend leg straight and then out to the side, still holding onto big toe.

"In this standing balance pose, it is very common for practitioners to hyperextend the knee on both the standing leg and the extended leg," Cheng says. (It's unwise to lock the knees in any pose unless told otherwise.)

Modify: Micro-bend the knee on both the standing and extended leg.



Extended Hand-to-Big-Toe

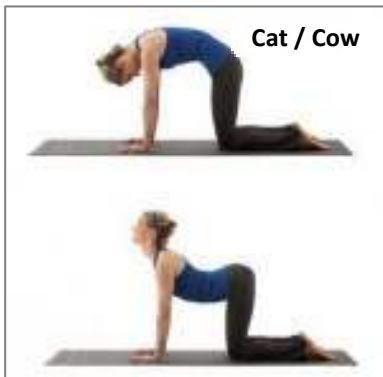
by Jacqueline Buchanan

Whether you sit at a desk all day, are on your feet, or you're feeding an infant, we carry a lot of tension in our necks. The constant tension and stress can cause the muscles and ligaments to shorten and tighten. It's more than just a pain in the neck, but it can restrict movement in the neck.



So what's the best medicine when you wake up with a stiff neck, or you have chronic tight neck muscles? Once again, yoga to the rescue.

With yoga you can move your neck in its six primary directions to lengthen and stretch the muscles. It can prevent chronic neck pain and treat sudden onset pain from sleeping poorly. We've pulled together our favorite yoga poses for neck pain relief. If you have a chronic neck problem, speak to your doctor before beginning a yoga program and work with an experienced teacher. Move mindfully and stop if you experience any pain whatsoever.



Cat / Cow

Warm up moving through Cat and Cow with the breath. This pose addresses multiple causes of stress in the neck through the flexion and extension of the neck.

We often hang our heads -- staring at our mobile phones, studying a textbook, watching TV -- all of these things cause our heads to fall forward in front of our shoulders.

The ligaments and muscles in the back of the neck are constantly strained holding the weight of the head. Stretching the front and back of the neck in Cat and Cow can help with many of the aches and pains we experience.

This warm-up posture twists through the cervical spine -- nothing like a good twist to wring out all the stale energy!

From Tabletop position, inhale as you extend your right arm up. Exhale, thread it through the space between your left hand and left knee, palm facing up. Rest your right ear on the mat. Hold for one minute and repeat on left side.



Thread the Needle



Melting Heart

This pose melts your heart into the earth for a gorgeous backbend through the upper and middle back -- a space that is notoriously difficult to access and causes tension in the neck.

Remember to keep your hips just above the knees and arms reach out at shoulder width. I like to clasp my hands around the back of my neck, with my elbows reaching forward, to bring the stretch into my triceps as well.

Rabbit Pose opens up and creates space in the thoracic and cervical spine. It stimulates digestion and brings fresh oxygenated blood to the brain. Tightly grasp your heels as you inhale to lift your hips towards the sky.

Try to bring your forehead to touch your knees and lightly rest the crown of the head on the floor. Use your arm strength and grip to lighten the load of your head. If there is sensitivity in the knees, fold up a blanket and place it underneath them.



Rabbit Pose



Although this might sound surprising, Bridge is a great pose to stretch the back of your neck and stimulate the thyroid by compressing the front.

Plant the feet about 6 inches from the tailbone. Inhale and lift the hips up off the floor. Place the hands under the sacrum to support you, or use a block either at its medium or highest height. Hold for 2 to 3 minutes. Slowly remove support. Lower the hips.

Lie down flat on your back and slide your hands, palms facing down, under the torso. Touch your thumbs together. Extend your legs onto the floor, feet together. Inhale as you press down through your elbows, lift your heart to the sky, and roll the crown of the head onto the floor.

Try to maintain most of the weight of your head in your elbows and forearms, not the crown of the head. When you come out of the pose, press through the elbows, lift your heart to the sky, and tuck your chin. Slide the back of head onto the floor.



Afterward, rest into your Savasana and allow any leftover tension to melt away.

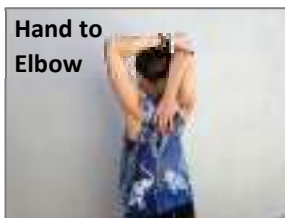
These six poses stretch the neck in the six different directions -- front, back, side-to-side, and twisting right and left. The above poses will help release tension and stretch the neck to prevent restricted movement.



Additional Poses

excerpts from 9 Yoga Poses to Help Relieve Neck and Shoulder Pain

by Sarah Stevenson





Palms Up – Hand positions can affect our state of mind

by Erin Phillips, from Radish



Our hands are miraculous in design and function, with a unique balance of strength and finesse, but they are more than tools. We recognize the power of a firm handshake to convey trust, the invitation of a soft touch on the shoulder to say “I understand and am here for you,” and the intimacy of walking hand in hand.

In yoga, hand positions called **mudras** are used to intensify the effect of body postures. Mudras are thought to invoke qualities such as patience or peacefulness. For example, Chin Mudra, bringing index finger to thumb, represents our longing to be one with our cosmic unconsciousness.

Gertrud Hirschi, in her book *Mudras: Yoga in Your Hands*, writes that “mudras engage certain areas of the brain and/or soul and exercise a corresponding influence on them.” Western medicine, too, reveals a connection between mind and hands. The human brain devotes a great deal of energy to the hands, which are filled with nerve endings originating in the motor and sensory cortex. As the central nervous system branches from the spinal cord to reach the extremities, it is understandable that hand postures may have healing effects all over the body.



East meets West in the mind-body connection represented by an open hand, **either palm up (the mudra for giving and receiving) or palm down (the mudra for abiding and calm).**

When the palms turn up, the shoulders rotate outward and the chest opens. The cervical spine, in response, raises upward and the eyes are directed forward. When upward palms are used in meditation, they position both the mind and the body in an open posture that enhances listening. Our bodies and our sensory organs are positioned to receive information from the outside world. It is little wonder that Eastern practices call this “the giving and receiving mudra.”

When the palms turn down, the shoulders rotate inward and the chest seems to collapse. The head slopes down and the eyes follow. For meditation, this closes out the world and the noise. It allows inward focus for a time of discernment. This is “the calm-abiding mudra,” believed to quiet the mind.

By simply sitting at a desk or a table and turning our palms up or down, we can feel the subtle differences in our body posture and breathing. The mind responds in kind. So when we seek to listen and be more open in our decision making, perhaps it helps to turn the palms to the heavens. And when we feel the stress and noise of a busy week, perhaps we can turn our palms to the earth and once again find ourselves grounded.

Aware of this mind-body connection in our world of technology and social networking sites, we can ask ourselves the effects on our posture and our psyche of keeping our palms turned downward on our keyboards all day, or curled around a cell phone. To reconnect with the people and environment around us, maybe we can begin with repositioning our hands.



Symbols play a valuable role in all of our lives. From waiting for the “walk” sign to cross a street, to giving someone a thumb’s up, to drawing a heart at the end of a love note, we use symbols to add meaning to our lives. Yoga symbols, like the Om, serve the same purpose – they add meaning to our understanding and practice of yoga.

Perhaps you’re a seasoned yogi or new to the practice, but either way, you’ve likely seen some of the lovely yoga symbols used in your yoga class or studio. Maybe it’s a pretty flower-looking blossom, or something that looks like a character from another language. Nice to look at, but what do all these yoga symbols mean? And why do yogis use them?



The Om

It looks a bit like the number 30 with a little hat on top. It’s probably familiar to you from the Om chant you hear at the beginning or end of some yoga classes. Made up of the sounds of the letters A-U-M, Om is all about threes.

With its roots in Hinduism, the Om symbol is said to represent the one-ness of all creation, including the heavens, earth, and underworld. Others say it is the representation of the three Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Some say the actual shape of the symbol represents the syllables of the word: the ‘three’ being the Sanskrit letter for ‘aahh’, the small ‘s’ is the ‘ooh’ and the half moon at the top is the ‘mmm’ sound. Om is considered one of the most powerful mantras, and the ritual of chanting Om has been done for thousands of years.

It looks like – and is – a water lily. The water lily, or lotus flower, has a wealth of meaning and history behind it. The lotus flower blooms on the surface of water with its roots deep in the mud – a symbol of light and emergence from darkness.

In Buddhism, the lotus blossom represents the heart opening. Buddhists compare the opening of the lotus flower petals to the unfolding of what is divine within you. It is a perfect reflection of new beginnings, purity and enlightenment. A closed bloom is the heart with its infinite potential for enlightenment, waiting to unfold.



Lotus Flower



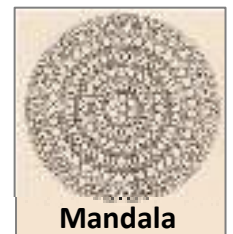
Hamsa

This yoga symbol appears as the palm of a hand, and the hamsa is a popular symbol in many cultures and religions. These cultures believe that the symbol (depicted by a right hand with an open palm or a hand with two open thumbs) is a sign of protection.

The word “hamsa” is derived from the five fingers on the hand. It is often decorated with the “evil eye” which is thought to ward off any harm or danger. The hamsa is meant to be displayed or worn with the fingers facing down to offer the proper protection, and bring luck and strength.

Loosely translated as “circle,” mandalas are said to represent the universe. A mandala is designed to offer a visual balance of elements that symbolize harmony and unity. When used in a spiritual practice, the mandala is said to help absorb the mind in meditation.

As you may have noticed, a mandala can come in an innumerable variety of designs, patterns, and colors. If you look closely, you’ll see the mandala represented in so many aspects of your own life – the concentric circles in the patterns of nature, and even the circles of life, friends, and family.



Mandala



Buddha

Buddha is a Sanskrit word that means “the awakened one.” It represents the life of Siddhartha, an Indian prince that gave up his throne, riches and lavish lifestyle to look for true meaning and happiness in life.

He studied for years with religious prophets and went on a six-year journey to share what he believed was the way to achieve real peace and fulfillment in life. His teaching is known as the Dharma. Buddha is represented in many different forms, including ones that symbolize protection, serenity or meditation, medicine and teaching.

by Silvia Rodrigues

Try Yoga with a partner and combine your abilities for a deeper practice together - which will push you both beyond your boundaries and limits. Sometimes we need to reach out for help from a friend – quite literally if we’re speaking about our asana practice. Try Yoga with a partner and combine your abilities for a deeper practice together. Team up with someone special for assistance, which will push you both beyond your boundaries and limits. This exercise not only builds your friendship and bond, but it allows you to be adventurous and attempt poses you may otherwise have shied away from. You’ll serve as amazing motivation and inspiration to one another. Joining strengths and working together is perfect for asana practice – Yoga is about unity, after all.

Try the following ten powerful poses with a partner:



Supported Easy or Half Lotus Pose

This is the perfect opportunity to work on your posture. Use your human wall to assure proper alignment of your spine while sitting in either Easy or Half Lotus Pose.



Forward and Back Bend Pose

From a seated position, as one partner exhales and folds forward the other comes to lie across their back for a backbend. This encourages a deeper forward and back bend for both partners. Hold for a few breaths and then exchange poses.



Buddy Boat Pose

Sit facing one another with your legs bent and your knees near your chest. Hold your partner’s hands or wrists and bring the heels of your feet together. Slowly straighten out your legs as you bring your feet upward. Release your shoulders, straighten your spine and lean back.



Stacked Child’s Pose

This is a great pose for balance and surrender. Have your partner come into child’s pose and then slowly and gently place your shins on either side of their back while being cautious to not press against their spine. Once you find stability, bring your head to rest between their shoulder blades and relax. Switch roles and enjoy.



Back-Bending Cobra Pose

As your partner lies on their stomach with their feet together, stand over them with your feet placed on either side of their thighs. Hold onto their hands to lift them upward into cobra and take advantage of this lock for a full backbend. Hold this pose for as long as you feel comfortable and then switch positions with your partner.



Double Side Stretch Pose

Stand on either side of your partner at a distance of about three feet apart. Bring your feet together and lengthen the spine as you inhale. With an exhale, bend toward your partner and bring your hand to rest on their hip while the other grabs onto their elbow. Apply force into their hip as if you are trying to push them away while simultaneously pulling their elbow in your direction for a deep, opening side stretch. Let your head hang loose and enjoy, then switch sides.



Thick Tree Pose

Come to a standing position next to your partner. Bring the side of your hips together and then raise your leg as they raise the opposite leg and guide them onto your inner upper thighs. Wrap your arms around their waist and bring your palms together into prayer position or extend them outward to fully express your thick-trunked tree. For an advanced variation, bring your arms straight up instead of holding onto their waist. Switch sides with your partner and repeat this pose.



Twin Warriors Pose

Come into Warrior I and then extend your backbend to hold on to each other’s hands or wrists. Open your chest outward and let your neck relax as your head drops back. Keep your legs bent at a 90° angle with your knees directly above your ankles. Breathe and then repeat this pose with the other leg.



Dancer Duo Pose

Stand facing your partner and bring your left hand’s palms together. Raise your right leg and hold onto your foot. Remember to keep your hips squared and facing forward. Raise your leg as high as possible. If you’d like you can come to an advanced variation by rotating the wrist to grab the outside of your foot, then bending and bringing the arm up and around as you hold your foot. Focus and be the balancing support for one another. Switch sides and repeat this pose.



Forearm Stand Pose

This is the perfect time to be brave and try inversions. Place your forearms on the mat and hold on to either elbow to measure distance and then bring your hands together with your arms bent at a 90° angle. Pull your hips up into the sky, similar to a Downward-Facing Dog Pose. Have your partner stand with their arm straight out ready to support your legs. Look at your mat and kick your legs upward as your partner blocks them from falling forward or backward. Your partner should give you some leeway of a few inches to explore your own balance in between their arms. This is a great pose to practice not only balance, but trust too. Once you’re ready to release, bring one leg down as a cue for your partner to let go and then switch roles.

Namaste Times Two

By collaborating with a Yogi friend, you are creating a buddy balance system, which is beneficial for both of you. You will both stretch your limits (pun intended) and reach your goals sooner and easier by practicing partner asanas. With support from a friend, both mentally and physically in this case, you’ll achieve much more, much sooner. The best part, however, is how much you’ll both laugh and enjoy your practice together.

Yoga just got twice as fun – Enjoy!

How to Do Yoga With Your Kids — and Why You Should



Are you looking for a new way to stay connected with your children? Consider sharing a yoga class together. It can help you shut out the noise and make time for quiet and relaxation together. Whether you're an accomplished yogi or a newbie yourself, yoga is a healthy and playful bonding experience for everyone.

Why yoga is good for your kids



Introducing yoga to your children helps establish healthy habits at an early age. Yoga can enhance your child's strength, coordination and flexibility, while encouraging body awareness and self-esteem. It can reduce your child's anxiety and stress and promote a sense of calmness. If they continue yoga as they grow older, your children will continue to reap the benefits, including improved: Memory, Concentration, Self-esteem, Academic performance

How yoga helps your family connect

Sharing a yoga class with your child can also help deepen your connection with your children. You're connecting movement with each breath you take, connecting with your inner self, and connecting with others — in this case, with your child.

There are two varieties of kid-friendly yoga poses you can try at home. The first promotes stillness and grounding. Here are a few examples:

Happy baby pose: Lie on your back. Bend your knees into your belly and exhale. As you inhale, grab the outsides of your feet. Open your knees and bring them up toward your armpits.

Mountain pose: Stand tall with feet parallel and relax your tailbone down for a neutral pelvis. Lift up through the spine. Tuck chin in slightly, and keep head balanced over your shoulders.

The other variety of poses promotes balance. Here are a couple of examples:

Tree pose: Stand tall on one foot and turn the opposite knee out. Then place the sole of the opposite foot onto your ankle, calf or thigh. (Avoid placing your sole on the inside of your knee.) Put your palms together in front of your heart or face them with palms up.

Warrior: Stand in mountain pose. Step back with one foot, angle it out while bending your front knee. Then bring your arms straight up and look up.

Practice these poses through a game of mirroring. Children are curious and imitate what others do. Invite them to try a pose and don't worry if it's right or wrong, just as long as it's safe.

Partner poses for older children (and adults)

As you practice partner poses with an older child (or an adult), you learn to support and balance each other, establishing trust at the same time. See below for a few partner poses you can do at home. Yoga allows you to simply relax while spending time together and learning together. It cultivates this sense of open-minded acceptance between you and your child.

10 Perfect Poses for Partner Yoga



DID YOU KNOW?
WHEN YOU DO THIS STRETCH DAILY...

Holistic All

QUADRATUS LUMBORUM



THIS IS THE AREA THAT CAUSES STIFFNESS AND LOWER BACK PAIN FROM LACK OF STRETCHING. THIS AREA MUST BE STRETCHED DAILY, ESPECIALLY IF YOU SIT ALL DAY.

DID YOU KNOW?
PLANKING FOR A FEW MINUTES PER DAY...



Ujjayogasana II

Planks help strengthen your core, arms, legs, tones your buttocks, builds abs & improves your mental focus

DID YOU KNOW?
The Malasana Pose Has Many Benefits



The malasana pose stretches the thighs, groin, hips, ankles, and torso. It tones the abdominal muscles and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination. This pose also increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy.

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THIS POSE FOR 5 MINUTES A DAY...

Holistic All



IT'S SUPER CALMING FOR THE MIND. IT'S GREAT FOR YOUR DIGESTION, IT ELONGATES THE LOWER BACK, IT OPENS UP THE HIPS.

DID YOU KNOW?

Holistic All



THE STANDING FORWARD BEND STRETCHES THE HIPS, HAMSTRINGS, AND CALVES, STRENGTHENS THE THIGHS AND KNEES, KEEPS YOUR SPINE STRONG AND FLEXIBLE?

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THE BRIDGE POSE REGULARLY...

Holistic All



STRETCHES THE CHEST, NECK, SPINE, AND HIPS. STRENGTHENS THE BACK, BUTTOCKS, AND HAMSTRINGS. IMPROVES CIRCULATION OF BLOOD. HELPS ALLEVIATE STRESS AND MILD DEPRESSION.

DID YOU KNOW?
UTRATA KONASANA HAS MANY HEALTH BENEFITS

Holistic All



IT STRETCHES YOUR HIPS, GROIN AND CHEST, TONES AND STRENGTHENS THE CORE MUSCLES, STRENGTHENS THE QUADRICEPS AND INNER THIGH MUSCLES. RESTORES THE SHOULDERS, ARMS AND UPPER BACK.

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THIS POSE FOR A FEW MINUTES PER DAY...

Holistic All



INDUCES RELAXATION, RELIEVES STRESS AND LIFTS MOOD. STRETCHES THE SPINE, SHOULDERS, LOWER BACK, AND HAMSTRINGS. STIMULATES ORGANS INCLUDING INTESTINES, KIDNEYS, LIVER, OVARIES AND UTERUS. HELPS RELIEVE SYMPTOMS OF MENSTRUAL DISCOMFORT.

DID YOU KNOW?
DAILY STRETCHING



UC DAVIS Reported that stretching increases blood flow to the muscle. Increases oxygen levels. Helps improve flexibility, improving range of motion in your joints. Releases tension in both the body and mind.

DID YOU KNOW?
UPWARD DOG HAS MANY BENEFITS
Holistic All



IT CAN STRENGTHEN THE WRISTS, ARMS, AND BACK, AND TONING THE BUTTOCKS. ITS CHEST-OPENING ACTION PROVIDES A GREAT ANTIDOTE TO "OFFICE SLUMP" WHILE FREEDING THE LUNGS AND OPENING THE HEART

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THIS STRETCH FOR SEVERAL MINUTES PER DAY...
Holistic All



STRETCHING YOUR PIRIFORMIS MUSCLES CAN LITERALLY REDUCE ANY PAIN ESPECIALLY SCIATICA AND LOWER BACK PAIN. IT ALSO HELPS REDUCE TIGHTNESS IN THE BACK OF YOUR LEGS, BUTTOCKS, HAMSTRINGS, AND PERHAPS YOUR CALF MUSCLES

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THIS POSE FOR A FEW MINUTES PER DAY...
Part :- 2



THE CAT-COW STRETCH IMPROVES POSTURE AND BALANCE, STRENGTHENS AND STRETCHES THE SPINE AND NECK, STRETCHES THE HIPS, ABDOMEN AND BACK, INCREASES COORDINATION.

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THIS GROIN STRETCH FOR A FEW MINUTES PER DAY...
Holistic All



THE BUTTERFLY SPREADER HELPS TO OPEN UP THE HIPS AND THIGHS AND IMPROVES FLEXIBILITY. THIS STRETCH TARGETS THE GROIN AREA, LOOSENING AND LENGTHENING THE INNER THIGH MUSCLES (ABDUCTORS). THE ABDUCTORS ARE OFTEN NEGLECTED IN WORKOUTS BUT THEY PLAY A KEY ROLE IN YOUR STABILITY AND BALANCE.

DID YOU KNOW?
WHEN YOU DO THIS POSE FOR A FEW MINUTES PER DAY...
Holistic All



IT STRENGTHENS AND STRETCHES THE INNER AND BACK LEGS AND THE SPINE, TONES THE ABDOMINAL ORGANS, CALMS THE BRAIN, RELIEVES MILD BACKACHE

DID YOU KNOW?
DOING THE PLOW STRETCH REGULARLY...
Holistic All



The Plow Stretch opens the neck, shoulders, and back. By compressing the abdomen, it massages and tones the digestive organs, which improves detoxification.

DID YOU KNOW?
Putting your legs up the wall for a few minutes per day...
Holistic All



This is a powerful and restorative pose that helps with Sending blood flow to your core, Eases stress, Helps you sleep, Calms your nerves, Relieves swollen ankles, Relieves varicose veins, Relieves headaches, and Improves digestion



6 Yoga Poses For Better Posture

POSTURE

by Mahala Grant-Grierson

Being afraid I'll end up looking like the humpback of Notre Dame when I'm older is a reasonable fear. **Either osteoporosis or poor posture may be my fate, unless I take some steps in the right direction.** Overall health and wellness has become much more of a priority. Good posture was something I may have only heard about from my mom when she told me to straighten up (or when I was acting out, more likely).

Recent studies have shown yoga to improve posture, and it's not surprising that this is true. **In addition to increasing body awareness, yoga strengthens the core and lengthens the spine.** The spine is the thing that holds up our body all day long, so it's important to keep it in tip-top condition. Not to mention it has to support that heavy bowling ball of a head we carry around all day long!



Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Yes, this is a yoga pose. It doesn't feel like it at first, but it's a very active pose. Stand tall, feel your feet on the ground, open your chest with arms at your sides, slightly tuck your tailbone, engage your thighs, roll your shoulders back and down to lower your shoulder blades, and bring your chin back so your ears are above your shoulders. It's all in the chin and you want to align your body from feet to head.

Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

This is probably one of my favorite poses because I can literally feel my spine lengthen as I fold over towards my feet. Just hang there, grab your elbows with your opposite hands, and breathe. After you release your arms, try looking up by opening the chest and flattening your back on an inhale. Then exhale and fold again. This pose saves me on visits to the chiropractor!



Cobra Pose (Bhujangasana)

This is an ideal pose for strengthening the back and opening the chest. Place your hands on the mat in front of you in a sphinx position and then slowly straighten your arms into your full extension of cobra. Bring your shoulders away from your ears, while keeping your pelvis and toes on the mat.

Hero Pose (Virasana)

This is a seated yoga pose that makes it difficult to slouch. Sit on your heels and sit up straight with the crown of your head towards the sky. If you have knee issues, this will not be your pose. If you can't sit on your heels, get an ergonomic chair that mimics this pose or use a pillow for cushion.



Child's Pose (Balasana)

This is also known as resting pose in yoga. Sit back on your heels and reach your arms out in front of you or bring them alongside the body towards your feet into a tiny little yoga ball.

Locust Pose (Salabhasana)

This is another great pose for strengthening the back. Open your chest lifting your arms and legs off the mat while keeping the pelvis on the mat. If necessary, you can lift just your chest and aim your arms towards your feet. A more advanced yoga pose would be to go into bow pose, but proceed with caution until you're ready.



Remember, just like our bad habits developed over time, our good habits take time to build back up as well. Try practicing these poses and see which ones resonate with you. Give yourself reminders in your calendar or on your desk to be present to your posture. In the end you will breathe, move, and feel better.



Eagle pose (Garudasana)

Start in Mountain pose (Tadasana).

Inhale and cross your right leg over your left thigh. Wrap the top of your right foot around your left calf.

Draw your right elbow into your left elbow and wrap your arms, allowing your palms to touch.

Hold for three to five breaths and switch sides, creating balance in both shoulders.

Plank pose (Phalakasana)

Starting on your hands and knees, extend into a plank by placing your feet hip distance apart and stacking your wrists, elbows, and shoulders in a straight line.

Focus your gaze on your mat, keeping a straight line along your spine, and drawing your abdominal muscles in. You can also modify this pose by lowering to your knees.

Holding Plank pose for 30 seconds to two minutes can help tone the abdominal muscles and strengthen the spine, allowing for a firm foundation when sitting and standing.



Downward-facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Begin on your hands and knees.

Tuck your toes under and lift up through your hips, drawing your hips to the sky as you lengthen through your spine and legs.

Draw energy down into your hands and feet—equally distributing your weight. Hold for three to five breaths.

Cat/Cow pose (Marjariasana-Bitilasana)

Start on your hands and knees, with your wrists, elbows, and shoulders stacked in a straight line and your knees hip distance apart.

Inhale as you let your belly sink down and focus your gaze toward the ceiling.

Exhale as you round your spine and draw your chin to your chest.

Continue flowing through Cat/Cow pose with each inhale and exhale. Practice this from 30 seconds to a minute.



Bridge pose (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana)

Lay flat on your back.

Draw your feet to the mat, hip distance apart.

Lift up through your hips, expanding and opening through your chest and spine. Engage your core. Hold for 3-5 breaths

February 14, 2018 By Julia Dellitt

The most inactive part of yoga class might just be the most powerful.

As a yoga teacher, there's nothing better than seeing your students settle into Savasana, a restorative posture, at the end of a challenging class—and **nothing more frustrating than seeing someone skip that pose to leave early.**



Savasana, also known as Corpse Pose, typically involves lying faceup, eyes closed, arms at your sides, and legs stretched out. You're supposed to be completely still and focus on quieting your mind and noticing the sensations of your body. Sounds easy enough, right? The reality is, my students often react in three different ways to the invitation of Savasana: They're grateful to finally be done moving; they find it somewhat difficult, but give the mini-meditation opportunity their best shot; or, they leave as quickly as possible, because they think Savasana is boring or pointless or getting in the way of whatever's next on their to-do list.

However, every time you pass on this pose, you're missing out on a handful of physical and mental benefits. Here's why experts say Savasana is so much more than simply lying down—and worth sticking around for when you can.

Savasana is a brief opportunity to take a break from the constant busyness of life.

Practicing yoga in general offers a break from daily life, and most people appreciate the chance to connect breath to movement. But Jenay Rose, a yoga teacher in Los Angeles, says that all that movement is not the end game; it is actually intended to prepare us for Savasana and “the ability to be totally still without the pressure of the mind.”

“[Savasana] is a time to relax our efforts, stop ‘doing,’ and rest. Sometimes the few minutes of Savasana at the end of class is one of the only times we stop in the day for conscious rest,” Mariana Caplan, Ph.D., a psychotherapist, yoga teacher, and the author of *Yoga & Psyche*, tells SELF.

Melody Moore, Ph.D., a psychologist and yoga teacher based in Santa Monica, California, views Savasana similarly, as a chance to be present with yourself amid the modern go-go-go mentality. “The body has been working and stretching, opening and releasing, and finally has the opportunity to relax, fully take in [the yoga practice], and appreciate the physical and emotional benefits of releasing tension, breathing mindfully, and moving with intention,” she tells SELF. It's a chance to lie with your thoughts and emotions without trying to change or manipulate them. **“But perhaps the greatest benefit of Savasana is that it requires us to be still, to listen, to receive. We get so caught up in the doing, in the performing, not only on the mat but in life as well.”**

As a form of meditation, Savasana can have some incredible mental health benefits.

Research suggests that meditation and mindful breathwork has the potential to optimize your body's response to stress, cause positive changes in mood, and reduce fatigue.

Yoga is, after all, considered a powerful mind-body exercise for a reason. “When you are free from sensory distraction, your central nervous system has the ability to calm down,” Nicole Anders, Psy.D., a psychologist who leads a post-traumatic stress disorder clinic treatment team for veterans in Nevada and offers trauma-sensitive yoga classes, tells SELF. “This is the part of our body that keeps us up at night with insomnia or anxiety throughout the day. When we have a calm and regulated central nervous system, parts of the brain such as the amygdala, which is in charge of emotions and your fight/flight/freeze response, also calms down, allowing for clearer thought processes, better memory, and less overall stress.”

Savasana feels hard because it is.

One of the most common reactions I hear to Savasana is that it's hard—and as a yoga teacher and a student, I think, “Well, yeah. That's kind of the point.” It's hard to sit still and just be, which is why we need to do it more often.

“One of the common concerns many yoga students have expressed to me over the years is that they think they are doing it ‘wrong,’ because during Savasana they find themselves thinking about many things, or they feel restless rather than peaceful,” Caplan shares. “One of the most important things about Savasana and all yoga practice is that practice really is the goal.”

When I asked Richard Miller, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, researcher, and yoga teacher, why he thinks people are so resistant to Savasana, he laughed. “When I started doing asana [the physical practice of yoga], I wanted to kill my teacher. It brought up all these feelings I had never dealt with, and then all of a sudden, I had to lay there quietly and deal with it? No, thanks,” he says.

“We aren't groomed in our culture to be with our thoughts, and so people don't really know what to do; they're busy, they want to get going,” Miller continues. “What I want to do is help people see Savasana as the entryway to deep meditation, and understand that it takes a while to get into a practice of Savasana before feeling the healing benefits.”

If you do have to skip out of class early, there are some right and wrong ways to do it.

“Skipping Savasana is like skipping out on an internal and emotional massage for your body,” says Anders. “You're leaving the class in an activated state from physical activity, with no rest and reset. I highly, highly encourage students to challenge themselves and learn to lie in the stillness of Savasana.”

Still, both Rose and Zurcher know that telling students to never duck out early is somewhat unrealistic, and in the grand scheme of things, making it to your mat at all matters more. **If you have to miss out on Savasana, just make sure you do it without interrupting the rest of the class.**

“First, tell the instructor and ask if they would be willing to put away your props after class so you do not disrupt other students,” advises Zurcher. “Second, leave all of your personal belongings in the locker room or your car. Limit your extra stuff: water bottle, articles of clothing, towels; the less stuff you have, the easier it will be to leave. Third, position yourself by the exit. If that spot is taken, explain to your fellow yogis you unfortunately have to leave before Savasana today. Fourth, leave when the class is cooling down. If you absolutely have to leave early, the rest of the students will appreciate you doing so before they arrive on their backs. Lastly, be as quiet as possible as you roll up your mat, walk to the door, open the door, and close the door behind you.”

In the short-term, you'll simply be able to go back into the real world a little more prepared. “[Savasana] is a moment to pause at the doorway between the yoga studio and the busy world that often awaits us just outside,” Caplan says. “In that pause, you can bring the balance, energy, insights, and awareness you experience on the mat into the world.”

Health Benefits of Corpse Pose

- Relaxes your whole body.
- Releases stress, fatigue, depression tension.
- Improves concentration.
- Cures insomnia.
- Relaxes your muscles.
- Calms the mind and improves mental health.
- Stimulates blood circulation.

Shoulder Pain with Yoga? Adjust your Downward Dog!

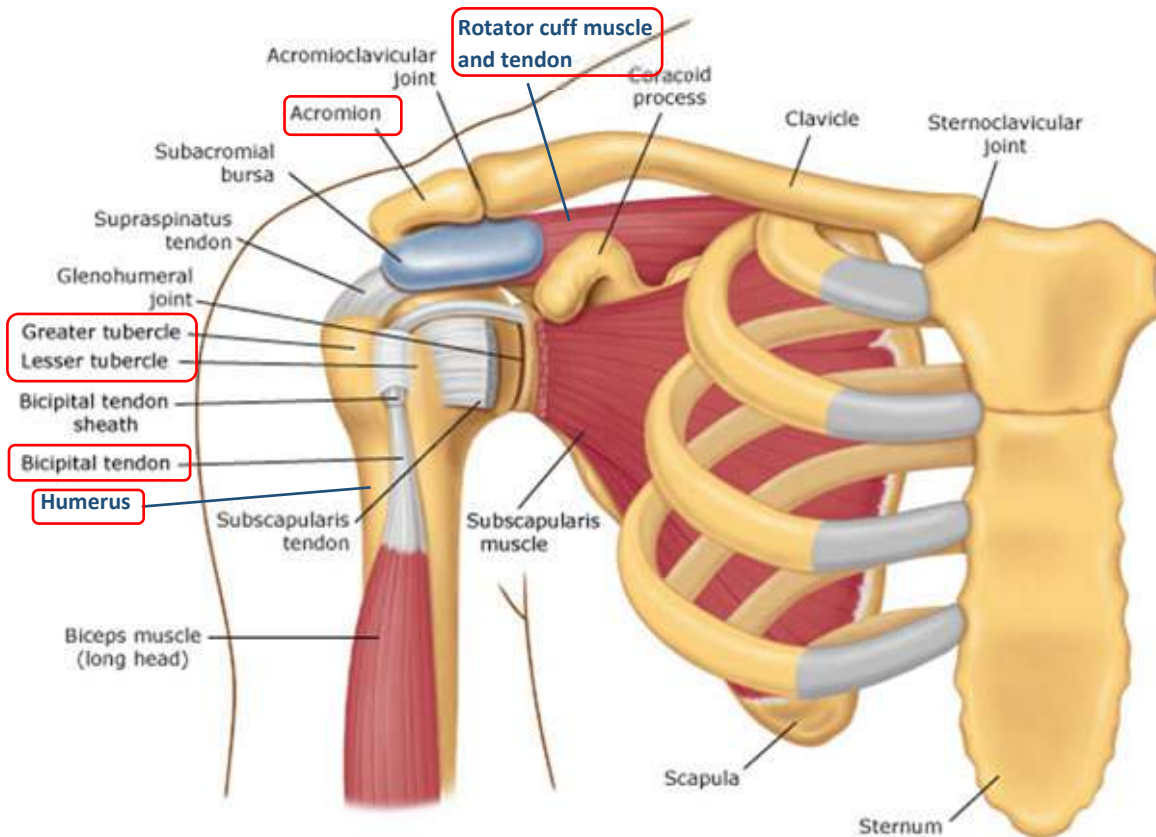
February 11, 2013 by Dan Baumstark, MSPT, CHT

The bones and tendons of the arms are not anatomically equipped to bear the brunt of our weight. If they were, we would still be walking around on all fours. The yoga “downward facing dog” position places us “on all fours,” placing abnormal stress on the tendons of the rotator cuff as the shoulder joints are placed in an extreme, flexed position (take a look at the pose!).



In order to understand the nature of the strain imposed on the rotator cuff tendons of the shoulder, it is necessary to understand a bit of shoulder anatomy. As seen in the illustration, there are two bony ridges on the head of the humerus, the lesser tubercle and the greater tubercle. These ridges often rub against the acromion that lies directly above them during specific activities such as downward dog. Rotator cuff tendons and the biceps tendon are also often irritated as they originate in this already cramped area.

If you are experiencing shoulder irritation from this yoga position, **try rotating your hands outward slightly as they are placed on the floor.** The outward rotation of the hands is accompanied by slight outward rotation of the head of the



humerus. This rotation can partially clear the tubercles and tendons out of the way of the above-lying acromion.

Realize, however, that there is a limit to how much you can turn your hands out with a downward dog position before you are placing too much stress on the wrists. **Try turning your hands out only slightly (10-30 degrees) and see if this lessens irritation.**

This basic idea can be applied to numerous other activities that involve placing of the arms in an overhead position. If you are performing push-ups, bench presses, or military style presses with weights and encounter shoulder pain, try rotating the hands and shoulders slightly outward.

Author: Dan Baumstark, MSPT, CHT. Dan is a physical therapist who specializes in sports medicine & upper extremity rehabilitation. He is certified by the American Society of Hand Therapists, and he has extensive continuing education in manual therapy from the Michigan State University School of Osteopathic Medicine.

What Not to Do in Downward Facing Dog

3/03/14 – by Jenny Sugar

From your first class to your 100th, Downward Facing Dog is probably the pose you do most often. That's why it's important to do the pose correctly: not only to avoid injury, but also to also make it as comfortable and effective as possible. Here are four don'ts when it comes to Down Dogging.



Tense Shoulders

It doesn't look like it, but this pose is all about upper-body strength. If your arms and shoulders are weak, you might compensate by scrunching your shoulders up to your ears. This is a big no-no, as it can cause neck strain, shoulder pain, and headaches. Be sure to actively draw your shoulder blades down your back, creating space in your neck. If you find your shoulders tensing up, it probably means you need to take a break. Bend your knees, rest in Child's Pose, and rise back into Down Dog when you're ready. As you continue your practice, upper-body strength will quickly increase, making it easier to hold Down Dog with correct technique.

Unstable Hands

A good amount of your body weight is in your hands, so be sure this base is strong and stable. Don't allow your palms to lift up; spread your fingers as wide as you can, creating a straight line between the elbows, forearms, and middle fingers. Actively press your fingertips and the knuckles at the base of your fingers firmly into the mat along with the heel of your palm, which can often relieve wrist pain. Your hands should be strong and solid enough that you could jump into a handstand at a moment's notice.

Rounding Your Spine

If your hamstrings are extremely tight and you struggle to straighten them, you'll compensate by rounding your spine. The best thing to do is bend your knees softly, so you can concentrate on lengthening your pelvis away from your shoulders. Don't tuck your tailbone in, but rather stick it out, as if you were pressing your belly button toward your thighs. As your hips and hamstrings open up, you can work on straightening the legs — just be sure your back stays long and straight.

Heels Pointed In

Touching your heels to the mat isn't necessary, as it depends on the flexibility of the backs of the legs. But in order to effectively work your inner thighs, hamstrings, and calves in this pose, press your heels out slightly, so the outside edges of your feet are parallel with the outside edges of your mat. Doing Down Dog this way is more challenging on your leg muscles, but with practice, it'll increase flexibility, and you'll be closer to pressing your heels to the floor.

Downward-Facing Dog Variation (Puppy Pose)

November 2012 by Nina Zolotow

As part of our continuing mission to make Downward-Facing Dog accessible to almost everyone, today we're featuring the kneeling variation of the pose that is sometimes called Puppy pose. For those of you who cannot do full Downward-Facing Dog pose due to hand or wrist problems or general weakness, this modification is a wonderful alternative. Because your knees are on the floor, you bear very little weight on your hands in this pose. And because your shoulders are lower to the ground, the position of your wrist stays closer to neutral. (When your hands are directly under your shoulders, as in Cat-Cow pose, your wrists are deeply bent; however, in Puppy pose, your hands and arms are more in line with your wrists.)



Even though you're bearing very little weight on your hands in this pose, because you keep your arms and shoulders active, this pose still helps build upper body strength while also increasing flexibility in the shoulders. Puppy pose activates the triceps muscles in the backs of your arms and the stabilizing muscles of your shoulder blades. As a side effect, if you keep your spine neutral, you also strengthen your front abdominal muscles (and who doesn't love that).

For upper body strengthening, you can practice this pose on its own as an alternative to full Downward-Facing Dog, or you can use Puppy pose to warm up for practicing the full pose, especially if you are tight in the shoulders.

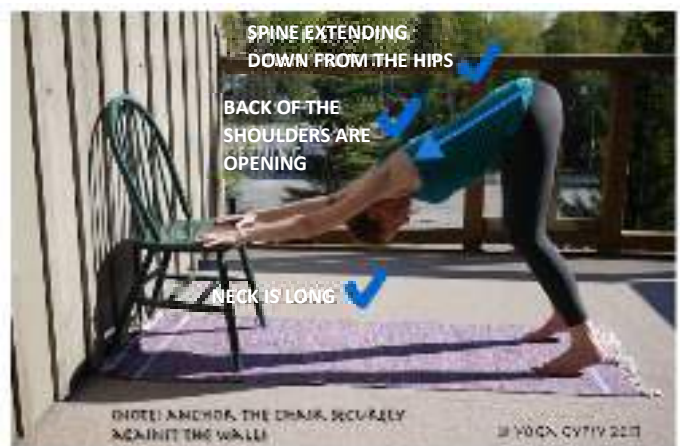
Instructions: Place a folded blanket on your mat to protect your knees (optional). Now come onto a hands and knees position in Table Top, with your knees on the folded blanket and your palms on your mat. If your wrists hurt in this position, stay on your fingertips.

From Table Top, keeping your hips over your knees, slide one hand at a time as far forward as is comfortable. Keep your hands shoulder-width apart and even with each other. At this point, you may be able to get more length between your hands and sitting bones by sliding your sitting bones back away from your hands. If you have tight shoulders, be aware of the tendency for your front lower ribs to drop or your lower back to arch dramatically to compensate. So focus on maintaining your torso in Mountain pose (Tadasana) alignment.

Press your palms firmly into the ground. Then reach your hands down and forward as you create an opposite movement of your sitting bones away from your hands to get a maximum length and stretch in the pose.

Stay in the pose for six to eight breaths, gradually working your way up to one minute. To come out of the pose, you can either swing your shoulders forward and then walk your hands back or simply walk your hands back to your knees.

Cautions: If you have rotator cuff injury or a history of shoulder dislocation, keep your chest lifting away from the floor rather than pressing down toward the floor. Back off if you feel any pain. If you have lower back problems, make sure you keep your lower back neutral (not overly arched) as you enter, maintain and exit from the pose. If you have knee problems, you might need extra padding.



Half-Dog Pose at the Wall

December 2011 by Nina Zolotow

The featured pose this week is a version of the classic Downward-Facing Dog pose that is a bit easier to do than the full pose and does not require a clean floor or a prop other than a wall. It's a fantastic all-over stretch, opening your shoulders and stretching your arms, back, hips and legs (in the straight leg version). It also provides a good forward bend of your pelvis over your thighbones without bending in your lower back. It's accessible to almost everyone, so it's perfect for students who are new to yoga or who are recovering from an injury.

Half Dog Pose at the Wall is an excellent way to begin a yoga practice. And it's also perfect as a single-pose practice when you need a break at work or while traveling. If you don't have wall available, you can do the pose with your hands resting on a desktop or counter, or on the seat of a chair.

Baxter prescribes this pose for:

- low back pain
- releasing muscle tension due to stress
- an alternative to full Downward-Facing Dog for those with hand or wrist problems
- an alternative to full Downward-Facing Dog for those with cardiovascular or neurologic conditions, such as hypertension or vertigo
- an alternative to full Downward-Facing Dog for those with limited shoulder mobility due
- either to stiffness or injury
- an antidote stretch for working at a desk, driving, or traveling



Instructions

Stand facing a wall, about one foot away. Place your hands on the wall so they are at either at shoulder height for less flexible people (lessening the impact and strain on the hamstrings, lower back and shoulders) or anywhere below shoulder height down to elbow height for more flexible people (which will result in a 90 degree angle at the hip joint). Press your hands firmly into the wall, mentally gluing them on place.



Bend your knees a bit and slowly walk your feet away from the wall. Keeping your hips positioned over your feet, gradually walk out until your arms are straight and form a long line with your torso and belly. Push your arms strongly towards the wall, while creating an upward lift from your knees to your hips.



You can gradually straighten your knees as long as it doesn't cause pain in your lower back.

Stay in the pose for 14-16 breaths, and then walk back toward wall to come up and out.

Cautions: Although this pose is good for most students, those with significant rotator cuff issues may have to work with a local teacher to find a good modification that does not aggravate their condition. If bending your wrists to 90 degrees is a problem, you can do the pose with just your fingertips on the wall.

9 Yoga Poses to Help You Sleep Better

SLEEP



by Maren Hunsberger

Yoga doesn't always have to be a vigorous, get-your-blood-pumping workout, although many of us love the feeling those classes give us. In fact, some of the most beneficial aspects of a yoga practice are the very subtle, minute changes that poses bring into your body, and you can reach these benefits during a short, gentle yoga sequence done at home!

Taking a few minutes at the end of the day to come back into your body and make yourself feel comfortable for bedtime is essential to unwinding at the end of a busy day. Get ready to feel more at home in your body with these yoga poses to help you sleep and relax into a great night's sleep.

Hero pose (Virasana)



Starting in a comfortable seated pose with your glutes resting on your heels with the tops of your feet on the floor, hero pose brings gentle stretching action to your knees and ankles.

This pose allows lubricating fluid to flood these areas, which protects them against injury, gets rid of any cracking sounds or minor discomfort you may be feeling here, and helps them feel more loose, warm, and comfortable—without any motion required.

Lengthen the spine upward, and open the chest as you find a calming breath pattern. Use your deep, even breaths to slow down your heart rate and clear your mind.

Cat and Cow Pose (Marjaryasana and Bitilasana)

From Hero pose, roll forward onto your hands and knees. For cat pose, exhale as you tilt the crown of the head and the tailbone down to the ground, arching your spine into a C-curve and pulling shoulder blades apart.



Inhale into Cow pose by bringing the crown of the head and the tailbone up toward the ceiling, hollowing out the lower back. Flow between these two poses as long as you'd like, moving with the pattern of your inhales and exhales and feeling like you're putting space between every vertebrae and loosening up your spine. When you're done, come back to a neutral spine in tabletop.

Child's Pose (Balasana)



From tabletop, sink your hips back to your heels and settle your chest between your thighs. Your big toes are touching one another and your knees are as far apart as they need to be to help you settle comfortably and be able to breathe deeply.

With your forehead resting on the ground or a blanket, walk your fingertips out in front of you, stretching through the arms. Roll your forehead from side to side to give yourself a massage.

Figure Four Against the Wall (Modified Sucirandhrasana)

Transitioning over onto your back, position yourself so your tailbone is pointing at the base of a wall. Place your glutes about a foot away from the base of the wall.

Place the bottom of one foot on the wall and, while keeping your tailbone in contact with the ground, flex the opposite foot and gently place your ankle on top of the opposite thigh. Keep your top foot flexed throughout the pose, with the toes pulling back toward the shin.



Place your tailbone closer to the wall and/or gently press the top knee open to the side with your fingertips. This deep hip stretch is a low-impact alternative to poses such as Pigeon and Lotus, but it still gives you the benefits of releasing any tension from the hips and lower back. Hip stretches are essential to feeling comfortable and relaxed before sleep. When you're ready, switch legs.

Legs Up the Wall (Viparita Karani)



From your figure four stretch, unfold your legs straight up the wall. If you can, bring your tailbone closer to the base of the wall, perhaps even to the point where your glutes are touching the wall. This pose can be a great gentle hamstring stretch.

It also helps drain lymph and lactic acid from the legs, which helps prevent injury and decrease the symptoms of fatigue and soreness if you spend a lot of time on your feet. Let the looseness that you brought into your lower back with the figure four stretch help you feel more comfortable in this pose.

Supine Spinal Twist (Supta Jaṭhara Parivartānāsana)

From a reclined position, bring both knees into your chest and rock back and forth. Bring your arms out into a 'T' position and let your knees fall to one side.

You can keep both knees bent, straighten the top leg, or choose to straighten both legs. If you're not feeling as much of the twist as you'd like, it may be helpful to adjust your tailbone, bringing your glutes further over to the middle of your mat so that your back is in one straight line down the center of your mat area, intensifying the stretch in the lower back. Move your head and gaze to the opposite side. Switch sides.



Happy Baby (Ananda Balasana)



Bringing both knees back into your chest, grasp your two big toes with the index and middle finger. Then pull the heels up to the ceiling, keeping the tailbone down on the ground.

Your knees should be pulling into your underarm area, and you can rock back and forth to gently massage the spine. This is a great pose for relieving abdominal discomfort and is a perfect final spinal relaxation pose.

Reclining Goddess Pose (Supta Baddha Konasana)

From Happy Baby pose, release the feet down to the mat. Bring the soles of the feet to touch one another and let the knees fall open, pulling the heels as close toward the pelvis as is comfortable.

This pose brings a gentle stretch into the pelvis, low abdomen, and inner thighs. Pull your shoulder blades underneath you, putting space between the tops of your shoulders and your earlobes, and then bring your left hand to rest on your heart and your right hand to rest on your belly.

Allow yourself to feel your breath as you bring it down into your chest to the very bottom of your lungs. Let your breath come deeply and evenly, relax your face, and close your eyes.



Corpse Pose (Savasana)



From reclining goddess pose, simply release your feet down to the corners of your mat or your bed, letting the toes fall open to the sides.

Release your hands so that palms are facing up and the backs of the hands are resting on the mat/bed a few inches away from the hips. Simply let your eyes close and let your mind be still and free of thoughts, while letting your breath come naturally and letting your body feel heavy, relaxed, and tranquil.

By Jennifer White



Eagle Arms

Taking your arms out to the side, swing your left elbow underneath the right. Attempt to take either the backs of the hands together, or bring the palms to touch if flexibility allows. Making sure to keep your shoulder blades sliding firmly down your back, begin to lift the elbows up to shoulder height while actively pressing the forearms away from the face. Next, moving with your breath, begin to curl and round the spine, bringing the elbows in toward the chest, further opening the shoulder muscles and the muscles at the base of the neck. Hold for 5 to 10 long inhales and exhales and repeat on the other side, with the right elbow underneath.

Head Tilts

Seated in a comfortable position and keeping a tall spine, begin by gently reaching your left arm out to the side, while bringing your right ear toward the right shoulder. Make sure your sit bones are rooted and try to keep the torso upright, without leaning to one side. Keep space between the shoulders and ears. Use your right hand to bring your head back to center and repeat on the other side. Stay for a few breaths, all the while reaching through the opposite arm.



Hand Clasp

Clasp your hands together behind your back, interlacing the fingers. If this feels uncomfortable, don't force it. Instead, grasp a towel or a strap. Try to bring the palms to touch and, keeping the shoulders down, breathe deeply while expanding through the chest and extending the arms long behind you.

Chin Tuck

Staying lifted through the sternum, begin to tuck the chin in toward the chest. Inhaling, and lift through the heart center. On your exhales, expand more through the back of the neck.

Head Massage

OK, this isn't necessarily a yoga stretch, but gently massaging the head — yes, there are muscles covering our skulls — with the fingertips, is one of the most instant forms of relief that I've found for the muscles of the jaw.

"Superman" (Locust Pose Variation)

Lastly, consider that when our core muscles — specifically, here, our back muscles — are strong, that they help keep our shoulders down. In other words, a strong back body helps prevent us from hiking up and hunching through the shoulders, without even thinking about it during the day. Because of this, I practice back-strengthening exercises daily. Begin this Locust Pose variation commonly called "Superman" by lying on your stomach. Take your feet mat-width distance apart and bring your forehead to the floor. Draw your arms forward and wide so that your entire body is in an "X" shape. Then, exhale all the air out of your lungs and lift everything up as high as you can on an inhale. Remembering to breathe, squeeze your legs and arms together, then extend your body back out into a lifted "X" shape. Lower and repeat 8 to 10 times.

Got Jaw Pain? 3 Yoga Strategies for Alleviating TMJ Discomfort

Emily Hardeman



Do a Body Scan: Scanning your body for pain and discomfort is a great way to help determine where you are experiencing tension and TMJ pain.

1. You can do this lying down or seated.
2. Scan your body, moving your attention through the entire head—from the scalp, to the forehead, to the eyes, to the cheeks, to the nose, to the mouth, to the jaw, down into the neck (front, sides and back), upper back and shoulders as well as the muscles of the chest.
3. Notice if there are any areas where you are holding tension or areas where you notice discomfort. Use your breath to help you relax any areas of tension you find.
4. Inhale, breathing in, and observing.
5. Exhale, releasing tension and focusing on relaxing the muscle tissue in each area.
6. Take as many rounds of the breath cycle as needed to allow an area of tension to release.

Stretch Your Neck: Neck stretching is also a great way to relieve TMJ discomfort and pain because tense neck muscles and fascia can significantly impact pain in the jaw.

1. While sitting, drop your head to one side, letting your ear drop toward your shoulder and keeping your chin facing forward. Hold this for three or four breaths.
2. Keeping your head dropped to the side, rotate your chin down toward the same shoulder. Hold this for three or four breaths.
3. Rotate your head back to the starting point.
4. Repeat this cycle on each side for two or three rounds.



Practice Supported Backbends: Supported backbends are also a wonderful way to focus on releasing tension in and around the neck and shoulders, as well as the chest muscles. As our chest muscles tighten, we have a tendency to draw our shoulders forward, which in turn pulls our chin forward. The chin-forward position, coupled with jaw tension, is a common combination for those with TMJ and generalized stress. This combination is a recipe for additional pain.

1. Roll a blanket into a long cylinder, placing it on a yoga mat so that it is parallel to the long edges of your yoga mat.
2. Sit on the floor in front of your blanket roll with your rear touching the end of the roll. Lie back on the roll so that you're the upper part of your lumbar spine; your thoracic and cervical spines; and your head are all resting on the blanket.
3. Extend your arms out to your sides at shoulder height with your palms facing upward. Allow your spine to be supported, and the muscles around your chest, shoulders, and neck to relax into that support.
4. Your hips should be on the floor. Your knees can remain bent, or your legs can be extended.
5. Stay here for at least a couple minutes or potentially even a few minutes. As you do so, breathe in and out through your nose.
6. Take long breath cycles, lengthening the inhalation and the exhalation. Part your teeth slightly so that there is space between your teeth.
7. Let your entire body relax into the supported pose and allow tension to begin to release.



Can You Do Yoga Before or After a Workout?

May 2, 2016 by Jay Medley



Yoga is a great compliment to your fitness routine, even if it includes other workouts. In fact, there are benefits to including yoga in your fitness plans no matter what other workouts you're currently doing. You may have already incorporated yoga into your exercise rotation, but have you ever thought about pairing it with another workout? Can you do yoga before or after a workout? Or should you do yoga before or after a workout?

Some styles of yoga are a workout in themselves and may be too much for your body after another workout. You'll need to get some rest before an intense style like Ashtanga. That's not to say that you shouldn't do the more athletic styles of yoga, but save them for a day when yoga will be the only exercise so that you won't be at risk of overtraining. More therapeutic styles will work well paired with another workout.

Yoga is most beneficial after a workout as a great cool down. The poses will stretch all of the muscles you just used, which can help to reduce soreness and speed healing. Getting oxygen into your muscles is just as important after the workout as before, because this will help your muscles to recover and grow during rest time. The meditation at the end of a yoga session will also help you to relax your mind and return to a resting heart rate. Because yoga focuses and relaxes the mind and body, a class is a great way to end a workout.

While yoga is best after a workout, you can incorporate it into your warm up as well. You won't want to go to a yoga class before a workout, these classes will leave you relaxed with a resting heart rate after a cool down and meditation session, not pumped up for your next workout. Instead, try to incorporate dynamic poses that you've learned in yoga classes into your own warm up. Dynamic stretches (ones where you're moving) have been shown to be more beneficial than static stretches (ones where you're holding a stretch) on athletic ability. A study from the American College of Sports Medicine found that while dynamic stretching is generally a good idea for most athletes, static stretching before activity can have negative effects on performance (static stretching has benefits when done after exercise.) Your yoga instructor is there to suggest some dynamic stretches that you can use in your warm up. Remember to actually warm up your muscles before doing any poses, because going straight into a stretch with a cold muscle is like asking for an injury. After a bit of walking, jumping jacks, or other quick activities to get your heart rate up, include a few dynamic yoga poses to loosen your muscles.

See if your gym offers yoga classes; you may be able to end your workout session with a yoga class. This way, you can reap and maximize all of the benefits of yoga and your workout, and be on your way to your fitness goals faster.

Cardio Before Yoga:

If you want to do a session of cardio and sweat it out before going onto yoga to calm and relax your body as well as cool down, then that's perfectly fine. The cardio will actually work as a warm up and yoga will relax the worked muscles. So by the time you finish your cardio as well as yoga workout, you will be in a total state of relaxation. If you're doing cardio before yoga, then we recommend that you do a light stretching sequence to warm up and stretch your muscles before getting into a full fledged cardio work out. After doing cardio for 30-60 minutes, your blood circulation will increase and your muscles will be fairly warmed up. This will also increase your flexibility and you can embark on your yoga session with greater movement and suppleness. Yoga will help you cool down and relax after your cardio session. Doing cardio before yoga works for some because the adrenaline rush that they feel after cardio keeps them fresh while doing yoga and the stretching exercises in yoga feel good after an intensive cardio session. Some also feel lazy and groggy after yoga, so they'd rather do cardio before. Several people prefer to do yoga after an intensive workout or cardio session as it helps them relax after the session rather than before the session. So after yoga, they can take a short nap as they feel slightly sleepy.



Cardio After Yoga:

On the other hand, there are those who like to do yoga before their cardio session. Yoga, which starts with a warming up sequence and moves on to asanas and then again a cooling down session, stretches, strengthens and tones up the muscles. The exercise and added oxygen that one inhales after doing pranayama and asanas, helps to prepare the body for the cardio workout. Yoga also warms up the body, making the muscles more flexible and the joints well lubricated. Thus, reducing the chances of muscle soreness or injury after the cardio workout. People also like to do yoga before cardio, because when they begin yoga, they are fresh rather than all sweaty and tired after the cardio session. If you choose to do yoga before cardio, remember to warm up completely before getting into any complicated yoga poses.

Last but not the least, it's entirely up to you, whether you want to do yoga before or after cardio. Speak to your fitness instructor for added guidance and work out an exercise plan that suits your body.

Whether you're a pro athlete -- or a keyboard warrior spending hours pounding away at your desk each day -- wrist care is important and makes sense. As an athlete, you need to have grip strength, be able to absorb falls and have powerful arm strength. One key to gaining those qualities is a supple wrist. If you're at your desk all day you're overdeveloping all the tiny muscles in your hands and wrists, which can then develop chronic pain. Try these wrist openers to gain freedom in your hands and wrists.

Reclining seated mountain



To properly open a joint, you need to stretch surrounding joints and muscles at the same time. This pose accomplishes that for you.

Keys to the pose:

- * Start on the floor, sitting up straight.
- * Place your hands on the floor behind you. Play around with the direction the fingers point according to where you feel the best stretch. Whatever you choose, be sure your hands are symmetrical to each other.
- * Lean back on your hands, with your palms flat and fingers spread evenly.
- * Inhale, lengthen your spine and push the floor away. Then exhale, open your chest and heart forward, while squeezing the shoulder blades together behind you.
- * Do this move for one minute of focus and breathing.

Inverted table



This move takes the reclining seated mountain to the next level. You might want to progress to this once you feel you are executing the previous pose well. You will continue to stretch the entire shoulder girdle, forearms and wrists. Then progressively add the strength element of the arms when you lift up, making it a well-rounded yoga move.

Keys to the pose:

- * Start sitting, and place your hands on the floor behind you with your fingers spread and palms flat.
- * Make sure you find the optimal direction for your fingers to point for the best stretch for you. Keep your knees bent and feet flat. Distribute your weight evenly between your feet and hands.
- * Inhale and lift your hips off the floor, aiming to eventually lift them as high as your knees. Exhale, then lower back down.
- * When you're in the lift, push evenly into your hands, pushing the floor away, and gently squeezing your shoulder blades toward each other. Pause before you lower.
- * Do this for 1-3 minutes depending on your ability.

Downward facing dog



The beauty of this pose is that you get a less direct, gently angled stretch on the wrist joint, while strengthening all the shoulder and arm muscles at the same time.

Keys to the pose:

- * Set your hands shoulder-width apart, with palms flat and fingers spread out evenly.
- * Your feet should be approximately hip-width apart. For the purposes of your wrists, do this pose with bent knees.
- * Inhale and push the floor away, then exhale gently and drop your head down toward the mat.
- * Breathe and hold this pose for 30 seconds to one minute.

Wrist turns



This pose is the kingpin stretch for the wrists and should be considered as an everyday move if you are experiencing tightness and pain in the wrist joint. Approach this move slowly and mindfully, so as not to be too aggressive when you first do it.

Keys to the pose:

- * Start on your hands and knees. Make sure your wrist joint is directly under your shoulder joint.
- * Stretch one wrist at a time. Turn the right wrist to the right, moving a little more each time until one day, your fingers are pointed toward your body.
- * Inhale, push the floor away, lengthen the neck out of your shoulders and hold for 30 seconds. Slowly come out of it and switch sides.
- * Do this move two times on each side.

Reverse wrist openers



All the previous moves focus on a flexing stretch of the wrist joint -- this move is unique, because you will finally feel an amazing extension stretch. It might feel strange at first because it's not a stretch you do or feel regularly, so approach it slowly and, before you know it, the small muscles in the wrist joint will begin to release and you will finally experience new freedom and flexibility in the wrists.

Keys to the pose:

- * Start on your hands and knees. Bring your left wrist under your shoulders, palm facing up. Spread your fingers evenly.
- * Put your right hand on top of your left wrist to gently press down on the left hand.
- * Lean into the stretch until you reach your limit, then hold and breathe for 30 seconds to one minute.
- * To come out of it, lean away from the stretch and slowly release your left wrist.
- * Repeat the move on your right hand.



24 COMMON YOGA MISTAKES

By Timothy Burgin | August 21st, 2018

Full article: <http://www.yogabasics.com/practice/yoga-for-beginners/common-yoga-mistakes/>

1. Arriving late for class
2. Rushing to yoga class
3. Wearing inappropriate clothing
4. Showing up stinky 
5. Not cleaning your mat
6. Refusing props
7. Using a cheap mat
8. Practicing with a full stomach
9. Bringing your phone with you 
10. Not using a towel in hot yoga
11. Holding your breath
12. Comparing yourself with others
13. Letting your eyes wander around the room
14. Focusing too much on perfection
15. Not asking for help 
16. Forcing yourself into a pose
17. Not engaging your core or bandhas
18. Practicing inconsistently
19. Negative self-talk
20. Forgetting to smile
21. Putting your teacher on a pedestal 
22. Thinking your teacher has all the answers
23. Not communicating with your teacher
24. Skipping Shavasana 



You have more than one yoga app on your phone, you're a regular at the studio, and you could ace any yoga poses quiz (and so could your kids, thanks to mommy-and-me classes!). But even if the instructor knows you by name or you've memorized every at-home workout you have, you may not be getting the most out of your practice. Even experienced yoga practitioners can make mistakes without realizing it, says Jason Crandell, an instructor with YogaGlo.com. These mistakes may prevent you from getting full results or, even worse, they may set the stage for injury. Want to make the most out of your practice? Discover six of the most common mistakes made in yoga class—and learn what you can do to fix them.

Mistake #1: You rush through the moves. In flow classes, you switch from one pose to the next. But hurrying through them doesn't do your body any favors. "You should never have that late-for-a-meeting feeling," Crandell says. Moving too quickly can mean that you don't set up the poses correctly.

***How to fix it:** First, check that you're going to the right class. Not all styles of yoga are the same: Vinyasa and power classes tend to move at a faster pace than restorative and Iyengar ones. During class, move at a pace with which you're comfortable. "It's not synchronized swimming," Crandell says. "Falling a little behind shows that you're able to recognize what works for your experience."*

Mistake #2: You force your body into a pose. The yogi next to you easily twists into a pretzel shape. Don't try to keep up if you know you're not that flexible. Straining to get into a pose can stress your muscles and joints, raising your risk of injury.

***How to fix it:** Reach for a yoga prop, such as a strap, block, bolster, or blanket. They help modify poses to best suit your body. (Can't touch your toes? Use a strap to reach your feet.) Props allow you to target areas of the body, so you can go deeper into a pose. Your instructor can show you the right way to use them.*

Mistake #3: Your hands and feet are too close in **downward-facing dog**. "Many people think that their heels need to be flat on the ground," Crandell says. As a result, they move their feet up on the mat. But this can throw off your alignment.

***How to fix it:** Start by setting up the pose correctly. Lying facedown on the mat, place your hands so your fingertips are in line with the center of the chest. Press up onto all fours. Then lift your knees off the ground, moving your hips up and back, and straighten your legs.*

Mistake #4: You hold your breath. It's common to hold your breath while you're focusing on a pose. But this can keep your muscles from getting the oxygen they need.

***How to fix it:** A deep, steady breath improves your practice. Inhale slowly so that your stomach swells outward, followed by the chest. Then exhale slowly out of the mouth. Out of breath? Take a break to catch it again.*

Mistake #5: You go too low. Deepening a pose challenges your muscles. But lowering down too far can stress your joints. It's a common problem in the **warrior** and **chatarunga** (low-plank) poses, Crandell says.

***How to fix it:** Do a quick alignment check: In warriors one and two, make sure your knee and front shin line up with the center of your ankle. In chatarunga, your ribs should go no lower than your elbows. Your elbows should graze the sides of your body.*

Mistake #6: You're trying to clear your mind. During final relaxation, everyone looks so peaceful. You're struggling to quiet your brain, but you can't stop thinking about what to eat for dinner.

***How to fix it:** Don't try to fight off every thought. "The goal isn't to make your mind blank," Crandell says. "It's to observe those thoughts and the sensation of your body and breath." For instance, let that mental note about grocery shopping pass through your brain. Then notice your breath or how relaxed your muscles feel.*

You Might Be Believing One of These 8 Yoga Myths

“Me, do yoga? I'm not flexible. Like, at all.”



If that thought has ever crossed your mind — or if you've ever felt like taking a yoga class is out of the question because you don't have a “yoga body” — you might not be getting the whole picture.

At its core, yoga is for everyone, and there are many different ways of doing it. It's also not just one singular thing — it's a practice that weaves together physical postures with breathing techniques and mindful meditation to deliver heaps of benefits for your mind and body.

“Studies repeatedly show that yoga has wonderful stress management benefits,” says Judi Bar, a yoga therapist and Yoga Program Manager. And that's just the beginning; studies have also found that yoga can help:

- Boost body image and self-esteem.
- Improve balance and flexibility.
- Preserve cognitive function as you age.
- Keep blood pressure under control.
- Boost mood and keep anxiety at bay.
- Ensure quality sleep.

Still can't imagine yourself donning stretchy pants and getting into downward-facing dog? Bar has heard it all before and is here to address some of the most common reasons people give for missing out on what yoga has to offer.

“I can't do yoga — I can't even touch my toes!”

Flexibility is something that's gained from a regular yoga practice, not something that's required in order to start one, Bar says. Yoga practice is intended to be adapted to meet every individual at his or her own level. “The whole essence of yoga is wrapping yoga around a person — not asking them to bend this and that way,” she says. “We always want people to go at their own pace, don't force anything and listen to their body.”

“Yoga is for women.”

The irony of this misconception is that (based on the earliest descriptions of yoga that we have) [it was started by men who taught it to other men in India](#). Somewhere along the way, as it became popularized in the Western world, it took on feminine associations.

“Part of it is, I think, the mind-body piece of it attracted women here initially,” Bar says. “But there are certainly wonderful male teachers and a lot of men that do yoga.”

“I'll probably get hurt.”

The mistake that people make in taking up yoga is not investigating the available styles and teachers enough to find what's right for them, Bar says. “If a class is too fast or extreme, or if we put too much pressure on ourselves, that is how we get hurt,” she says.

Start with a class labeled “beginner” or “gentle.” And remember, you don't have to twist yourself into a pretzel to do yoga. [Listen to your body](#), and let the instructor know it's your first time so he or she can offer modifications and adjustments.

“I can’t do yoga because I have back pain.”

Actually, studies suggest [yoga can actually help relieve lower back pain](#). “There are poses and breaths and meditations that absolutely support people with pain,” Bar says.

This is another case in which the experience of the teacher and the type of class will be paramount. You might want to seek out a class taught by a yoga therapist, which is an instructor who has additional training in helping people with physical challenges like pain, or people who are recovering from an injury.

“I’m looking for something that’s actually exercise.”

If you’re wanting a more fast-paced style that can really challenge your muscles, look for vinyasa or Ashtanga classes, which involve poses linked together into sequences. Hot yoga and Bikram yoga may also allow you to move deeper into poses — and make you sweat. But these more rigorous kinds of yoga are not something you want to just jump into, Bar says.

“Again, the key is to [choose a class that’s appropriate for your own fitness level](#), flexibility, tolerance for heat and understanding of alignment,” she says. “When we move with pressure and speed and we don’t understand alignment, that’s when injuries happen.”

“I don’t own designer athleisure or any fancy equipment.”

All you really need to do yoga is something [comfy to wear and a mat underneath your feet](#), and it can be done just about anywhere (thanks, YouTube). “A mat just makes it a little bit safer so you don’t slip, and it pads you a little when you’re laying down,” Bar explains.

Extra props aren’t necessary for many styles of yoga. Or, if you want to use them, you can find items around your house that will work the same way — say, use a book instead of a block or a belt instead of a strap.

“It won’t help me lose weight.”

Since it’s not usually a calorie-torching activity, some people assume yoga isn’t helpful for weight loss. But evidence suggests that’s not true. It’s actually the [mental benefits of yoga that are most likely to contribute to weight loss](#). “One of the biggest benefits of yoga is the clarity of mind and self-awareness that come with it,” Bar says.

“When we’re more aware, we’re able to make behavioral changes and be more mindful in our choice of how we eat, what we eat and when we eat.”

“I’m too old to start yoga.”

“I teach people who are 90 years old,” Bar reassures. “There’s this perception that yoga has to be fast and you’re on the ground and you’re sweating, but that’s not the case.” She advises that baby boomers and seniors look to their local recreation center for gentle or therapeutic yoga classes, or chair yoga, as those tend to be more adaptive than classes at a trendy yoga studio.

Yoga can be accessible and attainable for anyone — just remember to [always listen to your body](#) and find a class and an instructor that support you.

So go ahead, soak up that Savasana and be on your way to a clearer mind and a more relaxed body.

These Are The Most Popular Yoga Styles in the World

By Maren Hunsberger



Photo credit: Paige Rene

Not sure what kind of yoga is going to be best for you? Why not follow the crowd and take a cue from the ten thousand people—from 147 different countries—who participated in the DOYOUYOGA Global Yoga Survey this past year.

The survey data allowed us to see trends that answered some of our most burning questions, including: what are the most popular yoga styles that people practice most? Here are the top three:

1. Vinyasa Flow

Coming in on top, with 57% of respondents citing this as their primary yoga style, is Vinyasa Flow. This yoga style's popularity could be due to its fast-paced, fluid movement between poses.

Vinyasa is actually a broad category of practice that includes Power yoga and Ashtanga yoga, but when referred broadly as just 'Vinyasa', it allows for lots of flexibility and creativity. Vinyasa flow series can be customized to all levels of students, and can really get your heart pumping and your muscles warm, which aligns closely with most everyone's traditional expectation of exercise.

It's a great workout, it's typically not overly spiritual, and you see benefits in your body right away.

2. Hatha Yoga

At second place is Hatha yoga, with 42% of the respondents saying it's their style of choice. Hatha also encompasses a wide range of yoga styles, but typically is framed as the opposite of vinyasa yoga.

Hatha yoga takes one pose at a time and spends time there. It's slower paced, and is more focused on stretching. This yoga style is great for beginners or anyone who wants a more leisurely practice more focused on deepening stretching.

3. Restorative Yoga

People also seemed to really like their Restorative yoga, with 29% of responders saying they preferred this style as their primary yoga class. These yoga sequences typically involve a few gentle poses that are held for extended periods of time, usually with the support of multiple props. The poses include forward folds, twisting, and other gentle stretches that many find very relaxing—it's a great practice to do before bedtime!

The rest of the yoga styles that survey responders reported liking best are more niche variations of the top three—there's something out there for everyone!

[Continued on reverse side](#)

4. Power Yoga

29 percent of the respondents practice Power yoga, a style that adheres to the same tenets as Vinyasa yoga, but is usually designed to be more challenging. Some instructors may move faster between flows and poses, some may add more challenging moves, some may hold poses longer to work on strength. Be prepared to really feel the work in any class that calls itself Power yoga!

5. Ashtanga Yoga

Ashtanga is also a form of Vinyasa yoga, but this style follows a prescribed sequence of poses. Every Ashtanga yoga class will be the same, no matter where you are in the world, because every class performs the same poses, in the same order.

This is the class for you if you love routine and knowing what to expect in your yoga class. It's a great way to really see progress from class to class and to work toward measurable goals. 24 percent of the respondents practice Ashtanga.

6. Yin Yoga

Garnering 17% of the responses is Yin yoga, which is similar to Restorative yoga in that you hold a few poses for quite a length of time. It can, however, be much more challenging—Yin yoga 'balances out' the 'yang' of your more dynamic yoga practices by creating movement deep with your body's muscles and fascia.

It requires highly developed concentration and focus, and can play a big part in injury prevention and joint health—I recommend that anyone who hasn't tried yin yoga give it a shot!

7. Bikram/Hot Yoga

10 percent of the survey respondents practice Bikram yoga, a highly regimented, prescribed set of poses performed in a heated space, usually 35–42 °C (95–108 °F). More generic Hot yoga is less strict, and can be performed at any range of above-average temperatures and consist of many combinations of yoga flows and poses.

The most essential part of any hot yoga class is to hydrate well in advance—at least a day before attending a class—and to hydrate after, because the sweating that's gonna go down in one of these practices will be intense!

8. Iyengar Yoga

This form of yoga is a subset of Hatha yoga that follows a specific sequence of poses. These pose sequences can be mixed and matched within a practice, but all are to be practiced with great attention given to the precision of form and timing of movement and breath. Eight percent of the DOYOUYOGA Global Yoga Survey respondents practice Iyengar yoga.

Whatever your preferred go-to yoga style is, it's always fun to mix it up by adding a different class in once and while. You challenge your body and your preconceptions of what a certain yoga style is like, and you just might learn more about yourself along the way!

Yoga by the Numbers



We do it at home, in the studio, at the airport, at work, even in the park. In recent years, Americans have taken up yoga like never before.

- 36 million**Estimated number of Americans who practice yoga
- 80 %**Increase in yoga participation over the past five years
- 39%**Yoga participants who are 50-plus
- \$16 billion**Spending in 2016 on yoga classes, clothing & accessories
- 76,000**Registered yoga teachers
- 65%**Participants who do yoga at home

Get Started

If the sheer beauty and buzz of yoga makes you want to try it, go for it! The benefits of practicing are plentiful, from improving flexibility to relieving stress.

Ready to strike a Downward Dog? Let's go!

Yoga in your life



What it is:

With yoga, you move gracefully from pose to pose. You will focus closely on breathing — carefully regulated inhales and exhales — which helps create an energetic, full workout.

What to expect:

Continual movement, with the teacher cueing each pose. Some teachers will include music; some won't. You'll find classes that focus on breath, while others will emphasize movement. There's much room for interpretation here, and no two classes are alike.



Who practices:

Yogis of all ages. Newbies should take the time to find the teacher and studio that are right for them. Look for classes called Gentle, Beginner, Level 1 or Introductory.



Take a Deep Breath:

Yoga is a combination of controlled breathing and movement, and these days the breath is getting as much attention as the poses. Research shows that your breathing pattern and rate can have a powerful effect on your body and mind.



Do You Know the Benefits of Yoga?

Yoga heals in many ways. Test yourself!



- 1) One study found that after practicing yoga for only eight weeks, people increased their flexibility by:
 - up to 35 percent
 - 50 percent
 - 80 percent
- 2) Certain poses enhance balance and, in older students, can reduce the fear of:
 - hearing loss
 - weight gain
 - falling
- 3) According to researchers, middle-aged adults who practice yoga regularly gain less weight as they age than those who don't practice.
 - True
 - False
- 4) How many minutes of yoga can increase memory and focus, and help you process information more accurately and faster?
 - As little as 30
 - 60
 - 90 of, ideally, hot yoga
- 5) Those who have practiced yoga, studies found, reduced their blood pressure and lowered levels of harmful LDL cholesterol by about:
 - 12 points, and lost an average of five pounds
 - 20 points, and lost an average of 10 pounds
 - six points, but lost no weight
- 6) After two months of practicing yoga for 45 minutes before bed, students fell asleep:
 - An hour faster and slept through the night
 - 15 minutes faster and slept more than a half-hour longer each night
 - five minutes faster
- 7) Women who practiced yoga regularly rated their body satisfaction higher than those who did other kinds of exercise.
 - True
 - False
- 8) Patients with heart failure who were enrolled in 16 yoga therapy sessions over eight to 10 weeks had a:
 - 43 % improvement in aerobic capacity
 - 10 % improvement in aerobic capacity
 - 22 % improvement in aerobic capacity
- 9) After taking part in a six-week yoga therapy program, women with urinary incontinence had a:
 - 70 % reduction in the frequency of urine leakage
 - 30 % reduction in the frequency of urine leakage
 - 55 % reduction in the frequency of urine leakage
- 10) Various studies have shown that yoga increases workplace stress and promotes general well-being.
 - True
 - False

ANSWERS:
1-up to 35 percent
2-falling
3-True
4-as little as 30
5-12 points, and lost an average of five pounds
6-15 minutes faster and slept more than a half-hour longer each night
7-True
8-22% improvement in aerobic capacity,
9-70% reduction in the frequency of urine leakage
10-False