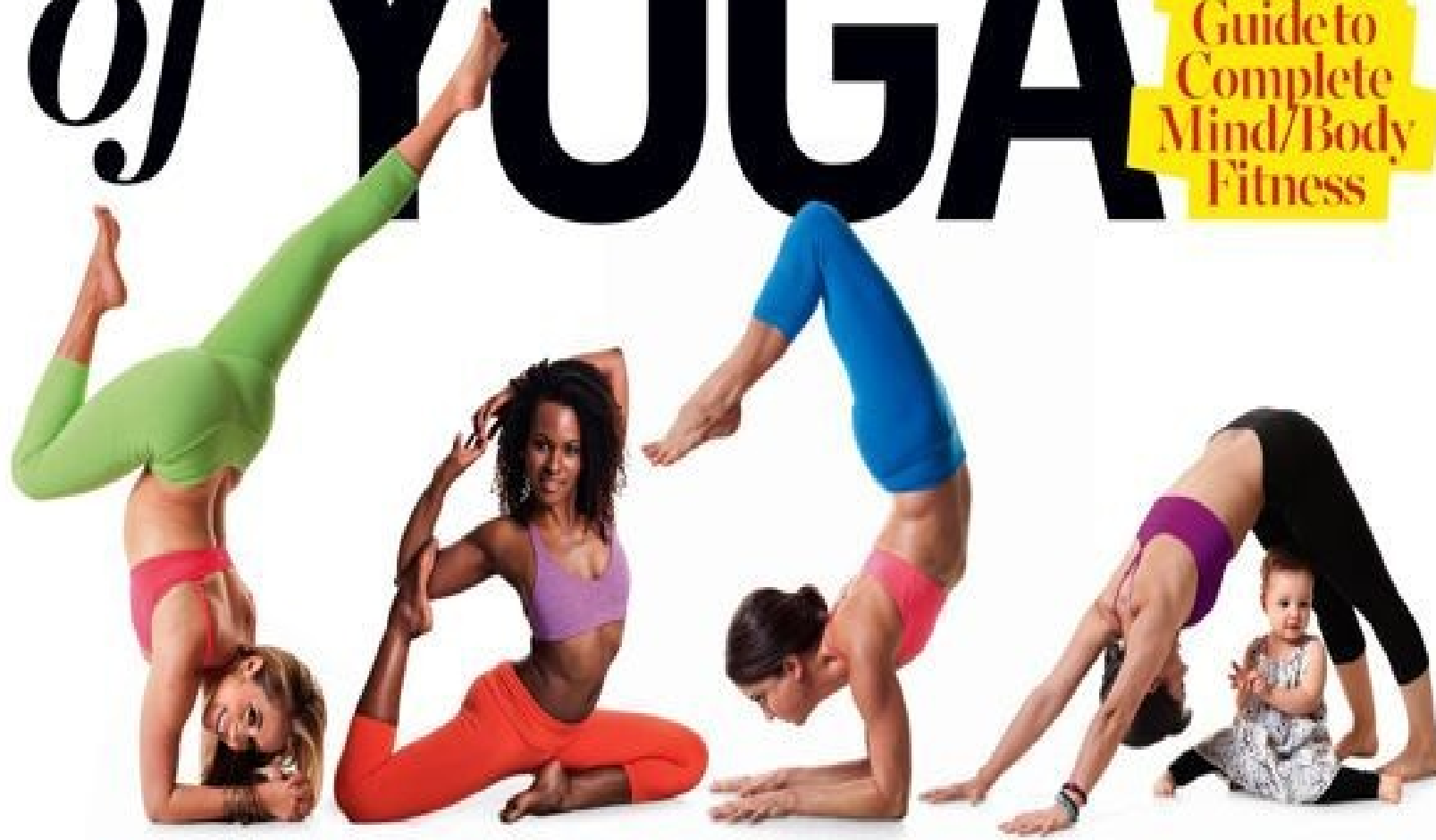


The Women's Health

BIG BOOK

of YOGA

The
Essential
Guide to
Complete
Mind/Body
Fitness



By **KATHRYN BUDIG**, Contributing Editor, *Women's Health*.

The
Women's Health
BIG BOOK
of
YOGA



RODALE

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*For my father, who taught me that
anything is possible.*

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Introduction

I lived in Los Angeles for 8 years—the mecca for slender, beautiful, “perfect” people. But take a closer look behind all the glitz, glamour, and designer sunglasses and you’ll find a lot of very beautiful, unhappy people. The cutthroat world of Hollywood is especially tough on women, which I experienced firsthand. I arrived in Los Angeles at the ripe age of 21, hoping to pursue my dreams of acting while teaching yoga on the side to keep me going from gig to gig. I remember my first meeting with a manager like it was yesterday. She took one look at my frame—all 5'2" and 108 pounds—and told me that I could be the funny best friend. If I ever wanted to play the ingenue I’d have to drop at least 10 pounds.

I went home feeling confused and hurt. Was I fat? I’m not attractive or slim enough to play a lead? I always thought I was in such good shape. Do I need to diet? Start drinking coffee and smoke cigarettes? Everything made me cringe. The uncomfortable questions went on and on, but my yoga practice answered all of my questions. My teachers kept reminding me that I was perfect exactly as I was—and I was fit and slim thanks to my daily practice. More importantly, yoga reminded me that life is about balance and not extremes. Life is meant to be enjoyed and embraced along with all of the discipline and challenges that it presents. Yoga showed me that self-acceptance and belief in myself was the key to strength and beauty.

In retrospect, that audition was a complete blessing because it guided me into an “accidental career” of teaching yoga full-time. I learned at a young age that the only way to experience happiness is by taking chances and following what makes my heart beat. Every minute I spend training and teaching is me at my best. It puts a smile on my face every single day. I hope to empower you through yoga to find what makes your heart beat. Practicing yoga allows you to connect to your untapped potential. Whether it’s mastering a handstand or allowing a simple savasana to chill you out at the end of the day, yoga offers unlimited potential to be your best self.

I teach yoga because it works. I practice yoga because it completes me. I’ve written this book with the hope that you’ll be tempted to do the same—live the life you’ve always wanted. Reclaim that strong, calm, powerful spirit within.

Heal old injuries, whether physical or mental—and have an insanely fun time!

Enjoy your journey. Remember that it takes valleys to create peaks! These poses and sequences are here to make you feel fantastic, to challenge you to be the best version of yourself, and to keep you healthy, fit, and beautiful. Rock your practice, and make it yours. Often all it takes is a good group of Sun Salutations or a fabulous inversion to remind you how unique and strong you are. As one of my favorite men of all time put so well, “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” —Oscar Wilde

Namaste, y’all.

xo Kathryn

CHAPTER 1

Ready, Set, Om

Your transformation starts here

If you picked up this book, you're probably one of three types of people: either you're curious about yoga, you want to deepen your practice, or you're just a sucker for pretty pictures. No matter which type you are, you'll find what you're looking for here. And even if you're a beginner, the truth is that you've already begun your yoga practice, simply by intending to make yoga a part of your life. I promise, it will be worth it.

"Yoga," which in Sanskrit translates to "yoke," "union," or "discipline," has persevered for thousands of years. It's had enough face lifts and transformations to make even Madonna look like a slacker. While the main focus of this book is on how we interpret yoga in the West today—as a challenging workout that tones your muscles, calms your mind, and strengthens your spirit—it's important to understand its roots, too.

One of my teachers once said of yoga, "The more you learn, you realize the less you know." Yoga will teach you how to unify your mind, body, and soul, leaving you refreshed, calm, and ready to take on the world (or, rather, one awesome moment of life at a time). It does this by strengthening and lengthening your body, slowing down your mind, and opening up your perspective. Welcome to the journey of a lifetime! Let's start with a little background.

A Land before Sports Clubs

The original hard-core yogis weren't kidding around when it came to practicing yoga. Their goal was to discover their true natures and embrace the process of transformation without expectation or attachment to the results. Essentially, they were trying to be at one in their minds, bodies, and souls. The best way for them to cultivate this lifestyle 3,500 years ago was to completely detach themselves from civilization and spend every moment dedicated to this process. While living in a remote cave with no cell phone reception is a one-way ticket to a meltdown in the modern world, these yogis found solitude crucial to calming their minds and steadying their focus.

I don't expect you to completely change your daily routine, but it's a good idea to make time to take care of yourself—whether you do that by taking a lunchtime yoga class or just by taking 15 minutes to quietly relax and close your eyes. Even the smallest bit of relaxation makes a big difference! According to a 2011 study in the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment, and Health*, participation in a 6-week yoga intervention program was associated with improvements in well-being and resilience to stress.

In that study, a group of employees at a British university participated in six 1-hour yoga classes over the course of 6 weeks. At the end of the study, they reported higher levels of well-being than did control group members, who did not attend yoga classes. Participants assessed themselves using the Profile of Mood States Bipolar Scale and the Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes. Those in the yoga group scored higher on clear-mindedness, composure, elation, energy, and confidence. They also reported increased life purpose and satisfaction, as well as feelings of greater self-confidence during stressful situations. So, taking the time out of your busy day to do yoga is worth it!

Asanas—"comfortable seats," in Sanskrit—are the yoga postures. The original form of yoga consisted of plenty of sitting and meditation—a little different from the sweat-inducing vinyasa classes we see in the movies. [Gurus](#) taught that the self (our egos) must be sacrificed in order to attain happiness and liberation from the dregs of life that weigh us down. The intensity of sacrifice espoused evolved into a set of standards, or rules, to live by for those who were willing to dedicate their lives to yoga.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

Possibly the most famous yoga philosopher went by the name of Patanjali. This guy is celebrated as the father of yoga. His personal history is shrouded in mystery and myth, so I actually like to call him the Godfather. Patanjali penned the famous *Yoga Sutras* in the 2nd century BC. These are 195 statements on how to conduct oneself in life in order to achieve enlightenment. He was the creator of the eight-limbed path of yoga (referred to as “ashtanga yoga”), which frees one from physical, mental, and emotional suffering when followed properly.

Patanjali’s sutras formed a yoga to-do list that includes yamas (restraints), niyamas (disciplines), asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (liberation). The words may seem complicated and tricky to pronounce, but don’t get too overwhelmed. Think of them as a basic guide to being a good person. They’re just suggestions for how to deal with the everyday stresses in life—kind of like a nonreligious Ten Commandments. When you feel good about yourself, that positive energy translates throughout the rest of your life.

THE FIRST LADY OF YOGA

In the 1930s, Russian-born Indra Devi caused quite the stir. The Mysore royal family insisted that Krishnamacharya teach her (yes, a woman!), and he grudgingly agreed. After proving herself beyond worthy, they became friends and she went on to introduce yoga in the Soviet Union, Argentina, and China, where she opened a school in Shanghai. Her popularity grew. She opened a studio in Los Angeles and taught leading ladies Marilyn Monroe and Greta Garbo. This powerhouse passed away in April 2002, but she left an inspiring legacy for women everywhere.

The Yamas

The yamas—or restraints—set out to give the yogi a solid ethical foundation. The *Yoga Sutras* identify the five yamas as ahimsa (nonviolence), satya (truthfulness), asetya (nonstealing), brahmacharya (abstinence), and aparigraha (nongreed). The question is, what do they all mean and how do you use them? Let's break them down.

AHIMSA (nonviolence)

This can have a multitude of definitions and echoes the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” While it clearly prescribes practicing self-restraint when you feel like taking out your boss or mother-in-law, it stresses living compassionately in general. Anger is a rash emotion, and violence often follows it. Being in tune with one's thoughts and actions helps the yogi to chill with the anger and harbor no hatred. Ahimsa also means that we can't be violent toward ourselves, including in the way we treat our bodies and how we deal with injury, and that our bodies must be honored as the sacred temples they are.

SATYA (truthfulness)

Literally translated as “don't lie,” this yama insists that we speak the truth even when we think it's easier to hide behind falsehoods. It directs us to be thoughtful with our words and to always speak with intention.

ASETYA (nonstealing)

This aligns with the commandments not to steal or covet what others have. We've all been taught from a young age that stealing is wrong, but longing to possess someone else's success or existence is just as bad. As mythologist and scholar Joseph Campbell so eloquently said, “The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are,” and I have a feeling Patanjali would back that up. Longing for what we lack causes suffering, but being comfortable with what we have and who we are creates stability and happiness.

BRAHMACHARYA (abstinence)

This one makes the modern-day yogi twitch. Patanjali definitely meant celibacy, which doesn't quite jibe with today's lifestyles—or any episode of *Sex in the City*, for that matter! His thoughts were that sexual energy took away from the focus one could put toward devotion. I prefer to translate it this way: Avoid using your sexuality recklessly. Offer your sexuality to those who deserve it and will respect you, so you can respect yourself, in turn.

APARIGRAHA (nongreed)

Take a walk down any main shopping strip and you'll understand this one: We are obsessed with and attached to material goods. While enjoying a good shopping spree can elevate one's mood (everyone needs a little retail therapy from time to time), be careful not to associate happiness with tangible objects. This yama seeks to keep us in the present moment instead of lusting after a wish list of unattainable goodies.

The Niyamas

Once you have a solid grip on your restraints, it's time to move on to your disciplines (niyamas), which are: saucha (cleanliness), santosa (contentment), tapas (austerity), svadhayaya (self-study), and isvara pranidhana (devotion to God).

SAUCHA (cleanliness)

Your mama probably taught you this one. While it's important to scrub behind your ears and get between your toes, this also means purity of thoughts and consumption. Take care of your body (it's your temple) by doing the physical practice, speaking your truth with compassion (there's satya!), and consuming pure, clean food.

SANTOSA (contentment)

This is the ultimate rule to truly live in the moment. We spend so much time worrying about things that may or may not ever come to be. Santosa asks that we stop planning ahead and enjoy each moment and breath as it arrives. This is tricky, but it becomes easier when you set a daily intention to be content and practice gratitude for the everyday gifts that you possess.

TAPAS (austerity)

The Sanskrit word "tap" means "to burn," so "tapas" is often referred to as "heat" or "discipline." Tapas comes from the exertion of doing the postures or being able to get out of bed when the alarm clock chimes at the crack of dawn. Practicing tapas makes us strong and enables us to show up when the going gets rough.

SVADHAYAYA (self-study)

Try saying this one three times fast! The theory here is that the better you know yourself, the more apt you are to have control over your actions, thoughts, and emotions. Svadhayaya includes things like taking the time to read this book and learn. It makes you a better citizen of the world and more mindful of your responsibilities.

ISVARA PRANIDHANA (devotion to God)

This one can get a bit sticky because the G word is used. Patanjali never cited a particular god figure in the sutras. Rather, he encouraged that we dedicate our energy and devotion toward our personal gods—Jesus, Allah, Buddha, spirit, or maybe even ourselves. It's a way to focus our meditation and realize that we're all unified and in this together.

Asanas

Finally! Something that we all know and love. Patanjali stressed that you must have a grip on your restraints and disciplines before you take a shot at the rigors of the physical practice. A “perfect pose” in yoga is one that you can hold with ease and stillness. During difficult poses, there should be no grunting like you do when you bench press at the gym. Your mind should become so still that all you can focus on is your body in connection to your breath. Talk about strength! My take on balance is similar. Balance isn’t standing completely still—it’s making peace with the fluctuations of the body and choosing to remain, regardless of the speed bumps. This is the goal of the asanas.

Pranayama

“Prana” translates as “energy” or “life force,” while “ayama” means “restraint” or “control.” Proficient yogis do regular pranayama practice to clear the channels of their minds in preparation for meditation. The simplicity of taking a moment out of your hectic day to breathe thoughtfully for even 1 minute can make all the difference in the world.

Pratyahara

The fifth limb is a highly useful tool for the modern-day yogi. We live in a nonstop world full of cell phones, car pools, business meetings, and jetting around. Our senses are bombarded with advertisements, videos, and constant text messages. Practicing mind withdrawal pulls us away from the external stimuli so that we can return to our thoughts. The ability to draw yourself inward lets you be aware of your surroundings without being ruled by them.

Dharana

Concentrating intently is a prerequisite for meditation. Just like a dancer chooses a single spot to gaze at to avoid falling out of a complex spin, yogis send all of their thoughts to a point in their bodies or around them. This gets you ready for the real game changer: meditation.

Dhyana

Meditation has profound effects on your stress levels and on your ultimate ability to clear your mind of the chaos of daily life. Patanjali's hope was that consistent meditation would help a yogi experience a deep connection to the universal consciousness. Put it this way: It's hard to get too angry at someone once you realize that you're mad at him because you're seeing a piece of yourself in him. This is the key to awareness, and to our next step.

Samadhi

This final step brings together all of the hard work. This is the pinnacle state of balance that we all strive to achieve. At this point, nothing throws us off, our intentions are consistently strong and pure, and our hearts and souls are full and at one with everyone else. Sign me up.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

While yoga is mainly practiced with only a mat, there are additional props you may want to have on hand to experiment with and deepen your practice. These yoga props can be ordered online at sites like Gaiam.com, Manduka.com, and Yogitoes.com; you often can also find good deals at your local T.J.Maxx or Marshalls.

TWO YOGA BLOCKS

These come in foam, cork, or bamboo. They're often used to lie on, so test out the different textures to see what your body responds to. Whatever you buy, make sure they're sturdy so they can hold as much weight as you choose to place on them.

USES

- Supporting the bridge pose
- Supporting a headstand
- Opening the chest
- Aiding flexibility in standing poses

STRETCHY STRAP

A circle strap made out of stretchy, adjustable fabric to help hold poses but keep your muscles engaged.

USES

Supporting the shoulders in backbends, arm balances, and inversions.

BOLSTER

Having one of these is like having a huge, fluffy teddy bear around. The bolster is a great companion for restorative poses and acts as a "safety pillow" when working on transitional poses in which your head goes toward the floor.

USES

- Supporting the lower back
- Doing restorative poses
- Aiding confidence during moves

CLOTH STRAP

The traditional yoga strap is a long cloth strap with a buckle that allows it to form a small to large loop.

USES

- Lassoing the feet to help with forward folds or bending areas of limited flexibility
- Performing restorative poses
- Deepening shoulder rotation in backbends
- Supporting the shoulders in backbends, arm balances, and inversions

ONE OR TWO BLANKETS

Blankets are used similarly to bolsters, but give you more variety when it comes to width, height, and thickness.

USES

- Supporting the lower back
- Supporting a shoulder stand
- Doing abdominal work on a hardwood floor

•Performing a Savasana (typically the final pose in a sequence, where you lie flat on your back to relax and allow your body to recover)

MODERN YOGA: From Seated Poses to Stretchy Pants

“Hatha yoga” is the umbrella term for the style of yoga Westerners practice today. When it first appeared in the 9th or 10th century, hatha yoga was a form of meditation (“finding one’s comfortable seat”). “Ha” (the sun) and “tha” (the moon) is a union of two opposites. This common yogic theme suggests that practicing hatha yoga will help the practitioner unite the opposing forces of the body, mind, and soul. So, how did yogis get off their seats and start to kick asana?

In the 14th century, a Tantric sage named Swami Svamarama wrote the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the first text to describe asanas in any specific detail. It contains 16 postures addressing digestive purification, seated meditation, and energy arousal. In the late 1800s, those 16 poses evolved into 122, as set out in the first book devoted to asana, the *Sritattvanidhi*. In addition to illustrating variations on poses from the earlier hatha yoga texts, it also includes Indian wrestling exercises and gymnastics practices, many of which you may be familiar with, such as the chaturanga dandasana pushups, taught in most classes, that give you such amazing arm definition!

Vinyasa

If Patanjali was the Godfather of yoga, then Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was the hip daddy. Although he never stepped foot on American soil, Krishnamacharya is the yogi most credited with influencing the Western style of physical yoga. He saw the beauty in the physical practice and set up classes in a gymnasium in India in the 1930s. Back then, only men were invited, and they wanted the same lean physique we all crave today. K-man developed sequences that created a dynamic flow of athletic poses that we now refer to as “vinyasa yoga.” Three of his most revered students in Mysore, India, were Pattabhi Jois, who founded the ashtanga system of yoga; Indra Devi, the “First Lady of Yoga” in the United States; and B. K. S. Iyengar, who created an alignment-and prop-heavy style of yoga called “Iyengar yoga.”

The vinyasa flow (“flow” is the linking of various postures in a sequence) that we practice today is often described as linking movement with breath. It’s a dynamic practice that attracts the masses because it makes you sweat, lifts your heart rate, and gives you a good workout. Vinyasa has become so mainstream that you’ll find there are a plethora of options available, ranging from classes that focus on strong standing poses to sequences in which you spend most of your time on your hands or upside down. No matter how you look at it, you can expect a strong class focusing on breath and mind–body connection.

Ashtanga

Potentially one of the most rigorous yoga practices, ashtanga attracts athletes, people with strong personalities, and anyone who wants the discipline and burn ashtanga involves. Although its creator, Pattabhi Jois, passed away in 2009, his tradition continues to flourish. Ashtanga remains popular, but has an air of mystery and intimidation about it. You'll often see elite yogis practicing ashtanga because of the intense amount of dedication (and the deep postures) it requires. If you're new to ashtanga, try a led primary class—they're great intros to this amazing method without the intimidation factor.

Iyengar

Named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2004, B. K. S. Iyengar has made quite the splash. In the same way that Jois created a series for those in need of a vigorous workout, Iyengar created a system for the less flexible. He stressed alignment and the use of blocks to help achieve the postures. This education-intensive style has proven wildly successful and is used in teacher training across the world. Iyengar continues to teach in Pune, India.

If you've ever walked into a yoga room and been puzzled by all the odd contraptions and ropes hanging from the walls, you're probably in an Iyengar classroom. This prop-heavy style uses all sorts of creative methods and devices to help you find your best version of the pose. I highly recommend adding Iyengar to your repertoire—there is endless information to learn under the guidance of a senior Iyengar teacher.

There are many other popular styles beyond these great three: power yoga (created by Baron Baptiste and Bryan Kest), the popular heated Bikram yoga (created by Bikram Choudhury), anusara yoga (created by John Friend), kundalini yoga, and the list goes on. I teach primarily vinyasa flow, but I dabble in them all.

There is no right or wrong way to practice yoga—what makes you smile and feel good is what's right. If you try a pose or sequence you're not into, please, move on. I always tell my students that if you can't smile (or at least make a funny face), you're taking it way too seriously. The modern yogi is luckier than a kid at Baskin-Robbins: The flavors and combinations are endless, so dig in!

How Yoga Will Change Your Life

Advertisements constantly bombard us with “miracle” cures: “Eat nothing but cabbage to lose weight and feel great!” or “Take this miracle pill to shed stress and pounds.” At some point we've all fallen for these empty promises—and we all know they don't work in the long run. Yet people continue to search for quick fixes to lifelong struggles—whether it's losing weight, making more money, or finding true happiness.

Yoga is genius because it can make you feel better almost instantaneously, but it also dives to the root of the problem to help you exorcize the demons of the

past and move into a happy and contented present. Priceless!

Good for Your Mind

Yoga is the ultimate stress buster. It provides us with a safe place to journey to on a daily basis. The yoga mat is our own little island where we can lose cell reception, goals, and obligations and return to the simplicity of breathing, finding a connection, and being in our bodies instead of floating all around them. The breathing and meditation practice slows the pulse, eases the mind, and clears out space. Doing this daily prepares us to stay calm in even the craziest of circumstances.

We have two very distinct choices in life—love and fear. Our fear base starts when we are small children dreading the monsters that live beneath our beds and slowly evolves to affect relationships, job choices, and even coming to terms with who we are. Choosing fear is the opposite of choosing love, leaving us confused, lonely, and afraid. A study published in *BioPsychoSocial Medicine* in 2011 revealed that long-term yoga practice can significantly reduce fear, anger, and fatigue. Researchers administered the Profile of Mood States questionnaire to two groups of healthy women—one group whose members had more than 2 years of yoga experience and another group who had never practiced yoga. The long-term yoga practitioners had, on average, lower self-ratings for mental disturbance, tension-anxiety, anger-hostility, and fatigue than the control group.

When we practice yoga, we kick worry to the curb and take love, potential, and hope with us when we roll up our mats and leave a class. It's a daily reminder to set intentions for what we want instead of what we dread. Think of yoga as an open invitation to be exactly where and who you are—which is perfect. Once you lose the fear, you can soar—high.

TIP: Make a promise to yourself: When the yoga mat comes out, communication devices are turned off. Practice in a room with no phone or computer, or at least turn them off. (Putting your phone on vibrate does not count!) Dedicate this small portion of your day to yourself and no one else. Enjoy the minivacation from the grind.

GURUS

A sign at a yoga studio in Los Angeles proudly states in bold print, “No chanting, no granola, no gurus. YOU are your own guru.” These words are accompanied by a picture of a woman who looks like she'd bite your head off before she'd encourage you to breathe through a pose. The idea of a guru—a spiritual guide—has a touch of mystery surrounding it. “Guru” is a Sanskrit word that breaks into two parts: “gu,” meaning “dark,” and “ru,” or “light.” When the two parts unite you have balance and the key to dispelling the darkness, which is enlightenment. The Yoga Sutras were originally written for gurus to pass on to their disciples.

Today, gurus still exist, but are often referred to as “mentors” in the Western world.

My own guru was Maty Ezraty, cofounder of the prestigious YogaWorks group of studios. This tiny, 5-foot-tall superwoman blew me away with her strength and her love. She possessed the power to make me want to practice every day! Without her guidance, I can honestly say I wouldn't be teaching today. She saw potential in me when I didn't believe in myself, and she threw my yoga tush on the fire as soon as I was out of training. I found myself teaching immediately and loving every moment of it. I had both shining and mortifying moments, like any new teacher does, but I needed her guidance to get me headed in the right direction. I think of her daily when I need inspiration or simply to say thank you in my mind. We can all benefit from this type of relationship, whether it's on a yoga mat or in our work. Be open to guidance; it helps you drop your ego and allows you to soar along the learning curve.

Good for Your Body

“How did you get those arms? Do you lift weights?” Yogis hear this question all the time and smile knowingly as they respond, “Nope. Just yoga.” Yoga’s physical challenges are unique in that they require nothing but you—no weights, no machines, just the ability to lift and hold your own body weight. Along with making your physical body strong, it increases your flexibility and reshapes your attitude into one that makes you ready to win. A 2011 pilot study by the Mayo Clinic found that a comprehensive, yoga-based wellness program helped a group of employees lose weight, lower their blood pressure, increase their flexibility, decrease their body fat percentage, and improve their overall quality of life.

This kind of practice leads to a leaner, longer, more graceful body that shows strength without bulk. And in addition to a rockin’ body, yoga creates endurance and confidence both physically and mentally. Now that’s sexy!

Yoga not only makes you lean and foxy, but also increases your sexual desire! A 2010 study published in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that yoga improves women’s desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, and sexual satisfaction, and lessens sexual pain. So forget lingerie—shack up with your partner after sharing a yoga class! You’ll bond during the mutual experience and be ready to rock.

If the gym feels like a prison, then yoga is a playground. Yoga is composed of endless creative postures, which means that you never have to do the same practice twice. There is a variation for every pose, and just when you think you’ve mastered a pose, someone will show you a new transition that takes it to the next level. The possibilities for growth and entertainment are endless!

TIP: Once you have settled into regularly practicing yoga (three or four times a week), here’s the real test—throw out the scale! I want you to go a solid 2 weeks without looking at your weight and instead go by the way you look and feel. Worry less about the numbers. Yogis are pros at being in the present moment and unattached to results—and they’re some of the hottest, fittest people around! Use your practice as a way to feel better, instead of trying to scratch digits off your weight. Trust me: It will be the best breakup ever.

Good for Your Soul

Yoga starts out as a physical practice and if we're dedicated enough, it can become a way of life. This shift in perspective can be extremely spiritual—it reminds us that we are the captains of our own ships and that we possess all the tools we need to build the best versions of ourselves. Whatever you do, keep practicing. Some days it feels amazing and on others it feels like pulling hair, but the end result after practice is always the same—feeling happy, serene, and full of soul. As Jimmy Dean said, “I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.” Use yoga as a way to always find the silver lining—it's there! It might be hiding somewhere under your mat or stuck in your spandex, but deep breaths, solid postures, and a sense of commitment will always get you there.

TIP: The next time you find yourself confronted with a situation that makes you irritable, take a deep, cleansing breath and give yourself a minute to stop and assess. What's really going on? Are you truly listening to what's being said? Don't be so quick to react and judge. Find a sliver of positive in even the most frustrating situations. See the big picture instead of what's being shoved in your face. (And don't forget to breathe!)

WHAT'S YOUR INTENTION?

Use this section to monitor your yoga practice. Answer these questions before you begin practicing and continue to check in regularly to see how your answers evolve. Use these thoughts as guidelines for your progress, fitness, and growth.

1. I am practicing yoga because: _____
2. I am happiest when I think about: _____
3. My goal for the next month is: _____
4. My intention for the next year is: _____
5. My top two challenge poses are: _____
6. My most humbling experience on the mat was: _____
7. My fears in life are: _____
8. I love: _____
9. What makes me smile instantly is: _____
10. My favorite part of my own body is: _____
11. My top five unique gifts are: _____
12. My favorite yoga pose is: _____
13. My least favorite yoga pose is: _____

CHAPTER 2

All of Your Questions Answered

Everything you've wanted to know about yoga (and more!)

Say the word “yoga” to anyone and you're sure to get a reaction. I've heard everything from, “I can't even touch my toes,” to “I'm not into that granola-eating-chanting-hippie-with-armpit-hair stuff,” to “Wow, can I take you on a date?”

There are plenty of opinions and mysteries surrounding the ancient practice of yoga, and I'm here to demystify them all. Whether you're looking to mellow your mind, tone your physique, boost your energy, or just try something new—or all of the above!—you'll find the answers to all of your questions here.

Do I Have to Be Flexible?

Pop culture portrays yogis as Gumbys with Madonna's supertoned arms and hamstrings that never end. While eventually achieving these results isn't entirely far-fetched, you certainly don't need to have all of that to begin. Saying you're not flexible enough to do yoga is like saying you're too dirty to shower! Practicing yoga will increase your flexibility—in both your body and your mind. It takes patience, but by regularly doing a routine that caters to your target areas, even your tightest muscles will begin to relax. The key? Patience. Rome wasn't built in a day, and your hands won't fly past your knees to touch the ground in that amount of time, either. Start out slow, learn to breathe through discomfort, and you'll become limber and flexible faster than you can say "Gumby."

Will This Be a Good Workout?

Call me crazy, but I love it when a big, athletic guy walks into my advanced class wanting to give it a go. I politely suggest an intro class, and he inevitably grunts something along the lines of “Bring it, yoga chick.” No problem! Within 20 minutes he’s lying exhausted in a puddle of his own sweat, begging for Child’s Pose.

If you’re looking for an awesome aerobic workout, you’re in the right place. Vinyasa flow yoga is specifically designed to build heat and keep your heart rate up throughout the class with a series of demanding standing poses, twists, and inversions. I’ve burned up to 400 calories during a 90-minute class! People constantly ask me if I do anything besides yoga to stay in shape. I take long walks, hike, and dabble in Pilates to complement my yoga practice. But I certainly don’t need to spend any extra hours in the gym. You’ll kiss the gym good-bye once you catch the yoga bug. It burns calories and fat, lengthens and tones your muscles, and—most importantly—it’s mentally engaging, stress busting, and flat-out fun.

BANDHAS

Bandhas, or “locks,” are additional techniques for expanding your practice and deepening your mind–body connection. Their use certainly is not mandatory, but if you want an extra challenge, try adding these to your regular poses. I find it most useful to use the mula (base) lock when lifting your body. Try the uddiyana (center) lock when you’re in Downward Facing Dog, or while lying on your back to help tone your belly.

All of these locks take some time to master, so work on them separately. Don’t get frustrated if you can’t feel them at first, or hold them for long. Try practicing them when you’re not in poses—when you’re simply seated, lying on your back, or meditating. Once you have a deeper awareness of how to engage them, invite them into your regular practice slowly, one pose at a time.

MULA (BASE) BANDHA

This is the lowest lock in the body, located between your genitals and anus. The action of locking this bandha is similar to doing a Kegel contraction. For women, it should feel as though you’re holding it in while waiting for the bathroom. (Men, I’ve heard it described as being like walking into very cold water and having your, ahem, little buddies retract!) Engaging these muscles gives you extra energy and a sense of lightness and lift that you can use to float through your practice. (Not to mention a little extra spice in the sack!) Just be careful not to overengage: You should be able to squeeze these inner muscles without anyone noticing.

UDDIYANA (CENTER) BANDHA

This bandha lives in your belly. To perform it, exhale until you’ve emptied your core breath and then draw your navel toward your spine. It should feel like someone has taken a vacuum cleaner to your lower abdomen and is shifting the contents up into your rib cage for storage. This bandha is excellent for toning and cleansing your core, as well as for enhancing stability.

Engaging these muscles helps to build fire (which burns fat!) and ease built-up tension.

JALANDHARA (THROAT) BANDHA

The last and highest lock is the connection between your chin and chest. Lift your chest up as you drop your chin down to create this lock, which helps to prevent energy from escaping the upper body. This is most useful when you're working on pranayama (breath control).

Will I Have to Do Weird Chanting? What Is ‘Om’?

Chanting is traditionally part of a yoga practice, but by no means is it required or even included in many classes. Chants are often made up of “mantras,” which are words or groups of words meant to aid in meditation and transformation. Some teachers will sing or chant at the beginning or end of class, or both. “Om,” which means, “the sound of the universe,” is voiced as a way to join all of the practitioners together. Usually “om” is chanted three times—the teacher begins and the class members join in.

It may feel silly at first, but chanting “om” is a great way to tune out the chatter in your head and focus your energy on something simple. Of course, you can always opt to just sit quietly instead. Yoga is not about judgment or competition and should never make you feel uncomfortable. Whether you jive to the chanting or not, remember that it’s just a small part of yoga practice that you can adapt to fit your own needs. Keep an open mind. Sometimes you’ll want just a physical workout, and sometimes a little “om” goes a long way.

What Does ‘Namaste’ Mean? Why Do People Say It Holding Their Hands as If Praying?

“Namaste,” a commonly used salutation in India, roughly translates to “the divinity in me respects and bows to the divinity in you.” It takes the whole concept of, “I see you” from James Cameron’s blockbuster hit *Avatar* to an even deeper level. The joining of the hands in front of the heart is called “anjali mudra” and is meant to symbolize respect and union (the connection of the palms). This does not have anything to do with the hand position for prayer that you use in church. Rather, it is an Indian salutation that has survived for thousands of years. It does not disrespect religion by any means—it is a symbol of respect. Overall, it’s just a really beautiful way to greet or say good-bye to someone. On that note, namaste!

Is Yoga Religious?

Yoga is a spiritual practice, but that should not be confused with religious practice. It is designed to connect the body, breath, spirit, and mind. Yoga has no formal creed or services to attend. It exists to unify our minds and bodies. Yoga originated in India, so it is often associated with the Hindu religion. You may see representations of deities such as Shiva, Hanuman, and Ganesha in some yoga studios, but they're not there to be worshipped. They simply represent stories and lessons of the past and an energetic way of living. Ganesha, for example, is "the destroyer of obstacles." Some teachers will mention him when they're guiding students through challenging postures. Many studios will show no Indian influence at all.

Remember: Yoga is a practice, not worship. Whether you include a deeper spiritual aspect is up to you. The poses and sequences in this book have been designed to improve your shape, clear your mind, and give you the energy to be your best self ever!

Do You Need to Be Vegan or Vegetarian to Practice Yoga?

In a word, no. But this is a huge debate within the yoga community. One of the rules in yoga is ahimsa (nonviolence). This can be interpreted in many ways and is often cited as a reason to not eat meat. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, one of hatha yoga's oldest texts, states in a passage describing proper yoga practice: "Food injurious to a yogi: bitter, sour, saltish, hot, . . . intoxicating liquors, fish, meat, . . . etc., should not be eaten."

Let's put it this way: Your yoga practice is going to feel pretty heavy if you scarf down a T-bone steak right before you hit the mat. There are definitely health benefits to eating a primarily vegetarian diet and staying away from processed foods. However, if you're a meat lover, there's no reason your diet should come into conflict with your yoga practice. There are more ways than ever to eat consciously—locally sourced, organic meats from grass-fed, humanely raised animals are available in most grocery stores. I love my diet of fresh vegetables, quinoa, fruits, and fish, with the occasional meat dish. I recommend fueling your body with a diet that's as healthy and natural as possible, whether you eat meat or not.

How Often Do I Need to Practice to See Results?

Depending on your specific goals, there is a wide spectrum of answers to this one. My advice: Listen to your body. Yoga can be practiced safely every day. For total newbies who want to jump-start their practice, I recommend sessions of anywhere from 20 to 90 minutes long on 3 or 4 days a week. Stick to a routine in the beginning so you'll become disciplined, and focus on a small group of postures so you can measure your results. Your yoga practice will constantly evolve—the goal shouldn't be to “perfect” a posture and then move on. You'll feel a great sense of accomplishment from simply being able to reach closer to your toes than ever before, as well as on the day you do your first headstand!

It's important to look at your results in the grand scheme of things to keep from feeling disappointed. Everyone has bad days when they just can't concentrate or don't have as much energy as they'd like. Your progress will be evident over time, so don't worry about what happens day-to-day. Set goals and then, like in any other sport, practice! Choose two or three postures and make them a regular focus. This consistency will help you better understand your body's progress. To quote Pattabhi Jois, “Yoga is 99 percent practice, 1 percent theory. Practice, and all is coming.”

Will I Lose Weight?

Absolutely! A regular yoga practice combined with a healthy diet is guaranteed to transform your body. Whether you want to lose 5, 10, 15 pounds—or even more—yoga is a fabulous way to burn calories, tone muscles, and create a lean, sexy shape. The best fat-blasting yoga styles are vinyasa and power flow, because they build a great amount of heat by focusing on strong holds and challenging postures aimed at burning calories. Not only that, the combination of stretching and strength building also creates that long, lean physique that yogis are famous for.

Of course, you can do all the yoga you want and not see a difference if you're eating poorly. Chapter 4 has all the healthy eating tips you need to complement your work on the mat.

MANTRAS AND CHANTING

A mantra is a word or phrase that is repeated over and over again. The original meaning of the word is “the creative projection of the mind through sound.” “Man” symbolizes the mind, while “tra” means “wave” or “projection.”

Our bodies are full of energy, waves, and vibrations. Naad yoga (the yoga of sound) is based on how sound vibrations affect the body, mind, and spirit. There are 84 meridian points on just the roofs of our mouths alone, and as you chant, the movements of your tongue touch certain meridian points and cause changes in the chemistry of your brain that evoke a particular energetic state your desire—it lifts you up when you need energy and soothes when you need calm.

Santa Monica–based kundalini teacher Kia Miller explains: “All thoughts are carried along vibration frequencies, or waves. Certain thoughts have a particular kind of vibration, which defines how we feel and what we project onto others. Chanting mantras, either silently or out loud, is a way of consciously directing your mind, ultimately creating a sense of mental calm and peace. Ancient mantras are considered codes (think of a yogic Sherlock Holmes) that unlock and harmonize our energy. Different mantras evoke different energetic states, but ultimately all lead us to a deeper connection with ourselves. Mantras encourage a place where we transcend the chatter of the mind and tune in to our infinite power.”

Here are some simple mantras to try.

OM

I know you've heard this one, but it's an easy place to start. “Om” translates to “the sound of the universe.” It's a great way to ground yourself and connect to your surroundings.

SO HUM

This is another common mantra used in meditation. It translates to “I am” and “that is.”

SAT NAM

“Truth is my identity.”

ONG SO HUNG

“What I am to be, I already am.”

BRAHMARI

This is actually just a sound like a buzzing bee makes. You should feel your lips and mouth vibrate as you hum.

LOKA SAMASTA SUKHINO BHAVANTU

I know this one is a mouthful, but its message is beautiful. It roughly means “May all beings everywhere be happy and free and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that freedom for all.”

Should I Practice When I'm Menstruating?

I lovingly refer to menstruation as the “ladies’ holiday.” This often-uncomfortable time of the month is your body’s way of cleaning house, and it should be treated with respect. The first few days of a period can be intense physically. But movement can offer relief from menstrual cramps, and many gentle yoga postures such as [Legs Up the Wall](#) also can help.

There are differing opinions on whether you should invert—be upside down—during your period. Many people claim the bloodflow will “get stuck” if you are upside down or that there are physical contraindications to inverting. The menstrual cycle is a sacred part of being a woman, and when something is trying to come out, it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to flip around and make it flow upside down. I do recommend skipping inversions for the first few days and practicing short holds toward the end of menstruation. But nothing will “get stuck”, and if it feels good to kick your feet up, go for it!

As far as a full practice goes, it’s completely up to you based on how you feel. Let your body take its natural course and do a gentle practice if need be. Enjoy your holiday, relax, and have a piece of chocolate. You’ll be back to a full practice in just a day or two.

Will Yoga Practice Help Reduce Stress? How Do I Breathe?

If I could bottle the amount of stress relief that yoga provides, it would sell faster than the Missoni collection did at Target! Yoga is an amazing physical workout that has the huge added benefit of stress relief.

A large part of this relief comes from simply breathing. Pranayama (breath control) is used in all postures. “Ujjayi breath” is performed by inhaling and exhaling through the nostrils with the mouth softly closed. This method of breathing is what allows you to focus when your mind starts to race or a posture becomes challenging. The combination of focusing on both the breath and the posture is the secret to yoga’s amazing ability to eliminate stress. It’s what helps to clear the chatter in your head and transport you to a calm and centered state of mind. Whether you practice in a class or in your own home, yoga creates a refuge where you can escape from the chaos of everyday life. It’s a physical and mental activity that reconnects you with yourself, as opposed to concentrating on what everyone else demands of you. And even if you don’t have time for a full practice, taking just 5 minutes to stop and breathe can have a dramatic effect on the rest of your day. Your pulse slows, your mind softens, and you’re ready to move forward stress free.

TRY THIS: Find a quiet, comfortable space where you can tune out the day and be by yourself. Sit cross-legged comfortably with your spine lifted straight and tall. Close your eyes. Inhale slowly for a count of 4. Hold your breath for 4, and then slowly exhale for a count of 4. Repeat this sequence for 1 to 5 minutes. Open your eyes. You’ll be amazed by how relaxed you feel. All it takes is 5 minutes a day to make a big difference!

What Should I Eat before Practice?

Yoga is full of movement—deep twists, hops, transitions, and inversions. I recommend that you not eat or drink (much) for 2 hours before you practice so you can hit the mat on a relatively empty stomach. If you practice first thing in the morning and feel sick without any food, eat something light, like a protein bar or some almond butter on toast. Otherwise, stick to the 2-hour rule. Remember to drink plenty of water afterward and to wait for about an hour before you sit down for a full meal.

What Should I Wear?

Cute yoga pants have become weekend wardrobe staples, but they do make a difference on the mat. Most dynamic styles of yoga require fitted clothes, since there's lots of movement. You want something that will move with you and not get in your way. Look for tights or straight-leg yoga pants made with spandex. There are plenty of options for tops as well, many of them with built-in bras and support. A fitted T-shirt works well, too, if you're not comfortable with baring much skin. Definitely avoid baggy shirts! They'll fall over your face in poses like Downward Facing Dog and inversions.

For more restorative (or “yin”) practice, you can opt for soft, nonconstricting clothes that don't need to be quite as fitted.

GREAT BRANDS TO CHECK OUT:

Lululemon: This Canadian company has taken the States by storm with its flattering bottoms and whimsical colors. Somehow, its yoga pants make everyone's behind look amazing.

Hard Tail Forever: This California company's line is carried by department stores and comes in every color and pattern imaginable.

Beyond Yoga: This company offers a more sophisticated line that concentrates on elegant shapes and fantastic fabrics.

Gap, Old Navy, and Target also offer yoga gear that's affordable and super comfy.

Once you have your outfit, you'll need to get a yoga mat, blocks, and a strap. (See “[More Yoga Resources](#)” for great Web sites that carry these, as well as “[What You'll Need](#)”.)

TIP: The one thing you should never have with you during your practice: your phone. A ringing, vibrating, beeping, or blinking phone or laptop pulls you out of your focus and makes it impossible to practice fully. You will survive without your phone! I promise. Take the time to disconnect from your agenda—whether it's for 15 minutes or even a full hour—and you will reap the benefits of reconnecting with yourself.

AIM TRUE

“Aim true” is my motto. For me, it means that I start each and every day

with a clear intention to be true to who I am, who I want to continue to be, and what makes my heart beat strong! I love the expression “aim true” because it’s extremely personal and translates into something different for each person who uses it. Take a look through the principles I’ve outlined here, and think about how you can use them in your practice and your life. When we aim true, we will always hit our mark—and yoga helps us do just that.



ASANA

Nothing says ahhhh like a beautifully executed yoga posture, also known as an asana (Sanskrit for “posture”). There is beauty in the postures themselves, not to mention the attractive physique that comes from a dedicated practice! Asanas also offer mental clarity and stress relief. No matter how cranky, tired, or sore you feel, I guarantee you’ll be refreshed and renewed after a yoga session. Connecting your breath with the poses is like an instant hit of relaxation, and the sequence of postures strengthens and detoxes your body. Asanas pack a double whammy of physical and mental power.



INTENTION

Professional and elite athletes often refer to “the zone.” It’s a state of mind in which their focus and their intentions are completely present in that moment. Whether they’re about to throw the perfect fastball or stride across the finish line in record time, athletes use the zone to hone and sharpen their training. In yoga, the zone is simply “intention.” At the beginning of every practice, take a moment to set your intention, whether it’s a specific goal (“I want to shake off the fight I just had with my boyfriend”) or a more universal ideal (“I want to cultivate a stronger body and attitude”). The cool thing about yoga is that it reminds us to set an intention every time we unroll our mats. An intention sharpens our ability to be mindful and aware. Talk about multitasking: Yoga helps you shape your body, relieve stress, and become a more compassionate person.

TRY THIS: Write down your intention every morning for an entire week. Make note of when you waiver from your intention throughout the day and do your best to keep it pumping strong regardless of the scenario. Remember how it felt to connect with your intention during your practice. Know that no matter how tough times get, you still have that in you somewhere and can tap into that reserve whenever you need it.



MANIFESTATION

“I’m in charge of my own happiness, so you’re off the hook.” This is one of my favorite quotes from Abraham Hicks, and it makes me smile every time I see it. By nature, we often believe that happiness will come from something external—a higher-paying job, a wedding ring, or that dream car. We spend so much energy focusing on what we lack that we forget all the powerful stuff we already possess! Yoga reminds us about how much powerful potential we have within ourselves. We just need to remember it’s there and learn how to use it.

Maybe you’ve never done an arm balance or balanced upside down on your head. In fact, maybe you’ve never tried Downward Dog. But you’re here! You’ve opened this book and you kept reading it. See yourself doing the pose. Once you can see yourself doing it, imagine what it feels like. Start to practice the pose in your mind and then invite it into your reality. It might sound like a joke, but manifesting is powerful stuff. (Anyone who’s ever read Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* will know exactly what I’m talking about!) Slowly, your body begins to change. Now you’re practicing a half headstand without breaking a sweat. Next thing you know, you’re balancing against a wall and then effortlessly floating into a headstand in the middle of the room. I’m serious! This is manifestation. Claim what you want, and you’ll have it.

TRY THIS: Keep a yoga journal. Pick two or three “challenge poses” that inspire and maybe even scare you. Figure out what makes you fearful (e.g., “I’m worried about hurting my shoulder” or “I’m afraid of falling”) and write that down. Record what works, what doesn’t, and take a look back at your progress once you nail the pose. Remember that mistakes can teach us so much, and a good sense of humor goes a long way! Enjoy the journey. (Note: If you do have an injury, speak to your doctor or physical therapist about whether you should do certain poses, or if they should be modified to suit your needs.)



THANKFULNESS

Gratitude is woven throughout yoga. Teachers consistently remind their students to be thankful—for being able to come to practice and to twist and turn their bodies. Yoga nurtures flexibility along with strength, allowing us to do simple things like touching our toes or opening our chests into a backbend—things that many people cannot do. These movements feel good physically, but they also make us feel good about our physical abilities.

This practice of gratitude makes us truly understand how to respect others, too. It can start simply: Look flight attendants in the eye and thank them genuinely for their help. It might just make their day after dealing with a bunch of grumpy passengers! Tell your significant other how attractive he or she is. Call up your mom and say, “Thanks, Mom. You rock and I really love you.” Of course, the world will immediately want in on the secret to your happiness—so share what you’ve learned! Use yoga to build your own gratitude and encourage others to do the same.



RELAXATION

Our world is constantly surging forward and sometimes it feels like our heads are spinning. Our overworked minds and bodies can only handle so much before breaking down or collapsing entirely. Whether you take a few minutes to focus on your breath or perform an entire restorative sequence, yoga can help you truly chill out. [Ujjayi breathing](#), or victorious breath, acts like a steamer for our brains, ironing out excessive wrinkles and bumps that keep us from seeing clearly. Restorative postures are also used to release your hips, lower back, hamstrings, and chest, and to put you completely at ease. Your body will be so calm that your mind will want to join the party! Remember, start by stopping. Take a breath. Let go.

TRY THIS: Pile two pillows or place a bolster next to a wall right before bedtime. Practice the [Legs Up the Wall pose](#) for 5 to 10 minutes. Cover your eyes with a towel or eye pillow. Take long, slow breaths and use only the sound of it to drown out any thoughts. When you're done, keep your mind quiet (avoid using the computer or other electronics and interacting with others) and crawl straight into bed for a sound sleep.



UNITY

The actual translation of “yoga” is “yoke,” which is exactly what it does: Yoga unifies the body, mind, and spirit. There are few physical activities that can boast such a résumé. Yoga seamlessly weaves this powerful trio together to give us the ultimate gift—contentment. Contentment (or “santosa” in Sanskrit) is the ability to achieve flow on our yoga mats and in the rest of our lives. Standing on one foot isn't difficult when you know it's okay to lower the raised one and try again. Similarly, that hurtful co-worker won't leave a scratch if you know you've done your best. When we unify our bodies, minds, and spirits with yoga, grace and confidence follow, and doors open up all around us.



ENJOYMENT

I'm just going to let the cat out of the bag: Yoga is supposed to be fun! Yoga has been portrayed for years as a dedicated and quiet discipline that should be practiced in isolation and seriousness. I'm here to tell you the complete opposite. A regular yoga practice will make starting each day with a dance party on your bed seem totally normal. Why not?

I was that yogi in the ashtanga room who always got scolded for talking too much or laughing. The funny thing is, I never changed. I kept laughing when I felt compelled to stop (which was quite

often, because I was falling all over myself). I'm so grateful that I never gave up that energy and passion, because it turned me into the teacher I am today—one who's loving, compassionate, and funny. I've learned how to make the practice accessible through humor and have reached many students through my teaching. I always remind my students when they're doing poses: If you can't smile or at least make a funny face, you're taking it way too seriously. There are enough obstacles in life that will make you pause and grimace; yoga doesn't have to be one of them! Use yoga as a tool to find the silver lining in everything and laughter and beauty in everything you do. Embrace and enjoy your life!

CHAPTER 3

From Om to Tone

How yoga gets you fit

You're so strong. What else do you do besides yoga?"

If only I had a dollar for every time I've heard that! There is a general conception that yoga will make you flexible, limber, and lean, but it can't possibly help you maintain your overall fitness as well as other types of workouts do. I'm here to prove otherwise! Let's start by taking a look at what "fitness" means.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "fit" as "sound physically and mentally." Sounds like the results of yoga to me! The American College of Sports Medicine identifies three different types of fitness that are key to maintaining good health: cardiovascular, muscle strength and tone, and flexibility.

Cardiovascular

This is the style of fitness that most people think of first, and it's what you get from doing heart-pumping, heavy-breathing, fast-moving actions. Cardiovascular exercise works your heart, lungs, and blood vessels, increasing stamina and decreasing your risk for heart disease and maybe some types of cancer.

Whether you can achieve a great cardio session with yoga depends on the type of yoga practiced. Vinyasa and power yoga create constant movement that fires up your body, gets the sweat pouring, and delivers a heart-thumping good time! The “flow” element and the challenging long holds in standing, balancing, and twisting postures that are common to these styles of yoga increase your heart rate.

Another huge element of cardiovascular health is how well you can breathe. Moving without fatigue depends on maximal oxygen uptake—in other words, how well oxygen enters your lungs. The fitter you are, the better you transport oxygen. The entire yoga practice—no matter what style you practice—revolves around connecting movement with breath. Ujjayi breath (see “[Victorious Breath](#)”) involves inhaling and exhaling through the nostrils with the mouth softly closed. The goal is to keep the breath fluid and calm—whether it's during seated meditation or 10 sun salutations into your session. The more you practice yoga, the better your breath control becomes, which ultimately improves your cardiovascular health.

Prominent yoga teacher John Schumacher performed a study at the age of 52 to prove that yoga does indeed make you fit. Schumacher underwent physiological testing at a lab in Gaithersburg, Maryland, while he performed a variety of fitness tests that measured heart and exercise recovery rates. His doctor told him he had less than a 1 percent chance of suffering a cardiac event. This from a man whose only form of physical activity was yoga and breathwork!

POSES TO TRY:

[Sun Salutation](#)

[Warrior II](#)

[Warrior III](#)

[Handstand](#)

[Boat](#)

[Revolved Chair](#)

Muscular Strength and Tone

This refers to the actual strength and endurance of your muscles. Doctors agree that as we age, we lose muscle mass as well as bone density. It's part of life, but yoga is a great counteractive tool. It not only helps to build muscular strength with the repetition of postures, but it is also a load-bearing exercise that increases bone density. Plus, every pound of muscle you have burns between 25 and 50 calories a day without you even unrolling your mat, so don't be afraid to eat your spinach and practice your chaturangas!

One major appeal of yoga is that you don't need dumbbells, gym machines, or any other fancy equipment to achieve awesome muscle tone—you just need a nonskid surface. Practicing yoga is like driving a car with a manual transmission—you understand and control your vehicle better. You don't need a machine to make the shifting decisions for you because yoga teaches you how to align your body and mind. Now that's strong.

POSES TO TRY:

[Pushup](#)

[Plank](#)

[Chair](#)

[Goddess](#)

[Handstand](#)

Flexibility

It wouldn't take a lawyer to prove that yoga makes you limber. Yoga clearly improves flexibility in our bodies as well as in our perspectives. In a British study from researchers at the University of York, people—primarily middle-age women—reported that they had improved back function and flexibility after doing 12 weeks of yoga, compared with those receiving regular care from the British National Health Service. As we age, our bodies grow tighter and shorter. This lessening of mobility is one of the major causes of chronic pain and injury. Lower-back pain is often caused by tight hip flexors or hamstring muscles putting tension on the lower back. The rounded, heavy shoulders resulting from poor posture fatigue the neck muscles and tighten the jaw. (Anyone who works long hours at a desk will know exactly what I'm talking about!) A regular yoga practice strengthens and elongates the muscles, allowing for a balanced existence.

Yoga is the ultimate fitness routine because it builds cardio strength with flow; develops muscular tone with long, strong holds; and creates flexibility with almost every pose. It's also completely customizable: You can dive into power and vinyasa classes to kick-start your heart rate and sweat like you're in a sauna. Or look to Iyengar yoga for intense holds. Try a yin practice, which focuses on opening and releasing tension with long holds in restorative postures. There's something for everyone at every level.

Will yoga make you fit? You bet. And that's not all.

VICTORIOUS BREATH

Ujjayi breath: Start by stopping. Slow down your breath. Begin to transfer from regular breathing to breathing in and out through your nostrils with your lips softly closed. You'll feel a slight rush like a wave at the back of your throat, but don't do anything that feels forced. The breath should be even, relaxed, and smooth.

Yoga and Weight Loss

Anyone who's lost weight on a diet only to regain it knows that the world of weight loss is almost as frustrating as watching edited reruns of *Sex and the City*.

Why is it so tough to get rid of that stubborn muffin top, or even those last 5 pounds? Before you ask the blanket question, "Why can't I lose weight?"

consider what else is happening in your life. Are you stressed out from work? Too busy to get to the gym? Constantly reaching for comfort foods instead of healthy options (and then feeling guilty about it)? We've all been there. But you don't have to ride this diet roller coaster forever. Once again, yoga comes to the rescue!

A 2005 study done by the National Cancer Institute looked at two groups of 15,500 healthy middle-age men and women. Over the same period of time, those who practiced yoga lost about 5 pounds, while those who didn't practice gained 14 pounds.

A regular yoga practice can help you evaluate the source of the imbalance that might be at the root of your weight problem. As you get more comfortable with aligning your mind and body, you'll feel calm and centered—and you'll find it easier than ever to make positive, healthy choices and to shed any extra pounds for good. In addition to a new mind-set, yoga also offers a host of physical benefits that help you lose weight: It relaxes muscles that are tight from inactivity, tension, and stress. It builds muscle strength, increases your range of motion, and can be a great cardio workout, as well.

All styles of yoga lengthen, tone, and strengthen your muscles, but you gotta burn calories in order to lose weight! A vinyasa-style practice—in which movement and breath are linked in the postures—builds a lot of heat, which burns a lot of calories. Ashtanga and power yoga deliver similar results, but take care, because these styles are intense and may prove too daunting for a beginner, possibly ruining your yoga experience altogether.

No matter whether you're a beginner or a more advanced practitioner, start slow. Make sure you understand the postures before you throw yourself into a whirlwind of movements and unfamiliar stances. This approach follows the principle of ahimsa—nonviolence to the body. The best way to lose weight and get in shape is by making sensible and loving choices for your body, step by step. Think of it this way: If you threw yourself cannonball-style into a swimming pool without learning to swim first, you'd quickly realize that wearing those dorky floats was a good idea after all! Swallow your pride and remember that anything worth having takes time.

The Stress Factor

One of the biggest factors in weight gain is, plain and simple, stress. The basic science is that stress releases cortisol, a hormone secreted by the adrenal glands. When your stress level is normal, cortisol aids in glucose metabolism; regulates blood pressure; and maintains blood sugar, immune function, and the inflammatory response, which is the “fight-or-flight” response to a perceived threat. However, when your body chronically experiences a high level of stress, cortisol secretion kicks into high gear and suppresses thyroid function, decreases bone density and muscle mass over time, and lowers immunity. Worst of all, it increases abdominal fat. Yup, you heard me—stress creates belly fat.

Cortisol stimulates fat and carbohydrate metabolism, which increases your appetite. Chronic stress can lead to chronically elevated cortisol levels, leaving you with a bigger appetite and the need to work out harder to burn off what you ate. Researchers have also shown that cortisol tends to deposit more fat in the abdominal area than anywhere else. Studies of women with excess fat in their abdomens showed that they had higher cortisol levels and more stressful lifestyles than women whose fat was stored in their hips.

Now, before you get stressed-out about being stressed-out, stop and breathe! Take a minute to ask yourself: Where is this stress coming from, and how is it affecting my behavior? A stressful lifestyle can lead to many unhealthy habits, not the least of which are binge eating, smoking, drinking, and grabbing junk food instead of a healthy meal. These are all crutches that you can and should replace with the best support system of all—yoga!

Yoga should be called the bad-habit buster. Many unhealthy habits nurtured by stress find the nearest exit after even just a few weeks of practicing. According to a 2011 study, British university workers reported an improvement in well-being and resilience to stress after participating in six hour-long yoga classes over the course of 6 weeks. The participants in the yoga group also scored higher on clear-mindedness, energy, and confidence than those who did not practice yoga. The calming, meditative effects of yoga help you relax, focus, and control your stress. So take a deep breath, unroll your mat (even just for 15 minutes), and get ready to let stress go and invite health in.

REAL-LIFE WEIGHT LOSS WITH YOGA

I'm just over 5 feet tall and weighed about 115 pounds when I became pregnant. The first trimester was a bit of a nightmare because I had hyperemesis, which is chronic morning sickness, 24/7, for 3 months. To avoid becoming extremely ill I had to eat every 2 hours, and I

was unable to do much because I was so nauseated. I spent the majority of the time lying down.

The rest of the pregnancy was wonderful—except that I consistently gained 7 to 10 pounds between doctor's appointments. At full-term, I weighed 174 pounds! I secretly hoped I would have a 50-pound baby. Every extra pound felt heavy and sluggish on my body and my mind.

On March 13, 2010, I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl. I had taken some yoga classes in the past, and the deep breathing helped me immensely during delivery. At my postnatal checkup with my midwife, I weighed in at 154 pounds. That was rough. I tried to stay positive, and everyone told me that with breastfeeding, I would lose the weight. Well, I didn't! Over the next 9 months I lost only 4 pounds.

I was sick of being so negative toward myself. I made a New Year's resolution to start eating differently and to do yoga.

I began practicing three or four times a week with videos and a class, and slowly but surely I started losing weight. I loved that I could practice in my own home. After we celebrated my daughter's first birthday, I noticed a big difference in my weight when I saw the pictures from her party. I looked great, but more importantly, I felt great. Not only were the inches gone, but also my aches and pains from carrying the extra weight on my petite frame had disappeared. To date, I have lost almost 40 pounds! Yoga changed my life, my body, and my self-esteem. Mostly, it has allowed me to become the energetic mom that I'm supposed to be. I'm so proud that I feel like someone my daughter can look up to.

—*Laura Helms, 28, of Portland, Oregon*

CHAPTER 4

The Art of Mindful Eating

Let yoga play a starring role in nourishing yourself

I used to practice yoga in one of the most prestigious classes in Los Angeles, surrounded by cream-of-the-crop yogis. These men and women were of all shapes and sizes, but had two traits in common—they were beautiful and they moved with the grace of Baryshnikov. Their lean muscles cut through the air flawlessly. I was in awe. I recall a practitioner telling me that my fresh-out-of-college body would change before my very eyes—and a mere 6 months later it had! I dropped 2 inches off my waist, I could see muscles I never knew I possessed, and my endurance grew by the minute.

While these physical changes were no doubt welcome results of all my yoga practice, they were also due to a shift in my diet. I was still enjoying my favorite foods from college: pasta, mac 'n' cheese, veggies with cream cheese, Mexican takeout, and so on. But as my practice had deepened, I had noticed changes in my cravings. Suddenly, I wanted fresh fruits, dark greens, smoothies, and lighter fare. And I noticed how awful my practice could be after a crazy, indulgent night out at a restaurant or downing a pint of Ben & Jerry's.

As I continued to practice yoga, I started to listen to what my body was really saying: I learned to distinguish “I'm hungry” from “I'm dehydrated” and to pay attention when I felt I was lacking a certain nutrient. I also started to gauge how full I was truly feeling, instead of looking at a menu with big saucer eyes and gobbling up whatever was put in front of me.

In a study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, a group of mostly female participants were given a mindful eating questionnaire (MEQ). Researchers found that yoga was associated with a higher MEQ score, whereas walking and moderate or intense physical activity were not. The ultimate goal is to find an active routine that fits your body and schedule and complement it with a thoughtful and nutritious diet. Yoga has the special ability to blend the best of both worlds. In Chapter 3 we discussed how yoga keeps you fit with physical postures. Yoga also reduces your stress level, allowing you to make more balanced and intelligent choices when it comes to your plate. Let's take a look at how yoga can curb your appetite and reprogram your taste buds

into making smart choices.

To Eat or Not to Eat—Before a Yoga Class

The most common advice is to not eat or drink anything for 2 hours before you practice. It's similar to the advice about not eating before swimming: You don't want to cramp up at the bottom of the pool, or your mat. A full stomach can be uncomfortable enough on its own, but add in deep twists, inversions, and backbends, and you've got some serious indigestion on your hands! Trust me, you don't want to be that person in class who's holding back gas or making gurgling sounds that make your neighbors nervous. Big meals slow you down. They decrease your energy level and stamina for constant (and deep) movement.

If you find yourself light-headed from hunger before yoga or you like to practice first thing in the morning, stick to light snacks: fruits, almond butter, tea, or even a small container of yogurt. Save the full meal for after class, but don't dive right in: Eating a large amount of food immediately after practice often causes nausea. Allow your body to cool down first. Drink plenty of water, take a shower, then sit down for a nice meal. Your body will thank you.

The same 2-hour rule also goes for liquids. If your belly is full of liquid you'll feel a whole lot of sloshing going on, and frequent trips to the restroom will disrupt the flow of your practice (or worse, all your classmates' flow, too). I don't recommend drinking water during your practice, either. This might come as a blow if you're used to lugging your water bottle everywhere, but there is a reason for this advice. One of the main objectives of yoga is to build heat in the body. This heat, or discipline, helps you burn through mental distractions *and* calories. Water puts out the fire, so instead of reaching for the bottle, let the heat rise! More sweating means more detoxing is taking place, which leads to my next subject.

Alcohol and Yoga

All work and no play makes us dull yogis, and there's nothing wrong with having a fun night out on the town. Just know that you will smell like that margarita the next day as you sweat out all the toxins. The first 20 minutes of yoga when you have a hangover may feel like the worst minutes of your life, but be strong! Once you get past the pain, the sweat will come, the twists will wring you out, and you'll be clear and clean by the end. Check out my [yoga for hangovers sequence](#) for a foolproof way to feel more like yourself on a Sunday morning.

In addition to helping you detox from a great party, yoga can also encourage you to cut back to a healthy level of alcohol consumption. Once you maintain a regular practice, you'll find yourself wanting to show up to practice in the best form possible. Staying up late and drinking excessively won't seem as alluring because they will interfere with your ability to hold the more challenging poses. Think of these yoga postures as loving chaperones, guiding us in the right direction.

The Carnivore's Dilemma

Hardcore yogis tend to be vegans or vegetarians because they practice the rule of ahimsa, which means “nonviolence.” The interpretation is broad, but many people view it as a reason not to kill or consume animals and/or their by-products. I’m a strong believer that we should eat what makes our bodies feel best, but there is a yogic spin to everything, and eating is no exception. If you’ve never explored a vegetarian diet and are curious, there’s no better time than the present. Yoga’s emphasis on movement may lessen your desire for heavy foods like red meat. (Conversely, it could make you crave it even more!) Join in the “Meatless Mondays” craze as a way to cut back, and see how your body responds. There are tons of recipes and ideas available at Womenshealthmag.com for you to try!

At the end of the day, do what makes your body run best, but make good decisions. It’s all about being conscious. Whether you’re chowing down on a big salad or a thick steak, know where your food comes from and how it affects your body and the greater world around you.

Conscious Eating

Eating is one of those activities that the brain easily shuts down for. The rules are simple: Open mouth, insert food. Chew. Swallow. Repeat. While many of us eat mindlessly as an emotional fix, we can also fall into a “food coma” regarding the food itself, where it comes from, and what’s in it. But avoiding this is especially important when it comes to consuming meat. The majority of American meat comes from large factories, not small farms. These factories often keep their animals in unnatural conditions, where they are confined in close quarters and fed fillers and fatteners such as corn—along with the antibiotics, vitamin supplements, and growth hormones needed to make them healthy in such conditions. Buying from these meat sources supports this system.

Concentrating a large number of animals in a relatively small space is also environmentally unsound. Animal agriculture produces a great deal of air and water pollution and causes 80 percent of the world’s deforestation annually, as forests and jungles are razed to establish new feedlots. Producing, transporting, processing, and marketing foods from factory farms rely heavily on fossil fuels, which are rapidly being depleted and which contribute to climate change. In a nutshell, mainstream animal agriculture is definitely not the way to go. So what can you do? Let’s look at three easy ways to buy meat in an eco-friendly manner.

GO ORGANIC

Buy meats from animals that were raised free of antibiotics, added hormones, GMOs, and other drugs.

Organically raised animals are not given any drugs for reasons other than illness, and they’re not fed genetically modified feed, nor can their own genes be modified. They are raised in much healthier environments and are fed organic food rather than something from a laboratory test tube. Check the packaging to make sure it says USDA organic.

SUPPORT MORE HUMANE, ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

Factory farming is not a pretty sight. Animals are treated solely as products and live their entire lives confined to small cages or overcrowded pens. Look for products labeled “free range,” “cage free,” and “grass fed.” They may cost a few more dollars at the grocery store, but that money goes toward both a cruelty-free way of eating and your overall health.

BUY LOCAL

You’ll lighten your carbon footprint by purchasing meats from a local farm. The closer the farm, the less distance the products need to travel, which ultimately

means less fossil fuel consumption. Small farms and family farms also tend to have cows, chickens, and other livestock that serve multiple purposes, not just providing food. When you purchase local products at your grocery store or farmer's market, you'll know that the money is going back into a community business, not a multinational food conglomerate. So choose local, organic animal products whenever you can. It's better for your health, your local community, and the larger community as a whole.

A Fresh Start

Whether you're meat loving, veggie, or vegan, there's more information than ever available to help you make wise decisions about what to eat. *Women's Health*, Womenshealthmag.com, and my blog on mindbodygreen.com are great resources for recipes, healthy tips, and more. Once you're ready to practice mindful eating along with your yoga routines, it's wise to clear out the old to make room for the new. It's time to cleanse, and I'm not talking about your closet! A full-body cleanse is the perfect way to clean out toxins and break bad habits. Yogis often cleanse several times a year. They do this to reboot their systems (many of them do it when the seasons change, a natural time for renewal), fight off sickness, lose stubborn weight, and get back to their bodies' natural rhythms and eating patterns.

There's a plethora of cleanses out there, so how do you know which one is right for you? One of the more popular options is the Master Cleanse (often referred to as the Maple Syrup Diet). This is a liquid cleanse using purified water, maple syrup, lemon juice, and cayenne pepper. The day begins with a salt flush, continues with drinking the maple syrup concoction or water, and ends with drinking laxative tea at the end of the day. Still with me? People go on this cleanse for anywhere from 2 to 14 days, but 1 or 2 days should be enough to get you completely detoxed. I do not recommend this cleanse if you're an extremely active person, but it might be helpful if you are in dire need of rebooting your body and have the time and patience to safely let it take its course.

Juice cleansing is also hugely popular, and it's super easy to do! Just say buh-bye to solid foods and whip out the juicer or blender. Any and all fruits, veggies, and herbs can be juiced in a multitude of combinations for this cleanse. Juicing fulfills most of the body's nutrient requirements, which makes it a bit easier to keep up your energy level as you cleanse. Juicing is recommended for 3 to 10 days. It's best to ramp up before starting the cleanse by upping your consumption of raw veggies and fresh fruits, and then wean yourself off by gradually reintroducing other foods. You can also drink a laxative tea or fiber beverage (psyllium husk works well) at night to supply the fiber that's missing from your diet. This enzyme-and antioxidant-heavy cleanse helps to heal and detoxify the body safely.

Be careful of sugar content when juicing. Many beginners will go for sweet juices, believing they are healthy, and go overboard on sugar and calories.

Missing solid food already? I completely understand. I'm a huge fan of cleansing, but not of the lack of sustenance, so I partnered with Dr. Debbie Kim

of Los Angeles, a holistic nutritionist, to create a minicleanse that will reboot your system, kick bad eating habits to the curb, and help you reassess the way you look at food. Our plan is designed to not only clear your system, but also to rewire your thinking when it comes to choosing foods. A liquid cleanse works wonders, but it may leave you confused about what to eat when you return to solid food. This purification program includes both smoothies and delicious, clean foods that will leave you feeling refreshed and centered.

Start with the 3-day cleanse, and if you're still going strong, continue for 10 days. The ultimate goal is to cleanse for 21 days, because that is the amount of time needed to form a new habit (or break an old one). We've provided recipes for 3 days and guidelines to follow if you feel inspired to carry on.

The recipes in this cleanse are an introduction to learning to cook with basic and healthy whole foods, while eliminating overly processed and sugary foods. You can use the cleanse for any number of reasons: a weight loss jump-start, healthy digestion, boosting energy, balancing blood sugars, managing blood pressure and/or cholesterol levels, balancing mental/emotional health, and skin problems. Most of all, along with your newfound yoga practice, you'll build good habits and learn how to eat healthy for life.

DR. KIM AND KATHRYN'S 3-DAY CLEANSE

There are no processed foods permitted during this cleanse. That means nothing from a box, jar, or can. The goal is to eat only fresh (and organic, if possible) foods. Feel free to be creative. Pair your salads with soups or entrées and play around—just keep it fresh! You can make two smoothies a day to serve as breakfast and/or a snack. Explore your smoothie-making power. All smoothies include a set base of ingredients (including leafy greens, flaxseed oil, and protein powder), but beyond that, it's up to you to experiment and enjoy!

DAY ONE

Breakfast

[Smoothie](#)

Snack

[So-Cool Cucumber Salad](#)

Lunch

[Asparagus Soup](#) and [Spinach Salad](#)

Snack

1 cup Veggies and Dip

(choose one of the [dressings from the salad section](#)) Dinner

[Greens, Eggs and No Ham](#)

Nightcap

1 cup mixed berries

DAY TWO

Breakfast

[Smoothie](#)

Snack

[Steamed Artichoke with Lemon Dip](#)

Lunch

[Raw Tomato Basil Soup](#) and 1 cup [Arugula Salad](#)

Snack

Hard-or soft-boiled egg

Dinner

[Simply Delicious Salmon](#) and Quinoa Nightcap
[Smoothie](#)

DAY THREE

Breakfast
[Smoothie](#)

Snack
1 cup Veggies and Dip
(choose one of the [dressings from the salad section](#)) Lunch
[Sweet Potato Soup](#) and [Kale Salad](#)

Snack
[Smoothie](#)

Dinner
[Crunch Salad](#) and [Dr. Kim's Green Soup](#)

Nightcap
1 cup mixed berries

Does This Pose Make Me Look Fat?

I arrived in Los Angeles at the ripe age of 21 wanting to pursue my dreams of acting, while teaching yoga on the side. I remember my first meeting with a manager like it was yesterday. She took one look at my 5-foot 2-inches, 108-pound frame and told me that I could be the funny best friend. If I ever wanted to play the star, I'd have to drop at least 10 pounds. Thankfully, my yoga practice came through and reminded me that life (and beauty) is about balance, not extremes.

A 2009 study published in *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* showed that practicing yoga can help women overcome binge eating. Researchers compared two groups of women with binge eating disorder and found that the group randomly assigned to a 12-week yoga program significantly reduced their bingeing behavior.

My best friend, Ashley Swider Cebulka, knows this firsthand. She struggled with a severe eating disorder from the age of 11, when she was bullied at school. For years she spiraled downward until she was hospitalized, weighing only 75 pounds. She was hospitalized two more times before she found yoga at age 20. At first, she thought yoga would be a new method of perfecting her body. But as she continued to practice, her attitude shifted. She says, "Yoga helped me realize that there is no perfect body I need to achieve to be accepted. I am already accepted and loved exactly as I am. Most importantly—loved by myself."

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. Anorexia claims the highest mortality rate for females age 15 to 24—twelve times higher than any other cause of death. Use your yoga practice in combination with any comprehensive treatment to fight this disease and remember how to love yourself. Embrace your soul in addition to your body—you're the same person inside no matter what you weigh, so connect with who you really are and celebrate your strength and beauty!

Try these mantras when you're feeling less than confident:

- My body is perfect.
- I am the same amazing person whether I've put on 10 pounds or lost them.
- I will own my power and shape and use it to inspire confidence.
- Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, and I think I rock.

Recipes

Building new dietary habits is the foundation of true and lasting health. It can be difficult to decide what to focus on—carbs, calories, fat content, cholesterol. With these simple recipes, you can learn to incorporate whole foods into your diet without sacrificing taste and satisfaction! Look for organic, free-range ingredients whenever possible.

INSTANT SMOOTHIE MAKER

SMOOTHIES ARE EASY TO MAKE AND INSTANTLY DELICIOUS! ALL SMOOTHIES SHOULD INCLUDE:

- 1–2 cups leafy greens, such as kale, Swiss chard, collard greens, beet greens, or spinach
- 1 rib celery
- 1 small Persian cucumber
- 1–2 tablespoons flaxseed oil
- 1 scoop each of protein powder and superfood powder

Blend with 1 cup of fruit and 1 cup water or coconut water to your taste.

Here are some of my favorite combinations. Feel free to experiment and come up with your own!

- Papaya and pineapple
- Strawberry and blueberry (½ grapefruit optional)
- Banana and raspberry (lime juice optional)

Salads

KALE SALAD

1 bunch kale, chopped

2 tablespoons olive oil

Sea salt

Mandarin orange slices or 1 orange, sectioned and seeds removed

½ avocado

1. Put the kale in a large bowl and massage it with the olive oil and salt. Let it stand for 10 minutes to soften the leaves.
2. Chop and add the oranges and avocado to the kale. Toss well.
3. Serve the salad with the dressing (see below) on the side.

Dressing

¼ cup apple cider vinegar

1 tablespoon raw agave nectar

1 tablespoon sesame oil

Pinch of sea salt

In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, agave, oil, and salt. Mix well.

To make it a meal, add 1 cup of cooked quinoa.

SPINACH SALAD

Spinach (1 bag)

Fennel, chopped

Hard-boiled egg, chopped

Radish, chopped

Grilled salmon

Spray a grill pan with olive oil and bring to high heat. Lightly coat both sides of the salmon with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Grill on each side for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the fish is opaque. In a medium bowl, combine the spinach, fennel, egg, and radish. Toss with Traditional Avo Dressing (see below) and serve salmon on top of greens.

Traditional Avo Dressing

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup distilled white vinegar

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon dried oregano

Juice of 1 lime

½ avocado

Sea salt to taste

In a blender, combine the oil, vinegar, garlic, thyme, oregano, lime juice, avocado, and salt. Blend well.

ARUGULA SALAD

Arugula (1 bag)

½ skinless, boneless chicken breast, grilled and chopped

¼ avocado, chopped

2 or 3 strawberries, chopped

In a medium bowl, combine the arugula, chicken, avocado, and strawberries. Toss, and serve with Raspberry Apple Cider Vinaigrette (see below) on the side.

Raspberry Apple Cider Vinaigrette

⅓ cup apple cider vinegar

½ cup olive oil

⅓ cup raspberries

Juice of ½ lemon

1 teaspoon agave nectar

In a blender, combine the vinegar, oil, raspberries, lemon, and agave. Mix well.

CRUNCH SALAD

Romaine lettuce, chopped

¼ apple, chopped

½ Persian cucumber, chopped

½ skinless, boneless chicken breast, grilled and chopped

In a medium bowl, combine the lettuce, apple, cucumber, and chicken. Add the Creamy-Cheesy-Sweet Avocado Dressing (see below), and toss well.

Creamy-Cheesy-Sweet Avocado Dressing

½ avocado

1 clove garlic, minced

½ cup olive oil

Juice of ½ lemon

Pinch of sea salt

1 tablespoon Bragg's Premium Nutritional Yeast Seasoning

1 teaspoon raw agave nectar

In a blender, combine the avocado, garlic, oil, lemon, salt, seasoning, and agave. Mix well.

SO-COOL CUCUMBER SALAD

3 Persian cucumbers

12 to 15 grape tomatoes

1. Trim the ends off the cucumbers and quarter them lengthwise. Finely chop the quarters. Place them in a serving bowl.

2. Use the same technique to chop the cherry tomatoes, chop and add them to the bowl.

Dressing

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

½ red jalapeño chile pepper, seeds removed, finely chopped, wear plastic gloves when handling

1 tablespoon mint leaves, finely chopped

½ shallot, finely chopped

1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar

Sea salt

Fresh cracked black pepper

1. In a jar, combine the oil, chile pepper, mint, shallot, and vinegar. Shake well to mix and pour it over the cucumbers and tomatoes.
2. Toss well and season to taste with the salt and black pepper.

Soups

RAW TOMATO BASIL SOUP

2 tomatoes, cored

3 cloves garlic

½ to 1 jalapeño chile pepper, seeds removed, wear plastic gloves when handling

1 cup fresh basil

¼ yellow onion or sweet onion

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper to taste

1 cup water

Squeeze of lime juice (optional)

In a blender or food processor, combine the tomatoes, garlic, pepper, basil, onion, oil, salt, pepper, and lime juice (if using).

SWEET POTATO SOUP

1 sweet potato

2 tablespoons butter

2 ribs celery, chopped

½ onion, chopped

3 carrots, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

Pinch of sea salt

2½ cups organic chicken broth

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon cumin

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and bake the sweet potato for 1 hour or until cooked through. Remove the skin from the potato and discard it.
2. In a skillet, melt the butter and sauté the celery, onion, carrots, and garlic for 7 to 10 minutes, until tender. Add the broth and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes.

3. Transfer the mixture to a blender or food processor and add the sweet potato pulp, cinnamon, and cumin. Blend or process until smooth.

ASPARAGUS SOUP

¼ cup olive oil

½ onion or 1 leek, chopped

Salt and ground black pepper

1 bunch asparagus, woody ends removed

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 cups chicken or vegetable broth

1 tablespoon nutritional yeast (optional)

1. Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Sauté the onions until soft. Add garlic and sauté for 1 to 2 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the asparagus and sauté until the spears turn bright green. Add the broth and simmer for 10 minutes.

2. Transfer to a blender or food processor and blend or process until smooth.

DR. KIM'S GREEN SOUP

2 cups each of Swiss chard and spinach

1 zucchini, cut into thirds

1 cup cleaned and trimmed green beans

¼ cup parsley

1. Put the greens, zucchini, beans, and enough water to cover the vegetables (3 to 4 cups) in a pot over high heat. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the greens turn an emerald color. Stir in the parsley, remove the pot from the heat, and let it cool slightly.

2. Transfer the mixture to a blender or food processor and blend or process until smooth.

3. Feel free to add onions, garlic, or the herbs or spices of your choice.

This soup is excellent for encouraging daily bowel movements and relieving constipation.

Entrées

GREENS, EGGS, AND NO HAM

1 cup red, white, and black quinoa, mixed

1¾ cup chicken broth

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil + 1 teaspoon for drizzling (optional)

2 cups water

1 cup beluga lentils

1 teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon curry powder

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

3 or 4 cloves garlic, minced

1 package organic baby spinach

½ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 egg

Greens of 2 scallions or 1 small bunch of chives, finely sliced

1. Cover the quinoa with water and let it soak for 10 minutes. Drain and pat it dry. Place a medium pot over medium-high heat, add the dry quinoa, and toast, stirring as needed, for 5 minutes or until it is fragrant. Cover the quinoa with the broth, then add a pinch of salt and a small splash of olive oil. Bring it to a boil, stir, and reduce the heat. Cover and let simmer for 15 minutes or until all the moisture has been absorbed and the quinoa is fluffy.

2. In another medium pot, combine the water and lentils over high heat. Bring them to a boil and then reduce the heat to a low simmer. Add the cumin, curry, and cinnamon. Let it cook for 20 minutes or until all the moisture has been absorbed and the lentils are cooked through. In a large bowl, mix the quinoa and lentils together. Drizzle on 1 teaspoon of olive oil if you desire a moister dish.

3. In a skillet over medium-high heat, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Sauté the garlic for 1 to 2 minutes, until it's golden brown, and add the spinach, red pepper, salt, and black pepper. Cook, stirring frequently to coat the leaves. Once all the leaves have wilted (they will shrink to almost one-third of their original size), remove the mixture from the pan, reserving the oil.

4. Place a nice layer of the spinach on a plate and top with the quinoa-lentil mixture. Reheat the skillet over medium heat and cook the egg sunny-side up for 5 minutes or until the white is cooked through. Transfer the egg to the top of the quinoa-lentil mixture and garnish with a festive bunch of scallion greens.

SIMPLY DELICIOUS SALMON

2 teaspoons agave nectar

1 filet wild Alaskan salmon

Sea salt to taste

1. Rub the agave nectar on both sides of the salmon and add a sprinkle of salt.

2. Cook over high heat in either a grill pan or a skillet on the stovetop or on the grill. Reduce the heat to medium-high and cook for 4 to 5 minutes on each side, until the fish is opaque throughout.

STEAMED ARTICHOKE WITH LEMON DIP

2 cloves garlic, smashed

1 bay leaf

1 artichoke, trimmed

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Juice of 1 lemon

3–4 tablespoons nutritional yeast

Large pinch Maldon sea salt

- 1.** Place the garlic and bay leaf in the water inside a steamer. Bring to a boil, add the artichoke to the steamer basket, and cook for 30 to 45 minutes, until the artichoke is tender.
- 2.** In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, lemon juice, nutritional yeast, and salt. Dip the artichoke leaves and heart in the dressing and savor every bite!

CHAPTER 5

The Essential Yoga Poses

Every move you need for mind/body bliss



It's time to unroll your yoga mat and get started! I've broken down the essential poses into various categories: Sun Salutations, Standing Poses, Seated Poses, Inversions, Arm Balances, Backbends, Core, and Restorative Poses. There are modifications shown for most poses, so you can adjust them according to your body's needs.

Remember: Rome wasn't built in a day! Take your time as you explore these poses and sequences. Engage your sense of humor and remember that the goal of yoga is to make you feel better. If you feel frustrated, take a break. Try different times of day to practice to see what works best for you. This is the beginning of the rest of your yoga journey!

The Essential Poses and Sequences

[Sun Salutation A](#)

[Mountain](#)

[Mountain with Arms Overhead](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Half Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Plank](#)
[Pushup](#)
[Upward Facing Dog](#)
[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Half Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Mountain with Arms Overhead](#)
[Mountain](#)

Sun Salutation B

[Mountain](#)
[Chair](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
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[Plank](#)
[Pushup](#)
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[Warrior I](#)
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[Warrior I](#)
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[Half Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
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Standing Poses

[Mountain](#)
[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Cow and Cat](#)
[Garland](#)
[Warrior I](#)
[Warrior II](#)
[Crescent](#)
[Warrior III](#)
[Reverse Warrior](#)
[Side Angle](#)
[Side Angle Revolved](#)
[Triangle](#)
[Revolved Triangle](#)
[Half Moon](#)
[Sugar Cane](#)
[Revolved Half Moon](#)

[Standing Split](#)
[Wide-Leg Forward Fold](#)
[Standing Big Toe Extension](#)
[Chair](#)
[Revolved Chair](#)
[Tree](#)
[Eagle](#)

Seated Poses

[Comfortable Seat](#)
[Staff](#)
[Seated Forward Fold](#)
[Head to Knee](#)
[Revolved Head to Knee](#)
[Seated Twist](#)
[Seated Half-Fish](#)
[Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend](#)
[Wide-Leg Balance](#)
[Bound Angle](#)
[Cow Face](#)
[Hero](#)
[Split](#)
[Single Pigeon](#)
[Double Pigeon](#)
[Thread the Needle](#)
[Happy Baby](#)
[Simple Spinal Twist](#)

Inversions

[Dolphin](#)
[Headstand](#)
[Tripod Headstand](#)
[Forearm Balance](#)
[Scorpion](#)
[Handstand](#)
[Handstand Scorpion](#)
[Plow](#)
[Shoulder Stand](#)

Arm Balances

[Crow](#)
[Side Crow](#)
[Side Plank I](#)
[Side Plank II](#)
[Flying Pigeon](#)
[Arm Pressure Balance](#)
[Firefly](#)

Backbends

[Cobra](#)

[Upward Facing Dog](#)
[Locust](#)
[Bow](#)
[Camel](#)
[Bridge](#)
[Supported Bridge](#)
[Upward Facing Bow](#)
[Wild Thing](#)
[King Dancer](#)

Core

[Boat](#)
[Half Boat](#)
[Plank](#)
[Forearm Plank](#)
[Pushup](#)

Restorative Poses

[Legs Up the Wall](#)
[Reclined Big Toe](#)
[Reclined Bound Angle](#)
[Corpse \(Savasona\)](#)
[Child's Pose](#)

More Essential Poses

[Lower-Belly Lifts](#)
[Windshield-Wiper Abs](#)
[Fingertips Abs](#)
[Twisted Lowering Abs](#)
[Tiny Little Package](#)
[Gentle Seated Twist](#)
[Goddess](#)
[Knee-to-Nose](#)
[Half Dog at Wall](#)
[Finger Stretches](#)

Sun Salutation A

Sun salutations are traditional sequences of postures used at the beginning of many classes to build heat and flexibility in the body. They're a fantastic way to start your day or your workout. These moves will get you going and work out all the kinks from the day (or weeks!) before.

Join all of the following postures together to salute the sun! This routine will get your body moving in all directions to loosen, strengthen, and prepare you for a longer practice. As you flow through these poses, use the numbered steps to help you create a rhythm and remember to inhale or exhale as you move from one pose to the next. Remember, don't rush! Complete a full breath before moving on. Enjoy the process!

TIP

For all sun salutations, feel free to modify based on your needs. If you have a tender lower back, keep your knees slightly bent in standing poses. You can also place your hands on your shins or a block if the floor is too far away.



1

Mountain



- Start by standing tall, arms at your sides.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.
- Shoulders drop down.
- Tailbone toward your heels.



2

Mountain with Arms Overhead



- Inhale as you raise your arms straight up and join your palms.
- Keep quads lifted.
- Relax the base of your neck.



3

Standing Forward Fold



- Exhale as you extend forward from your hips, straighten your legs, and fold forward to the floor.
- Keep hips stacked over your heels.
- Elongate your core.
- Keep your shoulders lifted away from your ears.



Half Standing Forward Fold



- Inhale as you keep your hands down and extend your gaze and chest.
- Melt your upper back and extend your heart.



5

Plank



- Exhale, plant your palms flat, and step your feet back into Plank.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.
- Extend your heart and gaze forward.
- Keep your core engaged.



6

Pushup



- Lower to Pushup (or jump directly into Pushup from Half Standing Forward Fold).
- Extend your heart.
- Draw the tips of your shoulder blades down your back.
- Stay out of the base of your neck as you gaze forward.
- Engage your quads.
- Keep elbows in toward your ribs.



7

Upward Facing Dog



- Inhale as you roll over your toes, and press away from the floor to lift your chest.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Press all 10 toes into the ground evenly.
- Lift up through your lower belly.



Downward Facing Dog



- Exhale, then roll your toes back over as you lift and press your hips back.
- Take 5 breaths.
- Hug your upper, outer arms in.
- Draw your ribs in toward your spine.
- Press your thigh bones back.



9

Half Standing Forward Fold



- Inhale, and gaze forward as you lengthen back into your legs and bend your knees.
- Exhale, and step or jump forward to meet your hands.
- Inhale as you extend your gaze and chest.
- Melt your upper back and extend your heart.



Standing Forward Fold



- Exhale as you fold forward over your legs.
- Keep hips stacked over your heels.
- Keep your shoulders lifted away from your ears.
- Elongate your core.



Mountain with Arms Overhead



- Inhale as you extend your arms wide to the sides, lift your chest, come all the way up to standing, and press your palms overhead, keeping your arms straight.
- Keep quads lifted.
- Relax the base of your neck.

Mountain



- Exhale as you release your arms and lower them next to your body in Mountain.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.
- Shoulders drop down.
- Tailbone toward your heels.

JUST BREATHE

“Don’t forget to breathe.” This is probably one of the most commonly heard phrases in yoga classes. There’s a tendency to hold your breath in anticipation when you’re overly focused on a pose. I’ll hear a person take a huge gasp in and hold it, not realizing they never exhaled. The result is strain, stress, and one bright-red tomato face.

When you gain control over your breathing, you gain control over your body and your life. Our breath keeps us going every day. It smoothes out like butter when we’re calm and spikes higher than a pair of Christian Louboutin heels when we’re stressed. It’s our body’s gauge to how we react to our surroundings. Controlling your breathing brings you immediately back into a place of control. It is incredibly empowering not only because you can feel the physical and mental shift of your body—you can do it simply by connecting and focusing. Breathing is a miracle drug, my friends! Here are some simple techniques.

VICTORIOUS BREATH (UJJAYI)

This is the most common breathing technique used in yoga. The inhales and exhales are calm, long, and even. People often describe it as sounding like a soft wave in the back of the throat.

HOW TO: Breathe deeply in and out of your nostrils with your mouth closed.

BENEFITS:

- Lowers heart rate
- Calms the mind
- Empowers

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

This style of breathing is commonly used during meditation or toward the end of class as a way to cool down. The nostrils represent the two contrasting channels and sides of the body: the sun (heat) and the moon (cooling).

HOW TO: Take your right hand and tuck your third and index finger in. Place your fourth finger on your left nostril and thumb on your right. Close off your right nostril with your thumb and inhale through your left. Close your left with your fourth finger and exhale evenly through your right. Inhale through your right again. At the top of the breath, close the right and exhale through the left.

BENEFITS:

- Calms the mind
- Lowers heart rate
- Soothes headaches
- Helps to alter perspective

MEDITATION BREATH

Use this technique when you lack focus or feel overworked. It is traditionally used with a mantra: think “Sa Ta Na Ma” on the inhale, repeat “Sa Ta Na Ma” four times as you hold, then exhale on a count of 2 to release. Try it with or without the mantra and see what works best for you.

HOW TO: Take four swift inhales through the nose. Retain the breath for a count of 16. Exhale through the nose to the count of 2, and repeat.

BENEFITS:

- Clears the mind
- Builds concentration

BREATH OF FIRE

This intense breath work uses sharp exhales to cleanse and tone the belly. You'll find students practicing this in kundalini yoga or whenever they are in the need of heat and discipline. This breathing can be done seated or in any posture.

HOW TO: Start in Comfortable Seat (or Chair Pose or Plank for an extra challenge) and take a deep inhale. Quickly exhale all your air out through the nostrils by engaging your diaphragm. The diaphragm will lift in and up (as if someone punched you lightly) to push the air out forcefully. Repeat this swift exhaling (the inhale will happen without thought since you are moving fast) and continue for between 30 seconds and 2 minutes. See [page 242](#) on how to use the Breath of Fire in my energy sequence.

BENEFITS:

- Tones the abdominals
- Aids in digestion
- Creates heat and energy
- Alleviates anger

Sun Salutation B

Sun Salutation B is the bigger, stronger brother to Sun Salutation A. These salutes add the leg-strengthening Chair and Warrior I poses to get you even closer to the heat of the sun! This sequence is wonderful for anytime you need to break a sweat and regain focus.

TIP

Take these at whatever pace you need. If you want to slow it down, try adding a Low Lunge or Crescent pose instead of Warrior I. If you want to spice it up, try using Crow to get back to Pushup.



1

Mountain



- Start by standing tall, arms at your side.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.
- Shoulders drop down.
- Tailbone toward your heels.



2

Chair



- Inhale, bend your knees and sink your hips as you raise your arms straight up and shoulder-width apart.
- Drop your tailbone.
- Keep your weight in your heels.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.



3

Standing Forward Fold



- Exhale as you extend forward from your hips, straighten your legs, and fold forward to the floor.
- Keep hips stacked over your heels.
- Keep your shoulders lifted away from your ears.
- Elongate your core.



4

Half Standing Forward Fold



- Inhale as you keep your hands down and extend your gaze and chest.
- Melt your upper back and extend your heart.



5

Plank



- Exhale as you step back into Plank.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.
- Extend your heart and gaze forward.
- Keep your core engaged.



6

Pushup



- Lower to Pushup (or jump directly into Pushup) from Half Standing Forward Fold.
- Extend your heart.
- Draw the tips of your shoulder blades down your back.
- Stay out of the base of your neck as you gaze forward.
- Engage your quads.



7

Upward Facing Dog



- Inhale as you roll over your toes and, using your arms, press away from the floor and lift your chest.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Press all 10 toes into the ground evenly.
- Lift up through your lower belly.



Downward Facing Dog



- Exhale as you roll your toes back over and lift and press your hips back.
- Hug your upper, outer arms in.
- Draw your ribs in toward your spine.
- Press your thigh bones back.



9

Warrior I



- Still exhaling, step your right foot forward in-between your hands and spin your back heel flat so your heels form a straight line.
- Inhale as you keep your front knee bent and back leg straight. Lift your arms and torso up, gazing forward.
- Roll your left hip forward.
- Draw your right thigh bone in toward your hips.
- Press into the outer edge of your back foot.
- Lift out of your lower back.
- Relax the base of your neck.



Pushup



- Exhale as you lower your hands back down, step back into Plank, and lower yourself down, keeping your back and legs straight.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Press all 10 toes into the ground evenly.
- Lift up through your lower belly.



Upward Facing Dog



- Inhale as you roll over your toes and, using your arms, press away from the floor and lift your chest.
- Extend your heart.
- Draw the tips of your shoulder blades down your back.
- Stay out of the base of your neck.
- Engage your quads.



Downward Facing Dog



- Exhale as you roll your toes over and lift and press your hips back.
- Take 5 breaths.
- Hug your upper, outer arms in.
- Draw your ribs in toward your spine.
- Press your thigh bones back.



Warrior I



- Still exhaling, step your left foot forward in-between your hands, and spin your back heel flat so your heels form a straight line.
- Inhale as you keep your front knee bent and back leg straight. Lift your arms and torso up, gazing forward.
- Roll your left hip forward.
- Draw your right thigh bone in.
- Press into the outer edge of your back foot.
- Lift out of your lower back.
- Relax the base of your neck.



Pushup



- Exhale as you lower your hands back down, step back into Plank, and lower yourself down, keeping your back and legs straight.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Press all 10 toes into the ground evenly.
- Lift up through your lower belly.
- Engage your quads.



Upward Facing Dog



- Inhale as you roll over your toes and, using your arms, press away from the floor and lift your chest.
- Extend your heart.
- Draw the tips of your shoulder blades down your back.
- Stay out of the base of your neck.



Downward Facing Dog



- Exhale as you roll your toes over and lift and press your hips back.
- Take 5 breaths.
- Hug your upper, outer arms in.
- Draw your ribs in toward your spine.
- Press your thigh bones back.



Half Standing Forward Fold



- Exhale as you step or jump to meet your hands.
- Inhale as you extend your gaze and chest, keeping your hands on the floor.
- Melt your upper back and extend your heart.



Standing Forward Fold



- Exhale as you fold forward over your legs.
- Keep hips stacked over your heels.
- Keep your shoulders lifted away from your ears.
- Elongate your core.



Chair



- Inhale as you bend your knees, sink your hips, and raise your arms up over your head.
- Drop your tailbone.
- Keep your weight in your heels.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Corset your front ribs in.

Mountain



- Exhale as you press upward to stand straight and then release your arms and allow them to fall to your sides.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.
- Shoulders drop down.
- Tailbone toward your heels.

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”
—Howard Thurman

Standing Poses

Standing poses help us find instant connection with the ground.

They also sculpt and tone the entire body, leaving you with a sexy shape and confident posture. Standing poses are the bread and butter of the asana practice. These poses can be held anywhere from one breath up to several minutes depending on your needs. Classes often link several standing postures together to create a heat-inducing flow. Use these postures when you need to focus, when you’ve been traveling too much, or when you just want a good old-fashioned workout.

TIP

If you find yourself scattered, confused or lacking routine, hold these poses for at least a minute each. They’ll help you to reconnect and feel strong and confident.

Mountain (*Tadasana*)



- Stand with your feet together and your big toes touching.
- Ground yourself evenly on all four corners of your feet.
- Relax your shoulders and lengthen your neck.
- Let your arms relax along your sides, palms to the front, and gaze forward.
- Ground all four corners of your feet.
- Release your tailbone.
- Pull your ribs in as if in a corset.
- Relax the base of your neck.

VARIATIONS: [Extended Arms](#) | [Side Stretch](#)

Mountain (*Tadasana*)

VARIATION

Extended Arms



- Rotate the outer edges of your arms inward.
- Extend your inner elbows.

[Main Pose](#)

Mountain (*Tadasana*)

VARIATION
Side Stretch



- Tailbone drops down.
- Spread the side of your ribs like a fan.

[Main Pose](#)

Downward Facing Dog (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*)



- Begin on all fours with your knees hip-width apart and your hands shoulder-width apart.
- Stack your hips over your knees and your shoulders over your wrists.
- Walk your hands a few inches in front of your shoulders.
- Curl your toes under, lift your hips, and straighten your legs.
- Push into your palms to draw more energy into your lower body to help elevate your pelvis.
- Press down evenly with all 10 fingers.
- Keep your arms straight and rotate your outer upper arms inward to broaden your upper back.
- Draw the front of your rib cage in and press your legs back.
- Extend your heels away from your toes and pull them toward the floor.

Cow (*Bitilasana*) and Cat (*Marjaryasana*)



- Start on all fours with your hips stacked over your knees and your shoulders stacked over your wrists.
- Keep your arms straight as you inhale, drop your belly, and roll your shoulders back (Cow).
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Drop your tailbone.
- Exhale, press into your palms, round your upper back, and drop your tailbone down (Cat).
- Draw your navel gently up.
- Keep your arms straight.
- Repeat this several times, performing Cow on the inhale and Cat on the exhale, to warm up your spine.

Garland (*Malasana*)



- Come into a low squat with your feet together.
- Separate your knees wide and walk your torso and arms forward between your legs.
- Rotate your shoulders forward and bring your arms back behind your hips, keeping them straight.
- Press your hands down with palms up, shoulder-width apart, as you pull your forehead and heels toward the floor.
- Relax your shoulders down.
- Press all 10 knuckles into the floor.

VARIATION: [Wide with Palms](#)

Garland (*Malasana*)

VARIATION
Wide with Palms



- Come into a low squat with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart.
- Turn your heels inward and your toes outward.
- Bring both arms to the insides of your thighs and wiggle your chest forward so that your upper arms rest against your inner thighs.
- Join your palms in front of your heart and press them together to lift your upper chest and open your shoulders and hips.
- Broaden your collarbone.

[Main Pose](#)

Warrior I (*Virabhadrasana I*)



- Start with your feet parallel and hip-width apart.
- Rotate your right foot out 90 degrees and your left foot in 45 degrees, keeping your heels lined up.
- Square your hips and torso toward your front (right) leg, and bend your right knee until your thigh is parallel to the floor.
- Drop your tailbone, lift the front of your pelvis, and reach straight up with your arms shoulder-width apart. Rotate your upper arms inward to broaden your upper back. Elongate your neck and gaze forward.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Stack your knee directly over your heel.

VARIATIONS: [Goalpost Arms](#) | [Interlaced Fold](#)

Warrior I (*Virabhadrasana I*)

VARIATION

Goalpost Arms



- Keep your tailbone down and lower belly engaged.
- Pull your heart forward and draw your shoulders back.

[Main Pose](#)

Warrior I (*Virabhadrasana I*)

VARIATION

Interlaced Fold



- Squeeze your arms together and straight, pushing your pinky fingers toward the ground.
- Hug your front hip in.
- Push into the outer edge of your back foot.

[Main Pose](#)

Warrior II (*Virabhadrasana II*)



- Start with your feet parallel and one leg-length apart.
- Rotate your left foot out 90 degrees and your right foot in slightly, so your left heel is lined up with your right foot's arch.
- Bend your front (left) knee, bringing your thigh parallel to the floor with your knee over your heel.
- Keep your torso directly over your neutral pelvis.
- Relax your lower back and keep your front ribs in.
- Keeping your inner elbows straight, reach actively with your arms to raise them parallel to the floor.
- Gaze over your front fingertips.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your front knee over your heel.
- Keep your weight in your heel.
- Broaden your arms.

Crescent (*Anjaneyasana*)



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Step back about one leg length with your left foot as you bend your right knee to a 90-degree angle.
- Keep both feet hip-width apart, with your weight resting on the heel of your front foot and on the ball of your back foot.
- Engage your lower belly to extend your lower back and raise your arms straight up over your head, keeping them shoulder-width apart.
- Rotate your upper arms inward to broaden your upper back, and lift your gaze upward.
- If you can keep your shoulders from flaring outward and your arms straight, bring your palms together.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your pelvis neutral.
- Extend through your back heel.
- Keep your hips level.

VARIATIONS: [Low Lunge](#) | [High Lunge](#)

Crescent (*Anjaneyansana*)

VARIATION
Low Lunge



- Release your tailbone toward your ground.

[Main Pose](#)

Crescent (*Anjaneyansana*)

VARIATION
High Lunge



- Tailbone lengthens back, heart extends forward, shoulders release away from your ears.

[Main Pose](#)

Warrior III (*Virabhadrasana III*)



- Begin in [Crescent](#). Join your palms together in front of your heart and lean forward over your front thigh.
- Keep gazing forward and lift your back leg off the floor until it is parallel with the floor.
- Extend your upper chest and gaze forward as you flex your back foot, keeping your leg straight and all of your toes pointing down.
- Stay here or extend your arms straight out in front of you and keep them shoulder width apart or join your palms together.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Roll all 5 lifted toes toward the ground.
- Firm your right hip in.
- Extend your heart forward.

VARIATION: [Hands to Heart](#)

Warrior III (*Virabhadrasana III*)

VARIATION

Hands at Heart



- Extend your heart forward to activate your core.

[Main Pose](#)

Reverse Warrior (*Viparita Virabhadrasana*)



- Begin in [Warrior II](#) and keep your lower body in that position.
- Rotate the wrist of your forward arm to bring the palm up. Sweep your arm up and back in an arcing movement.
- Lightly touch your back leg with your rear hand, letting it land on your back thigh or calf.
- Spiral your chest open and keep your tailbone dropped to avoid pitching in the lower back.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your front knee directly over your heel.
- Drop your tailbone and lift through your lower belly.

VARIATION: [Wrapped](#)

Reverse Warrior (*Viparita Virabhadrasana*)

VARIATION

Wrapped



[Main Pose](#)

Side Angle (*Parsvakonasana*)



- Begin in [Warrior II](#). Extend your entire left side over your forward leg as you place the fingertips of your left hand on the floor to the outside of your front leg.
- Reach up with your right arm and rotate your palm forward. Extend your arm overhead to form a straight line with your back leg, rolling the outer side of your arm in toward your body to relax your upper trapezius muscles.
- Keep your chest open.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Draw your front hip bones up toward the base of your ribs.
- Press your front knee into your left arm.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Roll your torso open.

VARIATIONS: [Forearm](#) | [Block](#)

Side Angle (*Parsvakonasana*)

VARIATION
Forearm



- Keep both sides of your waist even.
- Relax your bottom shoulder.

[Main Pose](#)

Side Angle (*Parsvakonasana*)

VARIATION

Block



- Place minimal weight on the block.

[Main Pose](#)

Side Angle Revolved



- Begin in [Crescent](#).
- Pivot your back heel flat to a 45-degree angle with the heel in and toes out. The back heel should be aligned with the heel of your front foot.
- Drop your right hand to the outside of your left foot and extend your left arm up to the sky. Extend your top palm forward and extend overhead to complete the line of your back leg.
- Keep the outer edge of your back foot rooted to the mat and your hips squared.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Square your hips.
- Soften the top shoulder into the socket.
- Firm your front hip in to the midline.

VARIATIONS: [Palms Press](#) | [Crescent](#)

Side Angle Revolved

VARIATION
Palms Press



- Spin the chest open.

[Main Pose](#)

Side Angle Revolved

VARIATION
Crescent



- Stay on the ball of your back foot.

[Main Pose](#)

Triangle (*Trikonasana*)



- Begin with your feet parallel and one leg-length apart.
- Rotate your left foot out to a 90-degree angle and your right foot in to a 45-degree angle, keeping your heels aligned.
- Lift your arms parallel to the floor, extend your left arm and that side of your waist forward, and move your left hand to the floor outside your left ankle.
- Extend your right arm straight up, so your right shoulder is directly over your left.
- Revolve your torso to open it and equalize the lengths of both sides of your waist.
- Keep your lower belly engaged and your legs straight.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Extend the bottom side of your torso over your front thigh.
- Draw your tailbone back.
- Keep your core engaged.

VARIATIONS: [Block](#) | [Shin](#)

Triangle (*Trikonasana*)

Variation
Block



- Draw your bottom shoulder back.

[Main Pose](#)

Triangle (*Trikonasana*)

VARIATION
Shin



- Keep the bottom of your waist extended.
- Place minimal weight on your shin.

[Main Pose](#)

Revolved Triangle (*Parivrtta Trikonasana*)



- Start in [Mountain](#). Step back one leg length with your left leg and turn your left foot outward 45 degrees, aligning your heels.
- Square your hips forward and place your right hand on your hip.
- Lift your left arm up into full extension and lean forward, keeping your back flat and arm reaching straight out in front of you.
- Place your left hand on the floor at the outer edge of your front foot.
- Extend your chest, then press your left hand into the floor to spiral your chest open. Extend your right arm straight toward the ceiling.
- Stack your shoulders and gaze upward.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your lower back level.
- Press your right thigh back.
- Lean your upper body back.
- Press down into your bottom palm.

- Press into the outer edge of your back foot.

VARIATIONS: [Block](#) | [Inside Foot](#)

Revolved Triangle (*Parivrtta Trikonasana*)

VARIATION
Block



- Press your entire palm into a block to revolve your chest.

[Main Pose](#)

Revolved Triangle (*Parivrtta Trikonasana*)

VARIATION

Inside Foot



- Lean your upper chest back.
- Stack your shoulders.

[Main Pose](#)

Half Moon (*Ardha Chandrasana*)



- Start in [Triangle](#). Gaze downward and bend your front knee as you extend your front arm, bringing your fingertips to rest on the floor about 8 inches in front of your toes.
- Lift your rear leg up until it is parallel with the floor.
- Straighten your front leg and draw your left glute inward to open your hips.
- Lift your top arm straight up and stack your shoulders.
- Move your gaze upward to further challenge your balance.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your standing hip firming in.
- Engage your core.
- Draw your left shoulder blade in toward your chest.
- Reach tall with your top arm.

VARIATION: [Block and Hip](#)

Half Moon (*Ardha Chandrasana*)

VARIATION

Block and Hip



- Roll your chest open.
- Keep your shoulders stacked.

[Main Pose](#)

Sugar Cane (*Chopasana*)



- From [Half Moon](#), bend your raised leg and fold it so your heel is by your bottom.
- Rotate your top arm so that your palm faces away from you as you reach back to lightly grab your foot.
- Press your foot back into your hand to open your chest.
- Gaze at one point on the floor for balance, or raise your gaze higher for a challenge.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Powerfully press your shin and foot back.
- Curl your upper chest open.
- Keep your bottom shoulder rolling back.
- Keep your standing leg straight.

Revolved Half Moon (*Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana*)



- Start in [Standing Forward Fold](#). Place your fingertips on the floor and sweep your right leg up to a 90-degree angle behind you.
- Keep your hips squared and move your right fingertips under your right shoulder so your arm is straight.
- Move your left hand to your lower back and check to make sure your hips are still squared.
- Revolve your chest to the left and firm your right shoulder blade by drawing it inward to open your chest.
- Reach up with your left arm until it points straight to the ceiling. Stack your shoulders while keeping your hips squared.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your hips level and square.
- Engage the entire length of your back leg.
- Spiral your chest open.
- Reach powerfully for the ceiling.

VARIATION: [Block and Hip](#)

Revolved Half Moon (*Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana*)

VARIATION
Block and Hip



- Press into the block to further revolve your chest.

[Main Pose](#)

Standing Split (*Urdhva Prasarita Eka Padasana*)



- Begin in [Standing Forward Fold](#). Pop up onto your fingertips and sweep your right leg up toward the ceiling, keeping your hips squared. Inhale, and extend your chest.
- Exhale, fold over your standing leg, and brace your left forearm against your left calf.
- Engage your glutes to lift your right leg higher toward the split.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Spread your toes.
- Extend your torso.
- Lift your left shoulder.

VARIATION: [Blocks Parallel](#)

Standing Split (*Urdhva Prasarita Eka Padasana*)

VARIATION
Blocks Parallel



- Extend your chest.
- Engage your lifted leg.

[Main Pose](#)

Wide-Leg Forward Fold (*Prasarita Padottanasana*)



- Start with your feet parallel and one leg-length apart.
- Put your hands on your hips and engage your quads.
- Keep rooting yourself in the outer edges of your feet as you hinge forward from your hips, moving your hands to the floor shoulder-width apart.
- Inhale as you extend your chest and straighten your arms.
- Exhale as you walk your hands as far back as they'll comfortably go, bending your elbows to 90 degrees and placing the crown of your head on the floor (or as close to it as you can get).
- Keep your elbows over your wrists and your shoulders lifted.
- Draw your inner thighs up.
- Lift your shoulders.
- Stack your elbows over your wrists.
- Keep your neck even on all four sides.

VARIATIONS: [Hands at Hips](#) | [Hands Interlaced behind Back](#) | [Hooking the Big Toes](#)

Wide-Leg Forward Fold (*Prasarita Padottanasana*)

VARIATION

Hands at Hips



- Press your hips back with your hands.
- Extend your torso long.

[Main Pose](#)

Wide-Leg Forward Fold (*Prasarita Padottanasana*)

VARIATION

Hands Interlaced behind Back



- Hug your shoulder blades in.
- Keep your quads lifting.

Wide-Leg Forward Fold (*Prasarita Padottanasana*)

VARIATION

Hooking the Big Toes



- Draw your shoulders up and away from your ears.
- Pull up on your toes as your toes push down on your fingers.

Standing Big Toe Extension (*Utthita Hasta Padangustasana*)



- Start in [Mountain](#). Bend your right knee and clasp your big toe with your right thumb, index, and middle fingers.
- Place your left hand on your hip for support.
- Relax your shoulders and begin to extend your right leg straight out in front of you.
- Extend your leg as far as you can without losing your grip or straining your shoulders. Keep your hips level and lift your chest tall while gazing slightly past your lifted big toe. Keep the leg you're standing on straight.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Relax your right shoulder into the socket.
- Soft gaze.
- Keep your hips level.

VARIATIONS: [Open Hip](#) | [Fold](#) | [Hover](#) | [Twist](#)

Standing Big Toe Extension (*Utthita Hasta Padangustasana*)

VARIATION

Open Hip



- From Standing Big Toe, rotate your right hip outward and raise your right leg to your right side, keeping your hips level.
- Gaze over your left shoulder.
- Drop your right hip down so it's level with your left.
- Firm your left hip in.

[Main Pose](#)

Standing Big Toe Extension (*Utthita Hasta Padangustasana*)

VARIATION

Fold



- From Twist, keep your right leg raised in front of you and parallel to the floor.
- Grab your foot with both hands and bend your elbows out to the sides as you extend your torso over your leg.
- Kiss your shinbone.
- Extend your chest.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Keep your standing leg straight.

[Main Pose](#)

Standing Big Toe Extension (*Utthita Hasta*

Padangustasana)

VARIATION
Hover



- From Fold, keep the lifted leg pointing forward and raise both arms straight up over your shoulders.
- Spread your toes.
- Engage your entire lifted leg.

[Main Pose](#)

Standing Big Toe Extension (*Utthita Hasta Padangustasana*)

VARIATION

Twist



- From Open Hip, switch hands, grabbing the outer side of your right foot with your left hand.
- Extend your right arm straight behind you and revolve your chest open.
- Keep your hips level and squared to the front. Relax your shoulders. Gaze forward, or look sideways for more of a balance challenge.
- [Drop your tailbone.](#)

- Lift your heart.
- Relax your shoulders.

[Main Pose](#)

Chair (*Utkatasana*)



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Bend your knees and drop your hips, bringing your weight onto your heels.
- Press your lower legs back so you can see your toes when you look down.
- Drop your tailbone, firm your front ribs inward, and lift your arms up shoulder-

width apart.

- Keep your shoulders relaxed in their sockets and rotate the outer edges of your arms inward to broaden your upper back.
- Gaze upward.
- Keep your front ribs in.
- Press your shin bones back.
- Keep your weight in your heels.
- Relax the base of your shoulders.

VARIATIONS: [Palms](#) | [Thumbs](#) | [Forearms](#)

Chair (*Utkatasana*)

VARIATION

Palms



- Firm your upper, outer arms in.
- Relax the base of your neck.

[Main Pose](#)

Chair (*Utkatasana*)

VARIATION
Thumbs



- Lock your thumbs, then try to pull them apart.
- Straight arms.
- Triceps hug in.

[Main Pose](#)

Chair (*Utkatasana*)

VARIATION
Forearms



- Draw your elbows back.

[Main Pose](#)

Revolved Chair (*Parivrtta Utkatasana*)



- Begin in [Chair](#). Swing your left elbow or tricep to the right and lay it on your right thigh.
- Press your palms together, pointing your right elbow up toward the ceiling.
- Keep your hips even and revolve your chest open by pulling your right shoulder back.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your knees even.
- Press deep into your palms to revolve the chest.
- Extend your heart forward.

VARIATION: [Arm Extended](#)

Revolved Chair (*Parivrtta Utkatasana*)

VARIATION
Arm Extended



- Broaden your collarbone.
- Lean your upper chest back.

[Main Pose](#)

Tree (*Vrksasana*)



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Lift your right foot, bend your knee, and grab your inner ankle with your right hand.
- Bring the sole of your right foot to your left inner upper thigh. Press your foot into your thigh and your thigh into your foot.
- Engage your core and extend your arms upward, shoulder-width apart, with your arms straight and their outer edges rotated inward to broaden your upper back.
- Gaze upward to challenge your balance.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your belly engaged.
- Press your foot into your thigh.
- Keep your arms active and reaching up.

Eagle (*Garudasana*)



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Slightly bend both knees and cross your left thigh over your right thigh (like you do when you sit in a chair with your legs crossed).
- Hug your left foot to the outside of your right calf, or tuck your toes behind your calf.
- Bend both of your elbows to 90-degree angles in front of you, shift your right arm underneath your left, and join your palms together so your wrists cross.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Lift your elbows in line with your shoulders.
- Press your forearms away from your face.

VARIATION: [Fold](#)

Eagle (*Garudasana*)

VARIATION
Fold



- Press your forearms toward the ground.

[Main Pose](#)

Seated Poses

Seated poses and twists do wonders for flexibility—they release tightness in our hips and help wring the tension of the daily grind from our bodies and minds. These postures are terrific for warming up and cooling down from other sequences, too. They are most beneficial when held for at least eight breaths, and up to several minutes. Note that you should feel a sensation when attempting some of these hip-opening poses, but never knee pain—that’s a sign you’re going too deep. Whether you use a prop or take a lighter stance, modify each pose so you are not in any pain.

NEED A LITTLE HELP?

If you’re finding it difficult to reach your feet or your hamstrings are uncomfortably tight, these simple modifications with straps, blankets, and blocks can help you adjust and get used to the poses. Don’t hesitate to use support when you need it!

Comfortable Seat (*Sukasana*)



- Begin seated, and cross one lower leg in front of the other, bringing your heels under your knees and keeping your feet flexed.
- Root into your hips to lift your chest and keep your spine tall.
- Let your palms rest lightly on your knees.
- Lengthen your spine.
- Soften your shoulders.
- Relax your face.

VARIATION: [Blanket](#)

Comfortable Seat (*Sukasana*)

VARIATION
Blanket



- Soften front ribs toward your spine.

[Main Pose](#)

Staff (*Dandasana*)



- Begin seated, with your legs together and extended straight out in front of you.
- Flex your feet and root deeply into your hips to lift upward through your spine.
- Place your palms flat on the floor next to your hips, fingers forward. Hug your arms to your sides and roll your shoulders back.
- Pull your front ribs inward and your shoulder blades down.
- Gaze forward.
- Lift up your chest.
- Draw your front ribs in.
- Flex your feet.
- Press your thigh bones down.
- Keep your neck tall and even.

Seated Forward Fold (*Paschimottanasana*)



- Begin seated, with your legs together and extended straight out in front of you.
- Root into your hips and lift your chest.
- Keep your spine long and lean forward to grab the outer edges of your feet, or clasp your right wrist with your left hand.
- Inhale and extend your chest.
- Exhale and, without rounding your back, lengthen your torso over your legs.
- Relax your neck and shoulders.
- Press your thighs down and keep your feet flexed.
- Melt the base of your neck.
- Engage your core to elongate over your thighs.
- Press your thighs down.

VARIATION: [Propped Up on a Blanket](#) | [Strap over Balls of the Feet](#)

Seated Forward Fold (*Paschimottanasana*)

VARIATION

Propped Up on a Blanket



[Main Pose](#)

Seated Forward Fold (*Paschimottanasana*)

VARIATION

Strap over Balls of the Feet



- Lift your sternum.

[Main Pose](#)

Head to Knee (*Janu Sirsasana*)



- Begin seated, with your left leg straight and your right knee bent.
- Bring the sole of your right foot to rest against your left inner upper thigh. Inhale and extend your spine.
- Exhale, spin your chest over your left knee, and grab the outer edge of your left foot, or clasp your right wrist with your left hand.
- Inhale and extend your spine again.
- Exhale and fold your torso over your straight leg, bending your elbows wide and relaxing the base of your neck.

- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Roll your right ribs down.
- Melt the base of your neck.
- Keep your gaze slightly forward.
- Firm your right outer hip down.

Revolved Head to Knee (*Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana*)



- Begin in a wide-legged seated position. Bend your right knee, bringing the heel of your right foot all the way to your pelvis.
- Bring your left forearm down to the inside of your left leg and grab the inside of your left foot. Reach straight up with your right arm, spiraling your chest open.
- Rotate your right palm inward and move your top hand to your left foot, or clasp the outer edge of your foot.
- Spin your chest open and gaze up, past your right arm.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Root your right hip down.
- Revolve your right ribs back.
- Soften the base of your neck.

VARIATION: [Extended Arm](#)

Revolved Head to Knee (*Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana*)

VARIATION
Extended Arm



- Soften your bottom shoulder.

[Main Pose](#)

Seated Twist (*Marichyasana C*)



- Begin in [Staff](#). Keep your left leg straight and bend your right knee, aligning your foot, which should be flat on the floor, with your right sit bone.
- Inhale, sit up tall, and reach straight up with your left arm.
- Exhale, twist toward the right, and drop your left arm to the outside of your right thigh.
- Bend your left elbow so your fingertips point up.
- Roll your right shoulder back to broaden your chest, and keep lifting from your lower back.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Press your right thigh into your left arm.
- Lift your chest.
- Root your hips.
- Press your left thigh down.
- Flex your left foot.

TIP: Make sure in any twisting pose that your rotation comes from your upper back, not the lower. Twisting your lower back compresses your sacrum, or the base of your spine, which causes lower back pain. Stabilize your pelvis and breathe into your chest to twist from your chest and shoulders so you keep your lower back stable and happy.

VARIATIONS: [Arm Wrap](#) | [Full Wrap](#)

Seated Twist (*Marichyasana C*)

VARIATION
Arm Wrap



- Broaden your upper chest.

[Main Pose](#)

Seated Twist (*Marichyasana C*)

VARIATION
Full Wrap



- Press into all four corners of your right foot.
- Drop your right hip down, lift your chest up.

[Main Pose](#)

Seated Half-Fish (*Ardha Matsyendrasana*)



- Begin seated, with both knees bent and the soles of your feet flat on the floor.

- Keeping your left knee bent, lay its outer side on the floor and bring your foot to rest next to your right hip.
- Cross your right foot over your left knee so it rests to the outside of your left upper thigh.
- Sit tall and reach up with your left arm as you inhale.
- As you exhale, drop your left arm to the outside of your right thigh.
- Bend your left elbow.
- Place your right fingertips beside your right hip or behind your tailbone.
- Press your left arm into the outside of your right knee to spiral your chest open without moving your hips at all.
- Gaze forward or past your right shoulder.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep your right hip heavy.
- Lift your heart away from your navel.
- Roll your right shoulder back.

VARIATION: [Ashtanga Wrap](#)

Seated Half-Fish (*Ardha Matsyendrasana*)

VARIATION
Ashtanga Wrap



- Instead of bending your left elbow, keep your arm straight and move the armpit down to touch your thigh.
- Turn your arm out and reach along the front of your shin to grab your big toe.
- Rotate your back arm inward and behind you, bend your elbow, and reach for your left hip or thigh.
- Grab your left hip with your right hand.
- Clasp your outer right foot with your left hand.

[Main Pose](#)

Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend (*Upavistha Konasana*)



- Begin seated, with your legs open wide in a V.
- Flex your feet so that your knees and toes point straight up.
- Keep your pelvis rooted to the floor. Inhale and lengthen your spine.
- Exhale, keep your spine long, and walk your hands along your legs without rounding your upper back.
- Grab hold of your big toes and fold forward.
- Extend your heart.
- Keep your quads engaged.
- Press your outer hips down.
- Relax your shoulders.

VARIATIONS: [Blanket/Block](#) | [Hands Forward](#)

Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend (*Upavistha Konasana*)

VARIATION
Blanket/Block



- Keep your legs active.

[Main Pose](#)

Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend (*Upavistha Konasana*)

VARIATION
Hands Forward



- Roll your hips and tailbone down toward the ground.

[Main Pose](#)

Wide-Leg Balance (*Urdvha Upavistha Konasana*)



- Begin seated, with both knees bent and your feet flat on the floor, wider than hip-width apart.
- Grab hold of your big toes and lift both feet off the floor.
- Root into your hips to lift your spine tall, and balance on the tripod of your tailbone and sit bones.
- Begin to straighten your legs to form an upright V.
- Relax your shoulders and keep your gaze forward, or raise it upward to challenge your balance.
- Keep your core engaged.
- Lengthen your heart up away from your navel.
- Extend through your big toes.

Bound Angle (*Baddha Konasana*)



- Begin seated. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together with your toes pointing forward and your heels close to your pelvis.
- Grab hold of your feet and separate the soles like you're opening a book.
- Keep holding on to your feet as you fold forward, pulling your belly toward your feet and your head toward the floor.
- Avoid rounding your spine.
- Use your elbows to pin your legs down and help your knees come closer to the floor.
- Press your elbows into your thighs.
- Extend your heart.
- Firm your hips down.

Cow Face (*Gomukhasana*)



- Begin seated, with both knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Lower your right knee, then drag your right foot under your left knee and next to your left hip.
- Lay your left leg on top of your right leg and put your left foot by your right hip so your legs mirror one another.
- Try to stack your knees.
- Reach your left arm straight up and drop your right arm down.
- Bend both elbows, swinging the right hand up your spine until you can clasp your hands behind your back. Use a strap if you cannot reach your other hand.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Draw your left hip bone down.
- Firm your upper outer left arm in.

VARIATION: [Legs Wide](#)

Cow Face (*Gomukhasana*)

VARIATION
Legs Wide



- Keep your shins in one straight line.

[Main Pose](#)

Hero (*Virasana*)



- Sit on your lower legs and feet with your knees touching.
- Lift your hips and move your feet to just outside your hips, then lower your bottom to the floor between your feet.
- Press all 10 toes down to the floor.
- Root your hips and sit with a tall spine.
- Rest your arms on your thighs, palms down.
- Press your pinky toes into the ground.
- Firm the front ribs in.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Keep your knees close or touching.

VARIATIONS: [On Block](#) | [Reclined](#)

Hero (*Virasana*)

VARIATION
On Block



- Press your tailbone down into the block.

[Main Pose](#)

Hero (*Virasana*)

VARIATION
Reclined



- Lengthen your tailbone toward your knees.
- Engage and lift your lower belly.

[Main Pose](#)

Split (*Hanumanasana*)



- Start in [High Lunge](#), with your right foot forward, and place your back knee on

the ground.

- Pull your hips back to stack them over your rear knee, and wriggle your front leg forward until you can straighten it and flex your foot.
- Curl your back toes under and lift your knee, moving it back several inches.
- Wriggle your front heel forward several inches.
- Continue to switch between adjusting your front and back legs until your pelvis reaches the floor.
- Pull the hip of your front leg back and roll the hip of your rear leg forward to square your hips.
- Press all of the toes of your back foot into the floor and either keep your fingertips on the floor or stretch your arms straight up.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Roll your rear hip forward.
- Press the pinky toe of your back foot down.
- Flex your front foot.

VARIATION: [With Blocks](#)

Split (*Hanumanasana*)

VARIATION
With Blocks



- Keep your lower belly engaged.
- Draw your right thigh bone in toward the socket.

[Main Pose](#)

Single Pigeon



- Begin in [Downward Facing Dog](#). Step your right leg forward and slide your foot toward your left, working to get your shin parallel to the front of the mat.
- Keep your back leg straight as you lower your pelvis to the floor.
- Roll the outside of your right leg down by pushing into the outside edge of your foot. Even out your hips.
- Keep your front foot flexed.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Roll your left hip down toward the ground.
- Press the pinky toe of your back leg down into the ground.
- Square your hips.

VARIATIONS: [Fold](#) | [Block](#)

Single Pigeon

VARIATION

Fold



- Roll your left ribs down toward the ground.

[Main Pose](#)

Single Pigeon

VARIATION
Block



[Main Pose](#)

Double Pigeon



- Begin in [Comfortable Seat](#). Stack your right lower leg on top of your left so your right heel rests on your thigh directly above your left knee, while your right knee is stacked on top of your flexed left foot.
- Sit up tall and hold for 8 breaths (or up to 5 minutes).
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep both feet flexed.

VARIATION: [Fold](#)

Double Pigeon

VARIATION
Fold



- Root your hips down.
- Walk your hands forward, and lower your face to the floor.

[Main Pose](#)

Thread the Needle



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Place your left ankle just above your right knee, on your quad.
- Rotate your hip open by gently pressing your left knee away from you.
- Loop your left arm through the gap between your thighs and clasp your right lower leg just below your knee.
- Move your right hand opposite your left and interlace your fingers.
- Pull your legs toward you to intensify the stretch.
- Use your left elbow to push your right thigh toward your head to get even more sensation.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Press your left elbow into your thigh to deepen the stretch.
- Relax your shoulders and head.

Happy Baby (*Ananda Balasana*)



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet raised so the soles are facing toward the ceiling.
- Open your legs slightly wider than hip-width apart and grab the insides of your heels.
- Gently pull down on your heels to help bring your thighs closer to the floor beside your chest.
- Keep your hips heavy and your tailbone extended forward.
- Relax your shoulders and keep your head down.
- Keep your tailbone heavy.
- Relax your shoulders.

Simple Spinal Twist



- Lie on your back and hug both of your knees to your chest.
- Open your arms wide and, keeping your knees bent and together, drop them over to your right side.
- Push your left shoulder down as you elongate your lower back and turn your head slightly to the left.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Melt your left shoulder toward the ground.
- Reach your tailbone away from your chest.

Inversions

These poses may look intimidating at first, but you can master them. The only way to be comfortable with balance is by letting go and being okay with falling down. Recognize that this isn't "messing up"—it's part of the learning process. Practice with dedication, and these poses will start to get easier. Soon you'll start to feel like a superhero!

NEED A LITTLE HELP?

If you are having trouble lifting or supporting your body when you flip upside down, practice all of these inversions against a wall for support.

Dolphin (*Makarasana*)



- Begin on all fours. Place your forearms on the mat, shoulder-width apart.
- Curl your toes under and lift your hips up.
- Straighten your legs and walk as far as you can toward your hands, keeping your shoulders directly over your elbows.
- Relax your neck and gaze just slightly forward.
- Firm your upper outer arms in.
- Press all 10 knuckles down evenly.
- Draw your front ribs in.
- Relax your base of your neck.

TIP: This is the ultimate preparation for inversions. It builds strength and flexibility in the upper back and hip flexors. Start by holding it for 5 breaths and work up to a solid 20. Once you feel comfortable in Dolphin, then you can start working on full inversions at the wall.

Headstand (*Sirsasana*)



- Begin on all fours. Interlace all of your fingers, tucking your bottom pinky finger in so it rests in front of your other pinky finger.
- Keep enough space between your palms so a billiard ball could fit inside them.
- Keep your fingers laced and put your hands down on the mat, keeping your wrists firm and not splayed open.
- Place the crown of your head directly behind the heels of your hands, but do not hold your head. Curl your toes under, lift your knees up, and walk your feet in toward your face.
- Bring one knee to your chest and lightly hop with the other foot to bring that leg into the same position. (You will look like you're doing a cannonball dive.) • Straighten your legs up toward the ceiling, lifting with your shoulders, pressing your forearms into the floor, pulling your front ribs inward, and lifting with your tailbone.

VARIATION: [Headstand Against Wall](#)

Headstand (*Sirsasana*)

VARIATION

Headstand Against Wall



[Main Pose](#)

Tripod Headstand (*Sirsasana B*)



- Beginning on all fours, lower the crown of your head to the floor.
- Place your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart, so your elbows form a 90-degree angle and stack over your wrists.
- Curl your toes under, lift your knees, and straighten your legs.
- Walk your feet in toward your face.
- Place your right knee on your right triceps and then place your left knee on your left tricep.
- Engage your core and lift your hips up over your shoulders as you lift your legs straight up into your headstand.
- Keep your elbows in, shoulders lifted, front ribs in, tailbone up, and legs engaged and reaching for the ceiling.
- Pull your elbows in.
- Pull in your ribs, as if in a corset.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.

- Hug your thighs together.
- Spread your toes.
- Lift your shoulders away from your ears.

VARIATION: [Tripod Headstand Against Wall](#)

Tripod Headstand (*Sirsasana B*)

VARIATION

Tripod Headstand Against Wall



- Flex your feet.
- Lift your tailbone toward your heels.

[Main Pose](#)

Forearm Balance (*Pincha Mayurasana*)



- Begin in [Dolphin](#).
- Walk your feet in toward your elbows as much as you can without collapsing into your shoulders.
- Keep your shoulders above your elbows and lift your dominant leg straight up in the air.

- Bend your other knee and push upward to stack your hips over your shoulders.
- Bring both legs together as you extend them straight up.
- Keep your gaze slightly forward (toward the floor) to protect your neck.
- Spread your toes.
- Press into your elbows.
- Draw your shoulders back to stack over your elbows.
- Press all 10 knuckles down.
- Pull your ribs in.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.

VARIATION: [Forearm Balance Against Wall](#)

Forearm Balance (*Pincha Mayurasana*)

VARIATION

Forearm Balance Against Wall



- Your fingertips should touch the wall.
- Lift your tailbone toward your heels.

[Main Pose](#)

Scorpion (*Vrischika*)



- Begin in [Forearm Balance](#). Soften your chest muscles and shift your upper chest forward through the gateway of your arms as you simultaneously bend both of your knees.
- Keep your knees hip-width apart and the insides of your feet touching.
- Extend your gaze and lift your chin as you lower your feet by engaging your hamstrings to bend your knees further.
- Balance the extension of your chest with the bend in your knees to help you maintain your balance.
- Broaden your collarbone.
- Melt your chest.
- Bend your knees.

VARIATION: [Legs at Wall](#)

Scorpion (*Vrischika*)

VARIATION
Legs at Wall



- Begin in [Forearm Balance](#) with your feet touching a wall and your fingers facing a wall 1 foot away.
- Soften your chest muscles and lift your gaze toward the wall.
- Bend one knee and touch the wall with the tips of your toes.
- Do the same with the second leg, and align your feet so your big toes touch and your knees are hip-width apart.
- Continue to extend your chest toward the wall and gently lift as you walk your feet down it, pressing them into it to help open your chest.
- Press your toes into the wall from 5 inches to 1 foot away.
- Gaze forward.

[Main Pose](#)

Handstand (*Adho Mukha Vrksasana*)



- Begin in [Downward Facing Dog](#). Shift your shoulders forward over your wrists and walk your feet several inches toward your hands.
- Lift your dominant leg up in the air and keep your gaze slightly past your fingertips.
- Keep your arms straight and firm your upper, outer arms to prevent buckling.
- Bend your other leg and begin hopping it forward to shift your hips up over your shoulders.
- Once your hips are over your shoulders, pull the second leg up to meet the other at the top.
- Press all 10 knuckles down.
- Spread your toes.
- Firm your upper, outer arms in.

- Straight arms.
- Engage your quads.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.
- Pull your ribs in.

VARIATION: [Handstand Against Wall](#)

Handstand (*Adho Mukha Vrksasana*)

VARIATION

Handstand Against Wall



- Your fingertips should be 5 inches from the wall.
- Your legs should be together.
- Flex your feet as you draw them up.

[Main Pose](#)

Handstand Scorpion



- Begin in [Handstand](#). Soften your chest muscles and shift your upper chest forward, through your arms, to broaden your upper chest.
- Lift your chin and your gaze.
- Bend both legs, keeping your knees hip-width apart and the insides of your feet touching.
- Lower your feet closer to your head by bending your knees further.
- Keep lifting your tailbone, and balance the extension of your chest with the bend in your knees.

- Melt your chest.
- Lift your chin and your gaze.
- Spread and reach through your toes.

VARIATION: [Handstand Scorpion Against Wall](#)

Handstand Scorpion

VARIATION

Handstand Scorpion Against Wall



- Your fingertips should be between 8–18 inches from the wall.
- Press your toes into the wall.
- Your knees should be hip-width apart.

[Main Pose](#)

Plow (*Halasana*)



- Begin on your back with your arms on the floor at your sides.
- Lift your legs up and swing them into the air, bringing your hips over your shoulders and the bottoms of your toes to the floor.
- Rock the outsides of your arms toward the floor to prop yourself up on your shoulders.
- Lift your chin slightly, to lengthen your neck.
- Press your legs upward to help straighten them.
- Lift your chin.
- Firm your shoulders in.
- Press your forearms down.
- Press your quads toward your hamstrings.

Shoulder Stand (*Salamba Sarvangasana*)



- Begin in [Plow](#). Rock your shoulders and triceps under your back so that your hips are stacked directly above them.
- Bend your elbows, keeping them shoulder-width apart, and move your palms to your lower back to help support your hips when you lift them.
- Bring both legs straight up in the air so that your heels, knees, hips, and shoulders are in one straight line.
- Walk your hands down your back, closer to the floor, to help elevate your hips.
- Keep a slight lift in your chin and gaze toward your navel.
- Firm your upper arms and elbows in.
- Lift your chin.
- Press into your back to lift your hips.
- Spread your toes.

VARIATIONS: [Supported](#) | [With Block](#)

Shoulder Stand (*Salamba Sarvangasana*)

VARIATION

Supported



- Keep shoulders on blanket but rest your head on the ground.
- Fold 2 blankets into quarters and stack.

[Main Pose](#)

Shoulder Stand (*Salamba Sarvangasana*)

VARIATION

With Block



- Rest hips completely on the block.
- Keep thighs together.
- Rest and extend upwards through the toes.
- Stack block the tall way under the lower back.

[Main Pose](#)

Arm Balances

Along with inversions, arm balances bring magic back into our lives as well as shape and tone our shoulders and core. You don't need a gymnastic background or superhero strength to do these! You just need patience and a drive to keep going. These balance postures

teach us how to cultivate focus and trust. They are the perfect blend of strength and alignment, reminding us that we possess all the tools we need to succeed—and have fun doing it!

Alice: "This is impossible."
The Mad Hatter: "Only if you believe it is."
—Alice in Wonderland

Crow (*Bakasana*)



- Squat with your knees spread wide and the insides of your feet touching.
- Put your arms between your legs and walk your hands forward until your arms are straight.
- Lower your chest to the level of your thighs.
- Hold this position as you walk your hands back toward you and hug your upper arms as high up as possible with your knees.
- Lift your hips up and lean forward so you can stack your elbows directly over your wrists.
- Keep your gaze level and pull one heel up toward your bottom.
- Keep hugging your elbows with your knees to help hold your weight as you pull your second foot up off the floor.
- Pull your heels tight toward your bottom, and round your upper back.
- Round your upper back.
- Hug your forearms in.
- Pull your heels toward your bottom.

VARIATIONS: [Straight Arms](#) | [Block](#)

Crow (*Bakasana*)

VARIATION
Straight Arms



- Press your palms deeply into the ground.
- Round your upper back.

[Main Pose](#)

Crow (*Bakasana*)

VARIATION
Block



- Keep your gaze forward.
- Stack your elbows over your wrists.

[Main Pose](#)

Side Crow (*Parsva Bakasana*)



- Begin in a squat with your knees together, balancing on the balls of your feet. Twist your torso toward your right, taking your left arm to the outside of your right thigh. Work your arm down your thigh to deepen the twist.
- Place your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart, so your fingers point away from you.
- Lift your hips slightly and lean forward to bring your elbows over your wrists.
- Keep your gaze level as you bend your elbows more.

- Keeping your legs together, sweep your feet off the floor until your lower legs are parallel with the floor.
- Round your upper back and press inward with your forearms.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Firm your elbows in.
- Keep your gaze forward.
- Stack your knees.

VARIATION: [Straight Arms](#)

Side Crow (*Parsva Bakasana*)

VARIATION
Straight Arms



- Round your upper back.
- Lift shins parallel to the ground.
- Press into your palms.

[Main Pose](#)

Side Plank I (*Vasisthasana*)



- Begin in [Plank](#). Bring your left palm to the center of your mat and roll onto the outer edge of your left foot. Stack your right foot on top of your left.
- Press deeply into your left palm to bring your shoulder away from your earlobe, and stack your right shoulder directly above your left.
- Engage your obliques by lifting and stacking your hips.
- Extend your right arm straight up, and gaze sideways or upward.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Firm your bottom shoulder in and down your back.
- Stack your hips.
- Stack your shoulders.

Side Plank II (*Vasisthasana II*)



- Begin in [Side Plank](#), with your right hand on the mat.
- Lift your left leg off your right and bring your knee tightly into your chest.
- Hook your left big toe with your left thumb and index or middle finger.
- Straighten your left leg toward the ceiling as you press your right foot into the floor.
- Root the inside of your right foot into the floor to help you lift your hips until the top leg is completely straight.
- Gaze upward at your left foot and keep your right arm straight, with your shoulder away from your ear and your outer upper arm firming inward for support.
- Press the inside edge of your bottom foot down.
- Lift your hips.
- The upper, outer portion of your support arm should be firm.

VARIATION: [Tree](#)

Side Plank II (*Vasisthasana II*)

VARIATION

Tree (*Vrksasana*)



- Starting from Side Plank II, bend your left leg and rest the sole of your foot on your inner thigh. Your left toes will point toward your right foot and your left heel toward your pelvis.
- Press your right thigh and the sole of your left foot into each other to create traction.
- Lift your hips and work the inside edge of your right foot into the floor.
- Lift your gaze up.
- Press your bottom thigh up into the sole of your upper foot.

[Main Pose](#)

Flying Pigeon (*Eka Pada Galavasana*)



- Start in [Mountain](#). Lift your right foot and cross your ankle above your left knee so the lifted foot is flexed and hanging just to the outside of your left thigh.
- Bend your left leg, bringing your weight into your heel as you hinge forward from your hips and extend your torso.
- Place both palms flat on the floor in front of you, shoulder-width apart.
- Lean your right shin onto your triceps, locking your right foot around the outside of your left arm.
- Gaze forward and bend your elbows as you wriggle your left foot backward until your elbows are at 90-degree angles over your wrists.
- Lift your left foot off the floor and round your upper back.
- Extend your lifted leg behind you as if you are pushing something away. Spread your toes.
- Lock your right toes around your left arm.
- Round your upper back.
- Engage your entire length of your extended leg.
- Spread your toes.

VARIATION: [Blocks](#)

Flying Pigeon (*Eka Pada Galavasana*)

VARIATION
Blocks



- Round your back.
- Lean forward.
- Blocks on low or medium height.

[Main Pose](#)

Arm Pressure Balance (*Bhujapidasana*)



- Begin in [Standing Forward Fold](#), with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart.
- Bend both of your knees slightly and drop your torso down into a fold, hugging your thighs around your arms.
- Grab hold of your right calf with your right hand. Push into your calf to help bring your shoulder behind the calf, as if you were trying to put a backpack strap over your shoulder. Repeat on the left side.
- Once you can't snuggle any deeper into your fold, place your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart, fingertips facing forward.
- Sink your hips as if you are going to sit on your arms.
- Lift your heels and then your toes, and cross your ankles.
- Squeeze your arms straight and round your upper back. (This is the pressure aspect of the pose.)
- Hug your arms in.
- Squeeze your thighs around your arms.
- Round your upper back.

Firefly (*Tittibhasana*)



- Begin in [Standing Forward Fold](#), with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart.
- Bend both of your knees slightly, dropping your torso into a forward fold, and wrap your legs around your arms.
- Grab hold of your right calf with your right hand and push into the calf to help bring the shoulder behind the calf, as if you were trying to put a backpack strap over your shoulders. Repeat on the left side.
- Once you can't snuggle any deeper into your fold, place your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart, fingertips facing forward. Sink your hips as if you are going to sit on your arms.
- Keep your gaze forward and lift your heels first, and then your toes.
- Continue to drop your hips toward your wrists as you squeeze your inner thighs around your arms to hold on.
- Straighten your arms and your legs, reaching for the sky with your feet.
- Broaden your upper chest by rolling your shoulders back as your thighs continue to hug your arms.
- Firm your forearms in.
- Broaden your collarbone.
- Lift your heart.
- Lift your gaze.
- Hug your thighs in around your arms.
- Spread your toes.

VARIATION: [Parallel Legs](#)

Firefly (*Tittibhasana*)

VARIATION

Parallel Legs



- Use the same entry pose, but instead of dropping your hips toward your wrists, keep your hips elevated so your legs are parallel with the floor.
- Round your back powerfully as you straighten your legs, and hug your arms with your inner thighs.
- Spread your toes and keep your gaze forward.
- Hug your thighs in.
- Round your back.

[Main Pose](#)

Backbends

Backbends strengthen and lengthen your entire spine and its supportive muscles and help open your hips. They're also proven endorphin-makers that allow us to open our chests and hearts. These postures help chip away at years of built-up tension in your upper back, tone your core, and improve your balance and energy.

It's important to know that you don't have to be super limber to do a backbend—you just need a good sense of alignment and patience. These poses are incredibly freeing, so go to a depth that allows space into your body and learn how to balance strength without pushing your limits.

TIPS

- Feel lower back pain when you backbend? Don't let your lower back stick out—keep your lower belly engaged and drop your tailbone down as you go into your pose. Curl your upper body and keep the base of your spine solid!
- Feel a literal pain in the neck? Don't worry about looking all the way up in your backbends. Keep your neck even on all sides and let the lifting action come from your heart. Avoid contracting in the base of your neck. Lift your chest and soften your upper back.

Cobra (*Bhujangasana*)



- Begin by lying on your belly with your legs hip-width apart.
- Place your palms flat on the floor next to your ribs, with your elbows slightly in front of your wrists.
- Press all 10 toes into the floor and engage your legs, rotating your inner thighs up to broaden your lower back, and keeping your bottom relaxed.
- Press into your palms to lift your head and chest, bringing your ribs and belly off the floor.
- Keep your arms bent as you draw back the tops of your shoulders to broaden your upper chest.
- Draw your upper chest through the gateway of your arms and lift your gaze forward or upward.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Lift your lower belly.
- Press all 10 toes down.
- Engage your quads.

Upward Facing Dog (*Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*)



- Begin by lying on your belly with your legs hip-width apart.
- Place your palms flat on the floor next to your ribs, with your elbows over your wrists.
- Press all 10 toes into the floor and engage your legs, rotating your inner thighs up to broaden your lower back, and keeping your bottom relaxed.
- Press into both of your palms to lift everything off the floor except for the tops of your feet and your palms.
- Drop your hips and keep your legs straight as you lift your chest straight up.
- Roll your shoulders back and draw your chest through the gateway of your arms.
- Keep your arms straight, distributing your weight equally among all of your fingers.
- Gaze forward or upward.
- Shrug your shoulders back.
- Lift your sternum up.
- Relax your glutes.
- Roll your upper inner thighs up, outer thighs down.
- Press into all 10 toes.

Locust (*Salabhasana*)



- Begin by lying on your belly with your legs hip-width apart and your arms flat along your sides, palms up.
- Press all 10 toes into the floor and engage your legs, rotating your inner thighs up to broaden your lower back, and keeping your bottom relaxed.
- Engage your core and press your abs and the tops of your hands into the floor to lift your chest and legs. (The key is to lift your chest and legs to the same height.) • Reach back with your toes as if they are trying to grab something and roll your shoulders back to help elevate your chest.
- Roll your shoulders back.
- Press your knuckles down into the ground.
- Extend your legs straight.
- Spread your toes.

VARIATION: [With Cobra Arms](#)

Locust (*Salabhasana*)

VARIATION

With Cobra Arms



- Keep shoulders in line with your feet.

[Main Pose](#)

Bow (*Dhanurasana*)



- Begin by lying on your belly.
- Bend both of your knees and grab the outer edges of your feet or ankles with your thumbs down.
- Keep your knees and feet hip-width apart as you press your lower legs backward to lift your chest.
- Keep powering your thighs upward and pressing your abs into the mat to help elevate your chest.
- Use your arms to help you lift your knees and thighs off the floor.
- Press your shin bones back.

- Lift your quads.
- Press your core down to lift.

Camel (*Ustrasana*)



- Begin by kneeling with your knees and feet hip-width apart and the tops of your feet flat on the floor.
- Keep your pelvis over your knees, your tailbone down, and your lower belly lifted.
- Bring your hands to your heart in the prayer position (anjali mudra), roll your shoulders back, and hug your elbows in.
- Curl your chest open by leaning back, but keep your hips over your knees.
- When you can't curl your chest back any farther, release your arms and grab your heels.
- Relax your head and open your throat.
- Relax your glutes.
- Roll your upper inner thighs back.
- Keep your pelvis over your knees.
- Lift your heart.
- Relax your throat.

VARIATION: [Toes Curled Under](#)

Camel (*Ustrasana*)

VARIATION

Toes Curled Under



- Grab your heels or try to touch them with your fingertips.

[Main Pose](#)

Bridge (*Setu Bandha Sarvangasana*)



- Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Lift your hips off the floor and interlace your fingers beneath your lower back.
- Rock your shoulders under your chest and press into your feet to lift your hips

up toward the height of your knees.

- Keep a slight lift in your chin and allow your bottom to be soft.
- Your knees should stay in line with your hips as you rotate your inner upper thighs downward to broaden your lower back.
- Keep your knees hip-width apart.
- Press your shoulders down.
- Curl your chest.
- Lift your chin.

VARIATION: [Supported Bridge](#)

Bridge (*Setu Bandha Sarvangasana*)

VARIATION

Supported Bridge



- Relax your hips.
- Keep your toes in line with your heels.

[Main Pose](#)

Upward Facing Bow (*Urdhva Dhanurasana*)



- Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Place your hands, palms down, fingers toward you, just beyond your shoulders.
- Lift your hips and head up and lightly place the crown of your head on the mat.
- Hug your elbows in, as they have a tendency to splay out, and draw your shoulders into their sockets to prevent collapsing into your chest.
- Curl your upper chest backward. Straighten your arms and lift your head off the floor.
- Walk your feet in toward your hands and bring your shoulders near to or over your wrists, or as close to it as possible.
- Raise onto the balls of your feet to help you lift your pelvis.
- Draw your tailbone toward your knees to lengthen your lower back.
- Keep your hips at this height as you sink your heels back onto the mat.
- Firm your outer upper arms inward and rotate your inner upper thighs downward.
- Press your shin bones back.
- Keep your feet parallel.
- Firm your upper outer arms in.
- Lengthen your tailbone towards your knees.
- Roll your upper inner thighs down.

VARIATION: [Blocks at Wall](#)

Upward Facing Bow (*Urdhva Dhanurasana*)

VARIATION

Blocks at Wall



- Angle the blocks against a wall.
- Keep your feet parallel.

[Main Pose](#)

Wild Thing (*Camatkarasana*)



- Begin in [Downward Facing Dog](#). Lift your right leg up into the air and rotate your hip open as you bend your knee.

- Pivot toward the outside edge of your left foot as you spiral your chest and pelvis to face the ceiling.
- Drop your right foot onto the floor behind you, landing on your foot or just the ball of your foot for a deeper bend.
- Arch your chest and lift your right arm up. Extend it forward, with its inner side turning toward the floor.
- Lift your hips and let your head hang.
- Roll your top palm down to face the ground.
- Press into all five toes of your left foot.
- Release your neck.

King Dancer (*Natarajasana*)



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Place your left hand on your hip.
- Bend your right knee and raise it behind you. Grab the outside of your right

foot at the toes with your right hand, palm up.

- Work your fingers across your toes until you are also holding the big-toe side of your foot.
- Lift your thigh and rotate your right elbow outward, upward, and then in, so it points toward the ceiling.
- Keep your standing leg straight and lift your left arm straight up. Bend your left elbow to reach back and grab your right foot.
- Once you have the foot in both hands, continue to lift your chest as you engage your right quad by pressing your lower leg away from you and elevating your thigh.
- Repeat on the opposite side.
- Press your foot back.
- Keep your chest upright.
- Square your hips. Drop your left hip so it's level with your right.
- Keep your standing leg straight.

VARIATION: [With a Strap](#)

King Dancer (*Natarajasana*)

VARIATION
With a Strap



- Begin in [Mountain](#). Make a loop big enough to hold your forefoot and place it around your left foot.
- Keep your left hand on your hip for balance and use your right hand to hold the strap as close to the foot as you comfortably can, palm up.
- Rotate your elbow outward, upward, and in as you lift your thigh away from the floor.
- Lift your left arm straight up, bend your elbow, and grab the strap with your left hand.
- Press your foot against the strap and lift your thigh.
- Walk your hands down the strap as you continue to press back on it, until you eventually reach your foot.

[Main Pose](#)

Core

Yoga in general is full of core-strengthening moves, but these poses cut straight to the chase. Most core work in yoga has the added benefit of toning and strengthening the shoulders and upper back, as well. (Warning: Practicing these postures on a regular basis may make you feel strong, confident, and sexy. Continue at your own fabulous risk!)

TIP

Feel pain in your lower back during core work? Keep a slight bend in your knees in poses such as Boat and feel free to prop your self onto your forearms behind your back if you're doing any leg-lowering action.

Boat (*Paripurna Navasana*)



- Start seated, with your knees bent.
- Keeping your spine long, lean back just far enough so your feet can float off the ground.
- Begin to straighten your legs together, making a V shape. Keep your arms extending forward and parallel to the ground.
- Stay balanced on the tripod of your tailbone and sit bones, chest lifted and gaze forward.
- Lift your lower back.
- Keep arms straight and extending forward.
- Hug your inner thighs.
- Spread your toes.

VARIATION: [With Bent Knees](#)

Boat (*Paripurna Navasana*)

VARIATION

With Bent Knees



- Keep your shins parallel to the ground.
- Keep your legs pressed together.

[Main Pose](#)

Half Boat (*Ardha Navasana*)



- Begin in [Boat](#).

- Lower your body until your legs and chest hover above the ground in almost a straight line.
- Keep your shoulder blades off of the mat and hug your thighs together.
- Extend your arms and keep your gaze forward.
- Hover your shoulder blades above the ground.
- Hug your thighs together.
- Gaze at your toes.
- Reach with your arms.

Plank



- Begin on all fours with your arms straight and shoulders stacked over your wrists, palms flat.
- Curl your toes under and step both feet back until your legs are straight and hip-width apart.
- Bring your shoulders, hips, and heels into one straight line, with your core and quads engaged.
- Firm the upper, outer edges of your arms in to release the base of your neck and extend your chest, and distribute the weight on your knuckles evenly.
- Gaze slightly past your fingertips.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.
- Extend your heart and gaze forward.
- Keep your core engaged.

Forearm Plank



- Begin on all fours with your forearms parallel to one another and shoulder-width apart on the floor.
- Curl your toes under and step both feet back until your legs are straight and hip-width apart.
- Stack your shoulders directly over your elbows. Your shoulders, hips, and heels should all be in one straight line.
- Keep your front ribs in and tailbone extending toward your heels.
- Gaze slightly past your fingertips.
- Reach your tailbone toward your heels.
- Gaze toward your fingertips.
- Hug your shoulders in.
- Reach your hip bones toward the base of your ribs.

Pushup (*Chaturanga Dandasana*)



- Begin in [Plank](#).

- Extend your gaze forward and keep your front ribs in as you bend your elbows at 90-degree angles.
- Keep your elbows in and over your wrists, and lower your shoulders in line with your elbows.
- Keep your gaze extended and your shoulders lifted.
- Keep your upper back broad and the tips of your shoulder blades drawn down your back.
- Extend your heart.
- Draw the tips of your shoulder blades down your back.
- Stay out of your base of your neck.
- Engage your quads.

Restorative

One of the foundations of yoga is breathing. Restorative postures help to clear the clutter in our heads and restore a sense of calm. All restorative poses can be held for a good 5 minutes (or however long it feels comfortable) in order to reap the greatest benefits with your eyes closed and your mind clear. These postures are just what you need to step away from stress, recharge, loosen up, and wind down.

TIP

The more props, the merrier! Don't be afraid to start a yoga blanket collection in these poses. Grab your bolster, blankets, blocks, straps—whatever you need to make your restorative pose the most comfortable one ever.

Legs Up the Wall (*Viparita Karani*)



- Begin seated, perpendicular to a wall.
- Bend your knees and lie back on the floor.
- Pivot your torso and extend your legs up the wall so your hips and the entire length of the backs of your legs rest against the wall. (It's optional to use a strap to tie your feet together so your legs can relax even further.)
- Let your arms rest next to you, palms up, or bend your elbows at right angles.
- Soften your belly.
- Pull your shoulders away from your ears.

VARIATION: [Supported Legs Up the Wall](#)

Legs Up the Wall (*Viparita Karani*)

VARIATION

Supported Legs Up the Wall



[Main Pose](#)

Reclined Big Toe (*Supta Padangusthasana*)



PART I:

- Begin by lying on your back.
- Keep your left leg on the floor and bend your right knee, hooking your big toe with your index and middle fingers, or use a strap over the ball of your foot.
- Straighten your right leg up toward the ceiling, keeping your foot over your hip.
- Relax your right shoulder to the floor and lengthen your right sit bone forward.
- Hold for at least 8 breaths.
- Extend through the back of your right knee.
- Press your left thigh down.
- Relax your right shoulder.

Reclined Big Toe (*Supta Padangusthasana*)



PART II:

- Rotate your right toes outward to open your right hip to the side.
- Place your left hand on your left hip to help root it in place.
- Keep externally revolving your right hip in its socket, and take your gaze over your left shoulder or keep it neutral.
- Hold for at least 8 breaths.
- Firm your left hip down
- Roll your right heel up and toes down.

Reclined Big Toe (*Supta Padangusthasana*)



PART III:

- Draw your right leg back to center.
- Grab the outer edge of your right foot with your left hand or with a strap, and lower your right arm flat on the floor in line with your shoulder.
- Bring your right leg over to the left, letting your leg hover above the floor.
- Keep the opposite shoulder rooted toward or on the floor.
- Hold for at least 8 breaths.
- Melt your right shoulder down toward the ground.
- Press your right thigh bone away from your face.

Reclined Big Toe (*Supta Padangusthasana*)



PART IV:

- Lift your right leg back to center and grab hold of your calf or foot with both hands.
- Keep both shoulders relaxed as you gently bring your leg toward you.
- Keep your head on the floor and your right leg as straight as possible.

- Hold for at least 8 breaths.
- Repeat all four parts on the opposite side.
- Soften your shoulders.
- Flex your left foot.

Reclined Bound Angle (*Supta Baddha Konasana*)



- Begin on your back, with your knees bent wide and the soles of your feet together.
- Bring your heels as close to your pelvis as you comfortably can.
- Lift your chest and draw your shoulder blades down your back to lengthen your neck.
- Take your arms wide, with your palms facing up.
- Melt your inner thighs.

VARIATION: [With a Bolster, Two Blankets, a Strap](#)

Reclined Bound Angle (*Supta Baddha Konasana*)

VARIATION

With a Bolster, Two Blankets, and a Strap



[Main Pose](#)

Child's Pose (*Balāsana*)



- Sit on your lower legs with your knees and feet touching.
- Fold your torso over your thighs and rest your forehead on the floor.
- Lay your arms along your sides with your palms facing up.
- Completely relax your shoulders and neck.
- Roll your shoulders down.
- Melt your chest.

TIP: If this feels too tight, separate your knees hip-width apart but keep your feet touching. This will give you more space in your chest. You can also place a blanket between your heels and bottom to alleviate tightness in your hips.

Corpse (*Savasana*)



- Lie on your back.
- Let your legs and arms flop open with your palms facing up.
- Lift your chest to snuggle your shoulder blades down your back. Release all tension in your body.
- Close your eyes (or, even better, cover them with a cloth) and bring your breathing back to normal.
- Empty your mind. Take a rest.
- Draw your shoulders away from your ears.
- Palms up.
- Let your feet and legs roll open.

More Essential Poses

In addition to the traditional yoga poses in this chapter, I've added a few more that I incorporate into the sequences in this book. Some (like Windshield Wiper Abs) are designed as mini-exercises, and some (like Finger Stretches) target specific areas of concern. Feel free to use any of these in your daily routine as part of a sequence or on their own. The great thing about yoga is the ability to modify poses or incorporate other stretches and movements into your routine—making it incredibly easy to switch it up and have fun with it!

TIP

Remember, there is a variation to every pose that will suit your needs. Listen to what your body needs and drop your ego. It reminds me of this Albert Einstein quote: "Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Lower-Belly Lifts



- Lie flat on your back with both legs straight up in the air.
- Lie your arms flat next to your sides with the palms down and shoulders relaxed.
- Exhale as you lift your hips a few inches off the ground.
- Inhale as you lower back down.
- Keep your shoulders rooting down.
- Spread your toes.
- Relax your face.
- Hug your thighs together.

Windshield-Wiper Abs



- Lie flat on your back with both legs straight up in the air.
- Rest your arm straight and wide on the ground so that the palms are facing down and in line with your shoulders.
- Exhale, and keep your legs straight and together as you reach your toes toward the opposite fingers.
- Inhale to come back up to center, and then switch sides.
- Keep your shoulders heavy.
- Extend your tailbone.
- Root your opposite palm down.

Fingertips Abs



- Lie flat on your back with both legs straight up in the air.
- Keep your right leg up and lower your left leg, keeping it straight until it hovers above the ground.
- As you exhale, curl your head and chest off the ground and extend your arms forward.
- Hold this position or, if possible, join your fingertips together in front of your right hamstring.
- Curl your chest up.
- Keep both legs engaged.
- Extend through your toes.
- Lift through your chest, not neck.

Twisted Lowering Abs



- Lie flat on your back with both legs straight up in the air.
- Keep your right leg up and lower your left leg, keeping it straight until it hovers above the ground.
- As you exhale, curl your head and chest off the ground and extend your arms to the outside of your right thigh, interlacing your fingers.
- Exhale as you hold your twist and lower your top leg to meet your bottom leg.
- Inhale as you lift your right leg back up to its original position.
- Keep your right shoulderblade lifted.
- Keep your legs straight and active.

Tiny Little Package



- Lie on your back and draw both knees into your chest.
- Grab your shins, pulling your legs tight to your chest and drawing your forehead or even nose toward your knees so that your head leaves the ground.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Lift up your shoulderblades.
- Hug your legs in tight.

Gentle Seated Twist



- Begin in [Comfortable Seat](#). Place your right fingertips behind your tailbone to help prop yourself up tall.
- Reach your left wrist to the outside of your right thigh.

- Press your left wrist gently into your leg to revolve your chest open.
- Roll your right shoulder back.
- Stay even and rooted in your hips.
- Keep your spine tall.
- Twist in your upper chest, not in your lower back.

Puppy Dog



- Start on all fours with your knees hip-width apart and hands shoulder-width apart.
- Stack your hips above your knees and walk your arms out in front of you, keeping your arms straight.
- Melt your belly, chest, and throat down toward the ground.
- Hug the upper outer arms in and press into your palms.
- Gaze forward.
- Keep your hips over your knees.
- Melt your chest toward the ground.
- Bend your elbows until you can rest your forehead on the ground.

Goddess



- Start with your feet one leg's distance apart and your feet parallel.
- Rotate your heels in and toes out until your knees point in the same direction as your toes.
- Bend your knees, and drop your pelvis into a neutral position.
- Keep your arms lifted, elbows slightly bent, and palms up.
- You can add a [mudra](#) or keep your palms open.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Keep your knees in line with your toes.
- Drop your tailbone and keep your lower belly lifted.

Knee-to-Nose



- Begin in [Downward Facing Dog](#). Lift your right leg up into the air.
- Bring your shoulders over your wrists, keeping your arms straight, and draw your right knee tight into your chest.
- Try to kiss your knee as you press the ground away and round your back.
- Keep your hips in line with your shoulders.
- Draw your heel toward your bottom.
- Press the ground away.

Half Dog at Wall



- Stand facing a wall with your feet hip width apart.
- Place your palms shoulder-width apart on the wall and walk your hands down until your torso is parallel with the ground.
- Draw your front ribs in, lift your lower belly and lengthen your lower back to take any arch out.
- Press evenly into all of your knuckles as you firm the upper outer edges of your arms in and around the bone (show 'action arrows' on the picture).
- Keep the outer side of your shoulders and sides long while the inner shoulders and base of the neck relax.
- Keep your ribs pulled in.
- Roll your outer arms down and in.
- Press evenly into all 10 knuckles.

Finger Stretches



- Flip your right palm up and flex your wrist so that your fingers point down.
- Using your left hand, gently pull one finger back at a time so the nail side is folding back toward the front of the wrist.
- Pull with just enough traction to create some sensation.
- Repeat on your other hand.

VARIATION: [Anjali Mudra Regular Behind the Back](#)

Finger Stretches

VARIATION
Anjali Mudra Regular Behind the Back



- From standing, bend your elbows and press your knuckles into each other behind your back.
- Roll your hands in an upward motion until the palms flip together with the fingers pointing upward.
- Swim your hands up your spine as much as you comfortably can.
- Press the knuckles together and roll your shoulders back.

[Main Pose](#)

Faith Hunter



“Moments of playfulness and adventure are fully reflected in my yoga practice and teaching. I make every attempt to enjoy life as it comes. My practice reconnects my spirit, mind, body, and mood.”

Faith Hunter incorporates her Louisiana upbringing, modern mystical sounds, and the purity of breath into her yoga philosophy. She began practicing yoga back in the early '90s, during the time her older brother, Michael, was losing his battle with HIV/AIDS. Yoga gave Faith the tools and confidence she needed to deal with the grief and negativity surrounding her brother's death. It provided her with the internal strength to move forward in difficult times, and helped quiet her mind and keep focused on the positive aspects of life. She views everything as an opportunity to learn something new.

Yoga can be transformative, but for Faith, that didn't mean becoming a different person—it meant reminding her of who she is at her core. It helped her return to a sense of openness,

adventure, and passion. It allowed her to view her body as an extension of her heart and motivate -her to live life to the fullest.

Faith has appeared on the cover of Yoga Journal and has contributed to OmYoga & Lifestyle magazine in the UK. Faith is a social advocate, writer, and yoga podcaster, and she leads yoga teacher trainings throughout the year. She is the owner of Embrace, a yoga studio located in Washington, D.C. You can practice with Faith around the globe, or find her online at faithhunter.com.

CHAPTER 6

Total Body Yoga

A series of targeted workouts you can do in 15 minutes or less



In a perfect world, we'd have a full 90 minutes a day to explore our yoga practice, followed by a luxurious organic meal and the rest of the day free to meditate and relax. Oh, and George Clooney would be there. Well, that's called a yoga retreat—"retreat" being the key word. The reality is that we are all busy people with jobs to do, places to go, and often a crazy, jam-packed schedule. Not to mention the fact that yoga studios and retreats can cost a pretty penny!

To give you the benefit of a full session when you don't have much time, I've designed several sequences that take 15 minutes or less.

They target specific areas of the body, so you can focus on what needs the most work or where you feel you're holding stress. Once you have a good grip on the sequences, you can customize how long you hold the postures and even add your own spin by including other postures or transitions.

Get to know these routines and you'll never have to sacrifice yoga on a busy day again! No matter how much or how little time you can devote to your practice each day, you should feel accomplished every time you decide to unroll your mat. George would be proud.

15-Minute Sequences

A.M. Yoga

[Child's Pose](#)

[Puppy Dog Stretch](#)

[Downward Facing Dog](#)

[Standing Forward Fold](#)

[Standing Forward Fold with Twist](#)

[Warrior II](#)

[Reverse Warrior](#)

[Triangle](#)

[Half Moon](#)

[Standing Split](#)

[Handstand](#)

P.M. Yoga

[Shoulder Opener](#)

[Reclined Twist with Legs Together](#)

[Reclined Big Toe](#)

[Eagle Arms](#)

[Reclined Hero](#)

[Reclined Bound Angle](#)

[Legs Up the Wall](#)

Arms Sequence

[Half Dog at Wall](#)

[Downward Facing Dog](#)

[Plank](#)

[Pushup on Knees](#)

[Revolved Pushup](#)

[Pushup](#)

[Forearm Plank](#)

[Dolphin with One-Leg Lift](#)

[Side Plank](#)

[Vinyasa](#)
[Child's Pose](#)

Legs Sequences

CRESCENT SEQUENCE

[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Crescent with Arms Forward](#)
[Crescent with Arms Back](#)
[Crescent](#)
[Crescent with Straightened Front Leg](#)
[Crescent with Straightened Back Leg](#)
[Vinyasa](#)

WARRIOR SEQUENCE

[Warrior I](#)
[Warrior II](#)
[Reverse Warrior](#)
[Side Angle](#)
[Warrior II](#)
[Vinyasa](#)
[Crescent into Warrior III](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Legs Up the Wall](#)

Core Sequence

[Simple Spinal Twist](#)
[Tiny Little Package](#)
[Lower-Belly Lifts](#)
[Windshield-Wiper Abs](#)
[Boat with Bent Knees into Half Boat](#)
[Vinyasa and Jump Through to Lie Down](#)
[Fingertips Abs](#)
[Twisted Lowering Abs](#)
[Vinyasa and Jump Through to Sit](#)
[Bridge](#)
[Savasana](#)

Butt

[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Side Leg Lift](#)
[Chair](#)
[Standing Big Toe Extension, Open Hip](#)
[Revolved Chair](#)
[Flamingo](#)
[Warrior I](#)
[Vinyasa](#)
[Warrior III](#)
[Revolved Half Moon](#)
[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Double Pigeon Fold, Arms Back](#)
[Savasana](#)

A.M. Yoga

Coffee schmoffee. Kick that caffeine addiction to the curb with this energy-inducing sequence that will start your day off right. It incorporates feel-good stretches followed by strong standing poses that literally make sure you get out of bed on the right foot. A final Handstand reminds you to take on the challenges of the day with a playful, open spirit.

TIP

Start your day with a large glass of water with a fresh squeeze of lemon juice. The lemon cleanses and jump-starts your body to help you feel alert and ready to go.

1

Child's Pose



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Puppy Dog Stretch

Start with [Puppy Dog](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your arms straight.
- Press down into all 10 toes.
- Melt your chest and throat toward the ground.
- Keep your hips over your knees.

3

Downward Facing Dog



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Standing Forward Fold



[\(directions\)](#)

5

Standing Forward Fold with a Twist

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Stack your bottom shoulder over your fingertips.
- Hips should be level.
- Roll your top shoulder back, stacking it over your bottom shoulder.
- Extend your top arm above you.

6

Warrior II



[\(directions\)](#)

7

Reverse Warrior



[\(directions\)](#)

8

Triangle



[\(directions\)](#)

9

Half Moon



[\(directions\)](#)

10

Standing Split



[\(directions\)](#)

11

Handstand



[\(directions\)](#)

12

Vinyasa



[\(directions\)](#)

Repeat the entire sequence starting with [Step 6](#).

P.M. Yoga

Can I tempt you with a yoga nightcap? After you've performed these poses, slip into your pj's and prepare yourself for

blissful sleep. This sequence releases lower-back tension, opens your hips after long hours on your feet, and melts your upper back to lift the weight of the day off your shoulders. Focus on relaxing your breathing and letting go of the day's agenda. If you're looking for deeper relaxation, try holding steps 5, 6, and 7 for 5–10 minutes each.

TIP

Hold the last two poses for at least 5 minutes each. Try placing an eye pillow over your eyes or a cool towel over your face to help you relax and find calm. For pure bliss, soak a towel in water and sprinkle a few drops of lavender oil before placing it on your face.

1

Shoulder Opener

Start with [Reclined Bound Angle](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place a block at a high height under your head.
- Place a block at medium height and wide under your shoulderblades.

2

Reclined Twist with Legs Together

Start with [Simple Spinal Twist](#), then make this adjustment.



- Let both shoulders melt into the ground.

3

Reclined Big Toe



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Eagle Arms

Start seated cross legged with [Eagle](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your spine long.

5

Reclined Hero

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Reclined Bound Angle



[\(directions\)](#)

7

Legs Up the Wall



[\(directions\)](#)

Arms Sequence

Yoga helps to calm the mind and spirit, but it also creates absolutely gorgeous arms! Many of the postures here help build your strength in the upper back and shoulders without adding bulk. The result is long, lean muscles that match your body type and will give you so much confidence you'll only ever want to wear sleeveless dresses.

TIP

Every day is different. Don't tackle your yoga practice with the same vigor every day, make sure you adjust the poses and modify them to fit your mood, both physically and mentally. If you feel strong—go for it! Add extra holds and challenging variations. But if you're tired or feeling weak, don't be afraid to modify them. You can always practice Plank and Pushup with your knees on the floor for additional support. Know when holding back is the strong choice.

1

Half Dog at Wall



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Downward Facing Dog



[\(directions\)](#)

3

Plank



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Pushup on Knees

Start with Pushup, then make these adjustments.



- Drop your knees to the ground.
- Cross your ankles.
- Engage your lower belly.

5

Revolved Pushup

Start with [Pushup](#), then make these adjustments.



- Fingertips spin in toward a 45-degree angle.
- Elbows bend wide.

6

Pushup



[\(directions\)](#)

7

Forearm Plank



[\(directions\)](#)

8

Dolphin with One-Leg Lift

Start with [Dolphin](#), then make these adjustments.



- Spread your toes.
- Lift one leg high, then repeat on the other side.

9

Side Plank



[\(directions\)](#)

10

Vinyasa



[\(directions\)](#)

11

Child's Pose



[\(directions\)](#)

VINYASA FLOW

“Vinyasa” translates as “the connection of breath to movement.” In vinyasa flow yoga, the vinyasa is a series of postures linked together to help build and maintain heat. In the sequences in this chapter, the vinyasa is the linking of Plank into Pushup, lifting into either Cobra or Upward Facing Dog and then pulling the hips back into Downward Facing Dog. This is a mini-sequence that can be repeated anywhere from once or twice to 30 times per session. Vinyasa will get you strong and flexible fast, but make sure you’re not rushing through it or collapsing your shoulders and lower back. Pay attention to your alignment, and always connect your breath to the movement. If you lose your breath and decide to keep going, it might still be a workout—but it’s no longer yoga.

Tips for a Perfect Vinyasa

- Keep your gaze forward in Plank and Pushup. This will help you extend your chest and keep your back flat. You want to avoid any rounding in your upper back, which stresses out your trapezius muscles.
- Keep your elbows tight against your ribs in Pushup, and engage your lower belly before you lower. This will help if you have lower-back pain or a hyperflexible lower spine.
- Don’t let your shoulders dip below the height of your elbows in Pushup. Keep resisting the lowering with your shoulders so you don’t wear out your shoulder joints.
- Look up with your eyes, instead of with your entire head, in Cobra and Upward Facing Dog. This will help you relax the base of your neck. Remember, lifting your chest doesn’t also mean lifting your shoulders! Avoid the “turtleneck” syndrome: Keep your shoulders down and away from your earlobes, and let your sternum do the lifting. This will feel much better.

Legs Sequences

All standing poses can bring on a major burn, depending on how long you choose to hold them. Both of these sequences work your quads and glutes, creating strong, lean legs. You can do them separately or combine for an extra workout. To maximize your leg work in a limited time, I’ve linked together the Warrior I, Warrior II, Reverse Warrior, and Side Angle poses. Try doing them for 5 breaths at a time at first. Eventually increase the hold to 8 breaths, and then to 2 minutes.

If you’re looking to add more movement, hold each pose for 1 breath, linking them in this order: Warrior I, Warrior II, Reverse Warrior, Side Angle. At the end of these four poses, add a vinyasa sequence and repeat on the opposite side. This is called a Dancing

Warrior sequence.

CHILD'S POSE TIP



Feel free to take a break in Child's Pose throughout your practice, whenever you lose your breath or feel overworked. Take 5–8 breaths in this pose, then move back into your sequence.

Crescent Sequence



1

Downward Facing Dog



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Crescent with Arms Forward

Start with [Crescent](#), then make these adjustments. Hold for 5 breaths.



- Keep arms alongside your ears.
- Relax the base of your neck.
- Your belly should hover above your thigh.
- Keep your core engaged.

3

Crescent with Arms Back

Start with [Crescent](#), then make these adjustments. Hold for 5 breaths.



- Keep arms alongside your hips with palms facing in.
- Keep your weight in your heel.
- Extend through heel.

4

Crescent

[\(directions\)](#) Hold for 5 breaths.



5

Crescent with Straightened Front Leg

Start with [Crescent](#), then make these adjustments. Repeat 5 times.



- Press into your front heel.
- Engage your front quad.
- Keep your tailbone neutral.

6

Crescent with Straightened Back Leg

Start with [Crescent](#), then make these adjustments. Repeat 5 times.



- Keep your hips centered.
- Drop your back knee until your shin is parallel to the ground then straighten.

7

Vinyasa



[\(directions\)](#)

Repeat the [entire sequence](#), on the opposite side.

Warrior Sequence

1

Warrior I



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Warrior II



[\(directions\)](#)

3

Reverse Warrior



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Side Angle



[\(directions\)](#)

5

Warrior II



[\(directions\)](#)

6

Vinyasa



[\(directions\)](#)

Repeat the sequence starting with [step 1](#) on opposite side, then continue to [step 7](#).

7

Crescent into Warrior III

([crescent directions](#) | [warrior directions](#))



Repeat on each side and hold for 5 breaths.

8

Standing Forward Fold



[\(directions\)](#)

Legs Up the Wall



[\(directions\)](#)

Core Sequence

Let's face it—we all want the benefits of a strong core and bikini-worthy abs, without all the pain of the workouts that create them! Unfortunately, there's no way around it: Strong core work requires effort, so pack your sense of humor for this one. Pretend you're a ninja as you move through this sequence and you'll get through it in no time—strong, calm, quiet, and slick! Remember that sexy abs are strong and confident, so own your hard-won shape—that's hot.

TIP

Don't rush! The goal here isn't to see how many reps you can pump out in a short amount of time. This often leads to bad posture, poor alignment, and often, injury. Take the time to breathe and make your movements thoughtful and precise. You'll burn more energy and target exactly where you want to tone up and tighten.

1

Simple Spinal Twist



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Tiny Little Package



[\(directions\)](#)

3

Lower-Belly Lifts



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Windshield-Wiper Abs



[\(directions\)](#)

5

Boat with Bent Knees into Half Boat

([boat with bent knees directions](#) | [half boat directions](#)) Hold for 5 breaths. Repeat 5 times.



6

Vinyasa and Jump Through to Lie Down

([vinyasa directions](#) | [jump through to sit directions](#))



JUMPING THROUGH TO SIT

Vinyasa can be used to link standing or seated postures. When you perform vinyasa in seated postures, you'll want to jump through to a seated position instead of stepping forward into a posture. Learning this transition takes practice, flexibility, and patience. Depending on your body type you may get it on the first try or have a lifelong project ahead of you. The good news is, there are some tricks! Grab two blocks and unroll your mat.

Have you ever seen a duck land in water? Right before they come in for the landing they stick their little webbed heels out in front of them so they land heels first. This technique creates a splashless and graceful landing. Jumping through to sit is similar, so channel your best impersonation of a duck and give it a go!

Come into Downward Facing Dog with your hands on blocks set up at the low height shoulder-width apart so you can land your hips between them. Step your feet together and look way past your hands to where your feet will eventually land. Keep your eyes on this one spot and lift your tail high into the air as you come onto the balls of your feet. Bend your knees and do a light hop up, pulling your thighs as close to your torso as you can, and flex your feet as they pass through the blocks. Keep pressing your hands into the blocks to pull more strength into your core. Let your heels land first, then your bottom.

Some people find jumping with straight legs difficult. The "flexing" element of the jump might make you land on your feet instead of continuing through to a sitting position. Keep trying. It really does take practice and time. If you know your hamstrings are tight and not ready to be straight, let your knees bend and your ankles cross as you do your jump.

7

Fingertips Abs



[\(directions\)](#)

8

Twisted Lowering Abs



[\(directions\)](#)

9

Vinyasa and Jump Through to Sit

([vinyasa directions](#) | [jump through to sit directions](#))



10

Bridge



[\(directions\)](#)

11

Corpse (Savasana)



[\(directions\)](#)

Tiffany Cruikshank



“Yoga gives me a sense of courage and confidence when life flips things upside down, a sense of stability when life shakes things up and a sense of clarity in an overwhelming world. I am forever grateful for this practice and the many ways it has transformed my life and my perspective.”

An internationally celebrated yoga teacher, author, and health and wellness expert, Tiffany Cruikshank travels the globe inspiring people to live their lives to the fullest. She is known for her lighthearted attention to detail and passionate dedication to the practice.

Tiffany started practicing yoga when she was 14 years old and was instantly enthralled by the physical challenge. She quickly noticed her yoga practice gave her a comfort in her own skin. As

a woman, yoga has helped her establish a healthy body image and appreciate the “perfect imperfections” that make her who she is.

*Tiffany is the acupuncturist and yoga teacher at the Nike World Headquarters in Portland, Oregon. She has been featured in video and print ads for Nike, Lululemon, Yogi Tea, and KiraGrace. Her classes can be found on YogaGlo.com. She has written many articles on MindBodyGreen.com, Origin Magazine, and ElephantJournal.com, and is the author of *Optimal Health for a Vibrant Life*, a 30-day detox for yogis. www.TiffanyYoga.com.*

Butt

There are some seriously cute and stylish yoga pants out there that can take you from mat to cocktails, but here’s the catch—they’re all pretty tight. This is ultimately a good thing because you don’t want to trip on fabric as you move from twist to fold to inversion. The somewhat unsettling part is that your backside is totally on display! Fear not, my courageous friend. Yoga and stretchy pants were made for one another. Tackle this sequence and your buns will be stealing the show—in yoga pants or skinny jeans.

1

Standing Forward Fold



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Side Leg Lift

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Stack your hip over your leg.
- Hook your toe and lift your leg so it's parallel to the ground.

3

Chair



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Standing Big Toe Extension, Open Hip



[\(directions\)](#)

5

Revolved Chair



[\(directions\)](#)

6

Flamingo

Start with [Revolved Chair](#), then make this adjustment.



- Bend your leg back until it is parallel to the floor.
- Hug your knees together.

7

Warrior I



[\(directions\)](#)

8

Vinyasa



[\(directions\)](#)

9

Warrior III



[\(directions\)](#)

10

Revolved Half Moon



[\(directions\)](#)

11

Standing Forward Fold



[\(directions\)](#)

12

Double Pigeon Fold, Arms Back

Start with [Double Pigeon](#), then make this adjustment.



- Let your arms relax at your sides.

13

Savasana (Corpse)



[\(directions\)](#)

CHAPTER 7

Yoga for Health

Cheers! Chin-chin! Salud! Kampai! Yoga!



Raise a glass to yoga—the fountain of wellness! This chapter is a toast to your healthiest self ever. These invigorating routines are designed to breathe fresh air into your darkest issues and make you feel energetic, happy, and whole. They will wring out digestive issues, give you a kick in the pants when you're sluggish, and even help you

walk comfortably in those designer heels you crave.

The authors of a review study published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine identified 12 studies that compared the effect of yoga to that of some other type of exercise on a variety of health issues. Yoga was found to be at least as effective at creating beneficial health changes as the other types of exercise. Not to mention that it makes you feel good everywhere else, too!

I selected some common ailments and on the pages that follow, you'll find the yoga moves that I'm betting will restore balance and make those sick days disappear. Remember, chronic issues may take time to heal, so be patient. You may need to practice the routine several times a week to work on a recurring problem.

Save Your Sick Days with Health-Focused Sequences

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

[Anjali Mudra Regular Behind the Back](#)
[Finger Stretches](#)
[Pada Angustasana](#)
[Dolphin](#)
[Cow Face Arms](#)
[Eagle](#)
[Reverse-Palm Stretch](#)
[Bridge](#)

Back Pain

[Simple Spinal Twist](#)
[Comfortable Seat Forward Fold](#)
[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Twisted Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Triangle](#)
[Child's Pose](#)
[Revolved Head to Knee](#)
[Reclined Big Toe](#)
[Savasana](#)

Hangover

[Gentle Seated Twist](#)
[Standing Forward Fold with a Twist](#)
[Sun Salutation A](#)
[Sun Salutation B](#)
[Revolved Chair](#)

[Side Angle Revolved Crescent](#)
[Seated Forward Fold](#)
[Head to Knee](#)

Headache

[Extended Puppy](#)
[Downward Facing Dog with Block](#)
[Standing Forward Fold with Block](#)
[Head to Knee](#)
[Seated Forward Fold with Block](#)
[Savasana](#)

Jet Lag

[Sun Salutation A](#)
[Standing Big Toe Extension](#)
[Dolphin](#)
[Headstand](#)
[Camel](#)
[Wild Thing](#)
[Legs Up the Wall](#)

Digestion

[Child's Pose with Fists at Low Belly](#)
[Mountain with Side Stretch](#)
[Half Moon](#)
[Warrior III Hands at Heart](#)
[Revolved Half Moon](#)
[Revolved Triangle](#)
[Reclined Twist](#)
[Reclined Twist with Legs Together](#)

Energy

[Stretch](#)
[Spine Roll](#)
[Knees to Nose](#)
[Ego Eradicator](#)

High Heels

[Standing Forward Fold with Crossed Legs](#)
[Mountain Pose on Balls of Feet](#)
[Chair on Balls of Feet](#)
[Reclined Big Toe, Part III](#)

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition that causes tingling, numbness, and pain in the hands and wrists. It's often the result of spending too much time at a computer keyboard (hello, those of you who are obsessed with Facebook!). The bad news is that because so many of us use computers now, in addition to using our hands for everything else, it's a tricky injury to avoid. The good news is that yoga can come to the rescue! A 1988 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that people who practiced 11 yoga postures twice weekly for 2 months had better grip strength and greater lessening of pain than a control group that did no yoga. But don't pop into a celebratory Handstand quite yet!

The idea of subjecting your wrists to poses like Plank and Downward Facing Dog can make handcuffs sound alluring, so try these variations and postures to help you get back on track. You'll be cartwheeling pain-free in no time.

TIP

If your wrists bother you, try using an ace bandage to support and keep your wrists stable, or practice with a wedge block to alleviate the pressure. You can always drop onto your forearms or knees in poses such as Plank and Downward Facing Dog.

1

Anjali Mudra Regular Behind the Back

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Finger Stretches

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Pada Angustasana

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Your feet should be hip-width apart.
- Lift your shoulders away from your ears.
- Hook your big toes and bend your elbows wide.
- Lengthen through your torso.

4

Dolphin

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Cow Face Arms

Start with [Cow Face](#), then make this adjustment.



- Sit on top of your feet.

6

Eagle Arms

Start with [Eagle](#), then make these adjustments.



- Sit on top of your feet.
- Press your palms away from your face.
- Keep your spine long.
- Lift your elbows in line with your shoulders.

7

Reverse-Palm Stretch

Start with [Cow and Cat](#), then make these adjustments.



- Spin your fingers out and back until they face your knees.
- Stack your hips over your knees.
- Pull your heart forward.

8

Bridge

[\(directions\)](#)



Back Pain

I've worked with students ranging from the young and athletic to the older and mellow, and the most common complaint is back pain. It can stem from overuse or under use, improper posture, or lack of core strength. A 2009 study published in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* looked at 30 adults with moderate-to-severe chronic lower-back pain. Participants were randomly assigned to a 12-week series of once-weekly hatha yoga classes or put on a waiting list for the class while receiving standard medical care. The yoga group reported a drop in pain scores from an average of 6.7 to 4.4 (where 10 was the worst) after the 12 weeks, while the waiting list group only dropped from 7.5 to 7.1. The yoga group also reported greater reductions in medication use.

These postures will help build strength and flexibility and lessen back pain or even help keep your back pain free. Keep a slight bend in your knees when you work on folding postures, and be careful not to overstretch! Inviting flexibility is always a good idea, but make sure you draw a line between sensation (when you begin to feel tightness in the muscle) and pain (what you feel when you're forcing the stretch

too far). If you have a tendency to slump in your chair, prop yourself up on a cushion when you're seated and practice grounding your hips and using your core muscles to sit up straight.

TIP

Add a natural pain reliever such as Arnica—an anti-inflammatory cream or gel made from flowers. Apply before and after your practice, followed by an epsom salt bath.

1

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Comfortable Seat Forward Fold

Start with [Comfortable Seat](#), then make these adjustments.



- Relax your forehead and neck.
- Walk your arms out straight ahead.

3

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Twisted Downward Facing Dog

Start with [Downward Facing Dog](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your thighs pressing back.
- Open your ribcage.
- Keep your front arm straight.
- Grab the outside of your leg or ankle with the opposite-side hand.

5

Triangle

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Child's Pose

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Revolved Head to Knee

[\(directions\)](#)



8

Reclined Big Toe

[\(directions\)](#)



9

Corpse (Savasana)

[\(directions\)](#)



MacKenzie Miller



“I’ve yet to find another physical activity that gives me the same clarity as yoga. I’ve learned the most about myself when I’ve fallen out of postures. In life you have to learn from your mistakes, pick yourself up, smile, and try again. My practice is a mental and physical blessing.”

MacKenzie is a certified personal trainer and yoga instructor based out of Seattle, Washington. The way yoga makes her feel can be summed up in just one word: blissful! She started practicing yoga in college and was immediately drawn to the physical challenge. The competitive side of her personality took over and pushed her to practice more and keep improving.

It might have been the physical challenges that attracted her but it was the mental benefits that have kept MacKenzie going. Yoga has helped her accept both the things she loves and doesn't love about her body, and her mood has become more consistent. She says it's as if every time she takes the time to practice, a refresh button is pressed for her body and mind.

MacKenzie started her yoga practice in Los Angeles under the eyes of Kathryn Budig, Vinnie Marino, and Annie Carpenter. After relocating to the Pacific Northwest she received her 200 hour Power Vinyasa Teacher Training Certification from Tiffany Cruikshank. Her classes are full of lively music and creative sequencing that offer a thoughtful mix of strength, balance, and flexibility. mackenziemilleryoga.com

Hangover

We've all been there. A last-minute decision to go out and grab "a drink or two" with friends translates into several bottles of wine. A bad blind date looks a little more interesting from the bottom of a martini glass—or three. Wedding receptions, tailgate parties, birthday bashes where you tried to prove you could still roll like a college kid. The point is, nobody plans a hangover, but when you drink too much, the next morning brings throbbing, pounding, can't-see-straight, I'd-rather-not-see-the-light-of-day remorse. The sad truth is that there is no getting around it. Your options are: 1. Grab a bag of frozen peas, place over face. Burrow under covers. Breathe through straw. Spend day watching bad TV.

2. Try the old greasy-food-and-coffee cure. (Honestly, do we still believe in that?) 3. Yes, you guessed it: Get ready to detox! Sweat the alcohol out and purify yourself. The first 20 minutes will be rough, but hang in there. You'll be a brand-new person by the end of the session.

Here are simple poses to help you beat those hangover blues.

TIP

Coconut water is not only delicious, it's full of potassium and does wonders to hydrate you after a long night. Try drinking one or two bottles before you go to sleep, and wake up to a smoothie with a coconut water base. Bye-bye, headache!

1

Gentle Seated Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Standing Forward Fold with a Twist

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Hips should be level.
- Roll your top shoulder back so it stacks over the bottom shoulder.
- Extend your top arm up.

3

Sun Salutation A

[\(directions\)](#)





4

Sun Salutation B

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Revolved Chair

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Side Angle Revolved Crescent

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Seated Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



8

Head to Knee

[\(directions\)](#)



Headache

I've seen some incredibly sweet people go postal when a migraine hits them. It's hard to maintain any sense of well-being when your entire head is throbbing and it hurts to blink. Unfortunately, the best remedy for a migraine is a dark room, a cold compress, and sleep. But yoga can also do wonders to thwart an oncoming migraine, and without a doubt it can help prevent future attacks. A study performed in India assigned 72 patients with migraines to yoga therapy for 3 months. The group demonstrated a significant reduction in migraine headache frequency.

Save yourself the need to write an apology note for being the world's greatest cranky pants: Practice these poses to soothe your head, and you'll be seeing straight again.

TIP

Purchase a silk eye pillow filled with lavender and apply it over your forehead and eyes. This flower is famous for its soothing properties, and silk stays cool when your head is pounding.

1

Extended Puppy

Start with [Puppy Dog](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your hips over your knees.
- Melt your chest and throat toward the ground.
- Keep your arms straight.
- Press down into all 10 toes.

2

Downward Facing Dog with Block

Start with [Downward Facing Dog](#), then make this adjustment.



- Rest your forehead on a block according to the height you need.

3

Standing Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Head to Knee

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Seated Forward Fold with Block

Start with [Seated Forward Fold](#), then make this adjustment.



- Instead of resting your head on your legs, rest it on a block between your legs.

6

Corpse (Savasana)

[\(directions\)](#)



Jet Lag

You could call me a bit of a jet lag pro. I am on the road so much I rarely know what time zone I'm in, so I do whatever I can to keep my body happy and healthy. A solid yoga practice is a must when subjecting your body to intense travel. And even if you're on a short flight, it's a good idea to rejuvenate your system with a quick yoga routine once you land on solid ground.

I've chosen these poses because they stretch out the muscles that cramp up from sitting for too long and relieve the upper back from poor posture.

TIPS

- Drink lots of water. The air in planes is extremely dry, which can lead to dehydration. It also might help to add an electrolyte tablet to your water.
- Bring a neti pot to clear your nasal passages, which can get congested after flying. (A neti pot is a small contraption, similar to a teapot, that you fill with salt water. You pour the water into one nostril and drain it out the other one to clear your nasal passages.)
- You can also pack melatonin to take before bedtime.
- Lastly, do not nap when you land, no matter how enticing those fluffy hotel pillows look! Get out in the sun, move your body, and do these yoga postures to help restore your natural sleep cycle.

1

Sun Salutation A

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Standing Big Toe Extension

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Dolphin

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Headstand

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Camel

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Wild Thing

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Legs Up the Wall

[\(directions\)](#)



Digestion

They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach—but I say that applies to anyone! A delicious meal is always a pleasure, but decadent, spicy, or exotic foods can send your tummy into a tizzy. Aside from drinking lots of water and detoxing, yoga is your best bet to calm your system and make amends with a troubled stomach. Twists are fabulous digestion stimulators. They gently massage your internal organs and wring them out just like sponges. Let's do the twist!

TIP

Drinking plenty of water is key to good health (and necessary after a workout), but drink before or after meals, not during. Drinking water during meals slows digestion. And go ice-free, as super-

cold temps gap digestion, too!

1

Child's Pose with Fists at Low Belly

Start with [Child's Pose](#), then make these adjustments.



- Curl your upper body over your fists and allow them to dig deep.
- Make a fist and cover it with your other hand, then place them into your lower belly.

2

Mountain with Side Stretch

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Half Moon

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Warrior III Hands at Heart

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Revolved Half Moon

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Revolved Triangle

[\(directions\)](#)



Repeat starting with [step 3](#) on the opposite side.

7

Reclined Twist

Start with [Simple Spinal Twist](#), then make these adjustments.



- Hug just one leg, rather than both.
- Let both shoulders melt into the ground.

8

Reclined Twist with Legs Together

Start with [Simple Spinal Twist](#), then make this adjustment.



- Let both shoulders melt into the ground.

Energy

I think we all suffer from a lack of energy, whether it's due to stress, lack of sleep, or simply feeling exhausted by a growing to-do list. While yoga can be a restorative act, it can also fire up your system and release massive amounts of energy from within—much healthier (and less expensive) than an extra-large cappuccino with a double shot of espresso!

Kundalini yoga is all about awakening the energy in your spine through movement, repetition, and breath. I talked to Los Angeles teacher Kia Miller, who combines kundalini and vinyasa yoga, about her favorite moves for energy, and she shared this sequence with me. If the holds feel too long, tailor them to your needs and build up to the full holds. The key is to do enough to get your energy flowing and break through whatever has been holding you back. You'll be bounding out of bed in no time!

BREATH OF FIRE

Breath of Fire is a style of breathwork that creates energy from within—and tones your abs, too. Start seated, breathing deeply in and out through your nose. At the top of your inhalation, exhale sharply, releasing all of the air by engaging your diaphragm. As soon as the air is out, inhale sharply and immediately exhale using your diaphragm as a pump. Your breathing should be so fast that the inhalation will happen almost without any thought; the primary focus of this exercise is on making the little punching sensation in your core to help release the breath.

1

Stretch

Lie on your back and lift your legs and chest about 12 inches off the ground. Reach your fingers toward your toes and practice **Breath of Fire** for 2 minutes.



2

Spine Roll

Pull your knees into your chest and roll back and forth on your spine for 1 minute.



3

Knees to Nose

Hug your knees into your chest and reach your arms along your body or behind your neck for support. Practice Breath of Fire for 2 minutes.



4

Ego Eradicator

Sit in Comfortable Seat, with your arms up to 60 degrees, and make a fist, thumbs stretched up. Practice Breath of Fire for 3 minutes.



Leo Marrs



“My yoga practice has made me more aware of how my body and mind work together to create my experience of the world. Working on the body is working on the mind, and vice versa. This understanding supports a more balanced, more energized, more intentional life.”

Originally from an island off the Alaskan coast, Leo now spends his time between Los Angeles and New York. When he first started practicing yoga, he never intended to find his “first lifelong love.” But he stumbled into something that he fell deeply in love with and has never looked back. Yoga helped Leo uncover layers of tension he had been carrying for years and provided a practice to lift these layers one by one.

Leo views yoga as a path of self-authorship, and evolution. The mat, the hardness of the floor beneath it, and the poses are constants to which the only variable is yourself. Because of this “mirror,” he says he has a greater sense of who he is and a greater capacity to choose who and

what he becomes.

Leo is an entrepreneur and activist who aims to bring the insights of leading writers and philosophers into popular culture. Leo most recently launched I.D./Evolution By Intelligent Design, a clothing line that aims to facilitate a movement in truth-transmitting imagery. www.id-clothing.com

High Heels

Since I was not graced with long legs or height, I have been forever obsessed with heels. Tall heels. The more treacherous, the better! Ever since I stepped foot into my first pair of platforms, my legs look great, but my feet sometimes feel sore, and my ego is often up in the air. It doesn't matter how gorgeous you look coming out of a chic restaurant in a little black dress and new platforms if you wipe out on the way to the valet. (Trust me, I know!) But don't let this plant fear in your stiletto-loving heart. Follow these simple steps to strengthen and elongate your calves, ankles, and toes. You'll feel confident and balanced at any height.

TIP

After a long night out in heels, sit down and trace the shapes of the alphabet with your feet (using your big toe to "draw"). This relieves both calves and shins. You can also use a foam roller to work out lactic acid and practice Downward Dog to lengthen and release your muscles.

1

Standing Forward Fold with Crossed Legs

Follow [Standing Forward Fold](#), but cross your legs



2

Mountain on Balls of Feet

Follow [Mountain](#), but stand on your toes.



3

Chair on Balls of Feet

Follow [Chair](#), but stand on your toes



4

Reclined Big Toe, Part III

[\(directions\)](#)



CHAPTER 8

Yoga for Athletes

Master these moves for peak performance



I adore sports. I grew up a tomboy and a die-hard University of Kansas Jayhawks fan. Sacrificing my body for a good play came as naturally as breathing—I lived to work up a competitive sweat. I may have since retired my Air Jordans and floor burns, but I still get emotional when I watch the Jayhawks play! I’ve also become an athlete in my own yogic right. Yoga has taught me to respect my body’s abilities and limitations, which is what allows athletes to soar and reach their utmost potential without overdoing it.

Yoga also teaches us how to breathe—something many athletes struggle with, even at elite levels. Practicing breath control helps to strengthen your diaphragm and improve endurance. One of the most important benefits of yoga is that it gives you the ability to prevent new injuries and treat old ones that have accumulated over the years. It’s the perfect form of physical therapy to counterbalance the intensity of sports and keep your body strong and supple.

“People always associate yoga with flexibility, but for athletes it means becoming more pliable to make your body more adaptable to

stressors. Yoga makes the muscles more like rubber bands and less like guitar strings,” says Tiffany Cruikshank, licensed acupuncturist, MAOM, a sports medicine specialist and the yoga teacher at Nike headquarters. She explains that expanding the functional zone of your muscles creates a larger range of contraction that not only helps to prevent injury, but also increases strength and power within the muscles themselves. This means more strength and better performance. Awesome.

Remember: You don’t “win” at yoga. Leave your competitive nature on the playing field and don’t get caught up in trying to become super flexible right away. “The hardest part about yoga for competitive athletes is that we’re so used to giving it our all and pushing ourselves to the limit,” Cruikshank notes. You want to reap the benefits of yoga instead of trying to beat them. Be aware of how your body reacts: Sensation is good, but pain is bad. You want pliable muscle tissues, which often means backing off from how far you can actually go. Any pain means you’re in the red zone. Instead of pushing through it as you might in your sport, stay calm—and don’t forget to breathe! The more your muscles relax in yoga, the better your body will perform when you’re playing your sport.

Yoga is full of active and passive stretching. “Active stretching creates warmth and suppleness in the muscle tissues, creating a more functional lengthening mechanism that’s similar to what many athletes need in their sport,” Cruikshank says. The passive stretching and long holds allow your tissues to lengthen even more, and also help your mind relax. In this calm state, your muscles can balance both the lengthening and strengthening movements. Most athletes’ muscle fibers start to function in a very small range of motion, which leads to power limitations and the tendency to get injured easily, Cruikshank says. Yoga’s combination of active and passive stretching will free your body and make both normal and intense activities feel better.

Finally, in addition to its physical benefits, yoga can help you take your game to the next level mentally. I’ve talked about “the zone”

already—the elevated mental state, promoted by a regular yoga practice, in which you can truly focus and perfect your aim, improve your balance, control your body, and become immersed in whatever your athletic pursuit is. Learning how to connect breathing with movement in yoga creates a mind–body link that translates to your sport. “Sports psychologists will tell you that this is the difference between a good athlete and a great athlete,” says Cruikshank. Practice your breathwork before and after taking part in your sport. Take the time to warm up and cool down so you are completely ready to go without distractions when the time is right.

I sat down with Cruikshank, who offered the following postures to help identify the specific muscles or body parts they target.

Boost Performance with These Routines

Runners and Cyclists

[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Crescent Low Lunge Variation](#)
[Single Pigeon](#)
[Bound Angle](#)
[Reclined Big Toe I with Strap](#)
[Seated Forward Fold with Strap](#)

Tennis

[Comfortable Seat with Side Stretch](#)
[Cow Face Arms in Comfortable Seat with Strap](#)
[Cow and Cat](#)
[Head to Knee Modified with Strap](#)
[Half Reclined Hero Modified on a Block](#)
[Thread the Needle](#)
[Simple Spinal Twist](#)

Golf

[Shoulder Thread the Needle](#)
[Cow Face Arms in Comfortable Seat](#)
[Cow and Cat with Opposite Arm and Leg Extension](#)
[Mountain with Side Stretch](#)
[Revolved Triangle](#)
[Cow Face with Relaxed Arms](#)

Soccer

[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Crescent Low Lunge with Side Stretch](#)
[Mountain with Side Stretch](#)
[Standing Forward Fold with Crossed Ankles](#)
[Thread the Needle](#)
[Reclined Big Toe I with Strap](#)
[Simple Spinal Twist](#)

Basketball

[Cow and Cat](#)
[Low Lunge](#)
[Hero on Block](#)
[Reclined Big Toe](#)
[Happy Baby Modified](#)
[Simple Spinal Twist](#)

Swimming and Rowing

[Puppy Dog](#)
[Cow Face Arms with Strap](#)
[Half Moon with a Block](#)
[Revolved Triangle with a Block](#)
[Double Pigeon with a Block](#)
[Reclined Bound Angle](#)
[Alternate Nostril Breathing](#)

Climbing

[Cow Face Arms with a Strap](#)
[Single Pigeon](#)
[Simple Spinal Twist](#)
[Head to Knee](#)
[Low Lunge Variation](#)
[Comfortable Seat with Reverse Palm Work](#)

Special Section: Real Men Do Yoga

[Standing Forward Fold](#)
[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Warrior I](#)
[Boat Pose](#)
[Reclined Big Toe](#)

TIP

If you want to make any of these poses into a full practice, add a sun salutation as a warmup, as well as standing poses like Warrior and Side Angle. I also recommend doing breathing exercises for all sports. Alternate nostril breathing is listed specifically under swimming, but any athlete can enhance lung capacity with this great exercise.

What to Do If Yoga Hurts

Yoga is often praised as a healing practice, but if done without full attention to form and alignment, it can wreak havoc on your muscles, connective tissues, nerves, blood vessels, tendons, and ligaments, and it can also degrade joints and bones. Ouch! It's not always easy to tell when you are blowing past a safe range, so I asked Jill Miller, a yoga anatomy and injury specialist (yogatuneup.com), to share her tips on how to prevent and treat injury.

Miller's basic rule of thumb is: If you can't take a full breath, you've gone too deep. I have two similar philosophies: If you can't crack a smile, you're taking yourself too seriously. And if you're starting to see stars and feel like you're about to pass out, well—you've definitely gone too far!

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOGA HURTS

by Jill Miller, creator of Yoga Tune Up®

- Admit you are in pain.
- Seek out a health care professional.
- Follow the health care professional's advice.
- Find a qualified yoga therapist (iayt.org).
- Listen carefully to your body as you build a new practice, and refrain from doing any pose that your body is not prepared for.

Here are some common injuries and helpful strategies to keep you safe and healthy as you practice.

Hamstring

Why It Hurts: Many people come to yoga with the goal of getting more flexible hamstrings. But touching your hands to the floor in a Standing Forward Fold should never be your goal unless you are an experienced yogi! A healthy hip with supple hamstrings will allow up to 135 degrees of motion when it's being folded. Hamstring havoc often is caused by overzealous forward bends when your body is not yet warmed up. An intense Seated Forward Fold right after rolling out of bed? Not such a good idea. Also, make sure that your mat isn't wet when you're practicing, or you can slip into a split. All of your muscles need to learn to contract as well as lengthen; the hammies are no exception. Try contracting them slightly in both seated and standing poses.

How to Help: Hamstring tendons can tear clear off of the bone (yikes!) from overuse and stretching beyond a comfortable range. If you hear a loud pop under your booty or feel searing pain, you must see a doctor and discontinue all forward-bending actions for several months (and up to 2 years for a complete separation). At first it may hurt to walk or to sit for long periods of time. Gradually, you will want to begin doing poses like Locust to strengthen the hamstrings, but refrain from stretching them out with straight knees. Seated poses such as Bound Angle, or a modified simple Seated Twist with bent knees, can slowly start to make their way back into your practice.

For those of you who can already fold yourselves over like sandwiches, work on strengthening your hamstrings in poses like Bridge, Locust, and even Chair.

Shoulder or Rotator Cuff

Why It Hurts: With more than 20 muscles all navigating the most mobile joint complex in our bodies, it's easy for good shoulders to go bad. The biggest culprit? Repetition with poor form. Be mindful when doing any poses that bear weight on your arms, especially in Plank, Downward Facing Dog, Upward Facing Dog, and Four-Limbed Staff. Practice each individually before connecting them in the dynamic and challenging vinyasa flow. All too often our shoulders are compromised by our daily lives: sleeping in awkward positions, typing endlessly at our computers all day, carrying heavy purses or heavy children, or even gripping a steering wheel tightly. Shoulders are often injured because the joints downstream of the shoulder may also have some dysfunction; if the wrist or elbow lacks mobility or stability, it will transfer confusing biomechanics back up to the shoulder and create a problem.

How to Help: If you tear a rotator cuff muscle, you will need treatment, so do not hesitate to see a doctor. These fine muscles that help to steer the upper-arm bone, the humerus, in multiple directions underlie all shoulder movements. Be patient. Once you are out of pain, start strengthening the shoulder right away to tighten the muscle and tendons that are likely overstretched.

Learn to reorient the head of the humerus (the golf ball-shaped area at the top of the bone) so it moves back in the socket rather than forward. In other words, stretch the front of your chest and shoulders in poses like Bow. You can strengthen the backs of your shoulders by flipping your palms up in standing poses like Warrior II and Triangle and imagining that two 50-pound kettlebells are sitting in your palms.

See if you can master holding your arms overhead in Mountain Pose with your back straight and parallel for 5 full minutes. This is a great test to find out if your shoulder and upper-back muscles are strong enough to support your body weight in Downward Facing Dog or Handstand.

Neck

Why It Hurts: The neck is composed of seven thin vertebrae, with disks lying between all but the first two. Structurally, this is the thinnest part of the spine, and it's not necessarily built for supporting the weight of the entire body. Necks get injured in yoga when the practitioner drops all of his or her body weight into the head instead of using the shoulders, upper back, and core to pull some of the weight off of those delicate bones. Your neck can also pay a very dear price if your head is tilted too far forward or too far back in a Headstand. This loads the bones and disks with imbalanced force and the disks can rupture. Shoulder Stands repeatedly held in poor position can also damage your neck over time.

How to Help: Learn to position your head on top of your spine, as if you were being held up by a marionette's string. Be aware of your head's position as you type at your computer, or watch TV, and even as you have a conversation. Ever notice how some people always talk with their heads tilted to one side? They need to break that habit! To counteract "computer neck," sit upright in a high-back chair and press the back of your skull against the head support. (You can do this in your car, too.) Try to push the head support backward for 10 seconds, rest for 10, push for 10, *etc.* Do this exercise at least 6 times a day and you should notice a difference in your posture as well as fewer aches and pains.

When doing Headstands, you can practice minimizing stress on your neck like this: Use a combination of two yoga blankets and two yoga mats to create a makeshift platform for your forearms. This will give your arms and shoulders a little more height so that you can have more "clearance" for your neck. Fold each yoga blanket into eighths and then fold a yoga mat around each one to create two rectangular burritos. Set the mats on the floor, pointing directly into the wall. Lay your forearms on the mats and clasp your hands in order to cradle the back of your head in a stable tripod. Curl your toes under and walk your hips in and up into a Dolphin Pose. Lightly kick up and rest your heels against the wall. Make sure that you're balancing on the crown of your head and avoid any strain in the front and the back of your neck. Keep your shoulders active and lifting to prevent the weight of your body from resting on your head and neck. You should feel as if you could actually slide a piece of paper under your head.

Lower Back

Why It Hurts: The lower back is tricky. It can get hurt from too little movement or too much movement. A big issue with the lower back is that it relies on the core muscles to give it stability. The layers of abdominal muscles and back muscles are the tissues that help the five lower-back vertebrae and their disks remain in optimal positions in any yoga pose and in daily life. Long holds in deep Backbends or Forward Folds without core support are a surefire way to create imbalances and sideline you from practice. Respect yourself by maintaining good posture both on and off your mat.

How to Help: In order to protect the lower back in all poses, you will need to create a sense of abdominal bracing to prevent your lower-back vertebrae from shifting too far out of alignment and compromising their disks. Here's a simple technique that activates the deepest abdominal muscle: Take a big breath and expand your belly. Hold your breath and attempt to pull your belly button inward while still holding the breath. Your abs should feel firm, as if you're ready to "take a punch." Now exhale, and feel your belly soften. Repeat this several times to get the feeling of creating abdominal tension on the inhale, versus relaxation on the exhale. Ultimately, when practicing your poses (except passive poses like Savasana and Child's Pose) you want to create some amount of that core tension while breathing in and out. But remember: Please don't hold your breath in yoga! This technique is meant to help you learn to engage your abs to create stability.

Learn how to use your deep hip and buttock muscles to support your spine as well. The whole pelvis, which includes the gluteal muscles, the sacrum, and the pelvic bones, serves as a base of support for the spine. If the hips are out of balance, your lower back will be out of balance too!

If you injure your lower back, you will want to refrain from excessive motion of your spine in any direction. Now is a good time for gentle massage, ice, ibuprofen, and possibly a visit with a professional. If the disk is torn or ruptured, you may need many months to recover. Once you are less achy, begin to perform less extreme versions of your poses and deeply utilize abdominal bracing as much as possible. Baby Backbends are very helpful with lower-back pain. Make sure to stand in good posture: Keep your ankles under your knees and your knees under your hips, and don't stand with one hip cocked to the side (no matter how sassy you think you look). Oh, and if you're going to wear high heels, make sure to practice the poses on [page 247](#) to strengthen your ankles and legs!

Knee

Why It Hurts: The knee is the least protected joint in the body. These shock-absorbing joints are shockingly naked of support. The knees rely mostly on a series of ligaments to prevent them from moving too much. Some yoga poses, especially the pretzel-like seated poses, can overstretch the knee ligaments and weaken the knees over time. Often, if the hips are too tight, the knees will pay a price. Explosive jumping through vinyasa poses on a concrete floor can also damage the knees. Try to practice on a floor that has some yield to it, or invest in an extra-thick yoga mat. Poses that load weight directly on the knees can also be troublesome for some folks. Fold up a mat or blanket to add a bit of cushion to your pose.

How to Help: If your knees hurt, you will need to decrease depth in all your poses, and potentially stop stretching altogether. Take rest, ice any swelling, and don't push yourself. Some of the more troublesome poses for cranky knees are ones that create lateral shear on the knee—in other words, the straight-leg poses that try to bend your knee sideways (the direction that knees don't bend!) A lot of standing poses can exacerbate this issue. You can avoid that lateral strain by just slightly bending your knees when doing these types of poses.

Healthy knees truly depend on having good relationships with the tissues and joints above (the thigh and hip muscles) and below (the lower-leg, ankle, and foot muscles). One unhappy muscle in either of these regions will upset the balance of the weight traveling through your knee. There are a few key muscles to focus on in your poses.

Quadriceps. These are the most powerful muscles for keeping the knee tracking properly. Many knee issues stem from an imbalance of resiliency in the quads. Hypertonic quads will keep the kneecap from moving up and down and permitting full range of motion of the knee. Quads that are too loose also have a challenging time preventing the knee from hyper-extending, or bending backward on itself. Choose a variety of poses that stretch the front of the leg, such as Standing Big Toe Extension, split variations, Crescent, and Warrior III.

Inner and outer thighs. The adductors and the gluteals help to negotiate forces on the inside and outside of the hip, as well as energy transfer into your knees. Make sure these are as strong as they are flexible by doing such poses as Wide-Leg Forward Fold, Half Moon, and Chair with a block between your thighs.

Be aware of the tendency for your knees to either “knock” together or bow away from one another. In both scenarios, the lower-leg muscles tend to be weaker on one side and stronger on the opposite. And finally, make sure your

iliotibial band isn't overly tight. Work on your Reclined Big Toe Pose III!

Runners and Cyclists

I used to only run if there was a cupcake sale waiting at the end of the 5-K, but have recently fallen in love with running a few times a week. Yoga is the perfect balance to keep your body healthy with running and cycling. Adding a few key yoga poses into your workout will not only strengthen your balance, it will increase body awareness and elongate your muscles, which will in turn lengthen your stride and range of motion. The following poses are great at releasing tension in the hip flexors, hamstrings, glutes, and iliotibial (IT) band, which are used in repetitive motions such as pedaling and striding.

TIP

If you find yourself looking enviously toward another's practice, take a moment to remember that yoga is not about winning or losing! You have no idea what that person is dealing with, what physical blessings they have, or ailments they've overcome. Focusing on your own challenges and accomplishments is what gets you to the finish line.

1

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Crescent Low Lunge Variation

Start with [Crescent Low Lunge](#), then make these adjustments.



- Drop your hips.
- Draw your shoulders back.
- Stay on your fingertips.

3

Single Pigeon

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Bound Angle

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Reclined Big Toe I with Strap

Start with [Reclined Big Toe I](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place a strap over the ball of your foot.
- Pull your leg gently across your torso.

6

Seated Forward Fold with Strap

[\(directions\)](#)



Tennis

Tennis players need healthy shoulders on top of an agile lower body. Yoga can help you learn how to listen to your body and stay present so you can start making small changes in your form and achieve peak performance. Because of the high impact of the ball against the racket, tennis players can develop asymmetries between the two sides of their bodies. With just a few simple yoga moves you can strengthen your core muscles, improve flexibility, and channel your newfound power towards every stroke. This section's poses address the spine, hips, and rotator cuffs as well as your shoulders.

TIP

Take note of when you push your body too far. If you've strained your hamstring, do you run the extra mile because you're afraid of falling off the train? Find other ways of being active when you need time to heal. Yoga isolates all parts of the body, so work the poses that keep the injuries at bay and your mind at ease.

1

Comfortable Seat with Side Stretch

Start with [Comfortable Seat](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place one hand on the ground with a slight bend in your elbow.
- Root your right hip into the ground.
- Extend through your top arm.
- Relax the base of your neck.

2

Cow Face Arms in Comfortable Seat with Strap

Start with [Cow Face](#), with your legs in a [Comfortable Seat](#), then add a strap.



3

Cow and Cat

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Head to Knee Modified with Strap

Follow [Head to Knee](#), but use a strap



5

Half Reclined Hero Modified on a Block

Start with [Hero](#), then make these adjustments.



- Walk your arms back, keeping them straight.
- Keep your top leg's foot in front of the block.
- Sit on a block set at a low or medium height.
- Lift your chest.

6

Thread the Needle

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



KEEP YOUR EYES ON YOUR OWN MAT

As you broaden your practice and venture out into group classes, remember that practicing yoga with others can be as intimidating as it is inspiring. A class full of limber ballerina types can leave you doubting yourself and wishing your body looked “perfect.” When watered with constant doubt, this seed of jealousy can turn into a huge, thorny beast that will shred you from the inside out. It doesn’t matter if you’re practicing next to Grandma or the lead from Swan Lake—what matters is what’s happening on your mat. Remembering this will keep your body safe and remind you that there’s no need to envy anyone else. A copy will never be as good as the original—so be yourself!

Golf

In golf, everything revolves around the spine to help the motion of the swing. Like tennis players, golfers often feel repeated impacts on one side, which can create asymmetries in the spine and shoulders over time. Yoga will strengthen your game by reducing stress and increasing flexibility as well as your ability to concentrate on your swing. The following poses focus on the rotator cuffs, spine, and hips, to help maintain balance.

TIP

For added focus and clarity, turn to [Page 34](#) and try my 3-day cleanse. In just 3 days you’ll feel better than a superhero.

1

Shoulder Thread the Needle

Start with [Thread the Needle](#), then make these adjustments.



- Rest on one side of your face and shoulder.
- Press into your palm to roll open your chest.
- Keep your hips over your knees.

2

Cow Face Arms in Comfortable Seat

Start with [Cow Face](#), and cross your legs as in [Comfortable Seat](#).



3

Cow and Cat with Opposite Arm and Leg Extension

Start with [Cow and Cat](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your bottom arm straight.
- Gaze forward and down.
- Lift your opposite leg and arm until they are parallel to the ground.
- Spread your toes.

4

Mountain with Side Stretch

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Revolved Triangle Modified with Block

Follow [Revolved Triangle](#), but add a block.



6

Cow Face with Relaxed Arms

Follow [Cow Face](#), but relax your arms.



Soccer

In *Yoga Journal*, Leslie Osborne, a midfielder for the U.S. Women’s National Soccer team, credits her ability to mentally overcome challenges on the field to her yoga practice. Getting over those mental hurdles is just one piece of the puzzle. After all, a soccer player’s legs are made for kicking! Practicing yoga will also reinforce your connective tissue around the knees, shins, and ankles, which promotes flexibility in the quads and hamstrings. This section’s poses focus on improving the health of the hips, quads, hamstrings, and calves to maintain a strong lower body for speed, strength, and endurance.

“The only person you should try to be better than is the person you were yesterday.” —Unknown

1

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Crescent Low Lunge with Side Stretch

Start with [Crescent Low Lunge](#), then make these adjustments.



- Extend your top arm until it's straight.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Rest your hand on your front thigh.

3

Mountain with Side Stretch

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Standing Forward Fold with Crossed Ankles

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Cross your ankles, lining up your pinky toes.
- Keep your front knee bent.
- Place your hands onto blocks set at the tall level.

5

Thread the Needle

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Reclined Big Toe I with Strap

Start with [Reclined Big Toe I](#), but add a strap.



7

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



MODIFY, MODIFY, MODIFY

Yoga works for everyone because every pose, whether advanced or basic, has a modification.

Think of your yoga practice as a huge puzzle. It's made up of hundreds of pieces that take time to fit together. Sometimes you find the perfect fit right away, and other times you might struggle with a corner or two. I've given you plenty of options for various poses, but feel free to experiment on your own, as well. Don't be afraid to take things down a notch in order to get the right alignment or balance. The pieces won't come together naturally if you force them, so be creative, switch it up, and find what feels good.

Basketball

Former National Basketball Association star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar attributes his remarkably long 20-year basketball career to the benefits he derived from yoga. “I wouldn't have played as long as I had if I hadn't done [yoga]. Basketball is a game of skill, and either you have it or you don't. But being able to maintain the skills is directly related to yoga in my case.” All of the jumping and running in basketball requires good knee and hip health to help absorb the impact on the joints. The former Los Angeles Laker star center adds that yoga “really helped my flexibility and range of motion, and it paid off in injuries that I did not get. It also helped me use my strength more efficiently.”¹ Focusing on injury prevention, the following poses target the hips, hamstrings, IT band, and spine.

TIP

Create a sweat log. Record everything you do that makes you sweat up to four times a week (every day would be amazing). Whether it's yoga practice, a pickup game, or a long walk, just show up, even if it means waking up an hour earlier than you normally would. Practice discipline and reap the results!

¹. Diane Ballon. “Body and Soul,” *Maclean's*, September 19, 1994.

1

Cow and Cat

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Low Lunge

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Hero on Block

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Reclined Big Toe Modified with Strap

Follow [Big Toe](#), but add a strap.



5

Happy Baby Modified

Start with [Happy Baby](#), then make these adjustments.



- Hold the outside of both thighs and draw them toward the ground.
- Flex your feet.

6

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



Swimming and Rowing

Swimming and rowing require repetitive rotational shoulder and hip movements. Adding yoga to your regimen can help you maintain strength and flexibility through your full range of body motion. You'll also develop core strength, and find a comfortable and almost meditative rhythm to your strokes, guided by yogic awareness. The poses in this section focus on stabilizing the rotator cuffs, neutralizing the asymmetries of the spine, and keeping the hips flexible.

REMEMBER

You are unique, talented, and blessed. Your yoga practice is here to guide you and help you overcome your fears and obstacles. Dr. Seuss said it best: "Today you are YOU, that is TRUER than true. There is NO ONE alive who is YOUER than YOU!"

1

Puppy Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Cow Face Arms with a Strap

Start with [Cow Face Arms](#), but add a strap.



3

Half Moon with a Block

Start with [Half Moon](#), then add a block.



4

Revolved Triangle with a Block

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Double Pigeon with a Block

Start with [Double Pigeon](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place a block between your top knee and bottom foot for support.
- Walk your hands forward, and lower your face to the floor.

6

Reclined Bound Angle

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Alternate Nostril Breathing

[\(directions\)](#)



YOGA IS NOT A COMPETITIVE SPORT

The *New York Times* published an article in January 2012 titled “How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body,” and it cited case after case of gruesome injuries sustained through yoga practice. Glenn Black, a highly experienced teacher of master classes, said that yoga isn’t for the masses and should only be practiced by healthy and strong individuals because the likelihood of someone pushing themselves beyond their limits and causing injury was too strong.

The problem is that, unlike some yogis seems to think, yoga isn’t a competitive sport! There are no gold medals handed out for best Triangle or world records bestowed for the longest-held Headstand. Any need to “push” yourself should be motivated by you, and you only.

Glenn Black is also quoted in the article as saying, “Asana is not a panacea or a cure-all. In fact, if you do it with ego or obsession, you’ll end up causing problems.” Now this I do agree with. This sums it up: Practice without ego. Take your poses to a challenging level while still maintaining a sense of calm and ease. The minute you try to prove something to yourself or others, the yoga is gone and the chance for injury is real.

Climbing

Rock climbers need superstrong upper bodies as well as agility. However, yoga also helps improve your state of mind and can help you outgrow the paralyzing fear that sometimes comes when summiting a cliff. Focus on breathing as well as poses—your body will relax and the route will open right up. The following poses pay special attention to the rotator cuffs, hips, and forearms so you can hang and glide with ease.

TIP

Start a manifestation journal. Write down everything that you dream about—your loves, goals, desires. Add photos and anything else that strongly resonates with you and helps you set intention. Visualize your dreams happening, then start living them! Trust that everything happens when the time is right if you are doing your best.

1

Cow Face Arms with Strap

Start with [Cow Face Arms](#), but add a strap.



2

Single Pigeon

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Head to Knee Modified with Strap

Follow [Head to Knee](#), but add a strap.



5

Low Lunge Variation

Start with [Low Lunge](#), then make these adjustments.



- Stack your front knee over your heel.
- Grab your back outer ankle with your left hand.

6

Comfortable Seat with Reverse Palm Work

Start with [Comfortable Seat](#), then make these adjustments.



- Draw your elbows down.
- Relax your shoulders.
- Press your palms toward each other.

Real Men Do Yoga

Men love yoga—when their girlfriends are practicing in tight pants. Let’s face it: Men can be, well, manly. Machism is in his nature and the idea of getting schooled by a girl in spandex is about as appealing as getting his toenails painted. How many times has a big, muscular guy strutted into my class with his game face on? I’ll ask if he’s ever taken an advanced vinyasa flow class and he’ll grunt, “No. I’ll be fine. I’m strong.” But once we hit our second sun salutation, I see him start to sweat!

Here’s the secret, guys: You can’t do yoga. You practice yoga. It can’t be won or beat. There are no trophies or gold stars. It’s one of the only physical activities where you check your ego at the door. But

once you do, you'll notice a shift in your body, and muscles you never knew you had (no matter how much weightlifting you do). You'll also gain a shift in perspective and ability to focus, whether on work or at home. Finally, you'll learn how to prevent and heal injuries. "Men often suffer from tightness, particularly in the hips, hamstrings, and shoulders, that can lead to injury or weakness," says Baron Baptiste, creator of Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga and former assistant coach of the Philadelphia Eagles. "Overtraining in any one sport can cause repetitive stress and other, more serious injuries. Yoga is a full-body workout that creates both strength and flexibility. You need to have both. One without the other is a recipe for disaster."

"I think yoga helped reduce the number and severity of injuries I suffered. As preventive medicine, it's unequaled."—KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

REAL LIFE INSPIRATION

by Jason Wachob, founder of MindBodyGreen.com

I'm not your typical yogi. First of all, I'm a dude. A tall dude. I played basketball in college and was president of my fraternity. After graduation, I worked on Wall Street as an equities trader for 5 years. As I got older, my sports injuries took their toll: dislocated shoulders, separated shoulders, stress fractures, bone spurs, and disk problems—you name it. At 37, playing pickup basketball isn't an option anymore, because I'm always one rebound (or dunk, I'd love to think!) away from my shoulder popping out. Not fun. Then, a few years ago, the disks in my lower back derailed and I found myself routinely keeling over in excruciating pain. Two doctors told me that I needed surgery.

I wanted to find a replacement activity for my ex-athletic, injured body—one that my wife and I could also enjoy together—which turned out to be a vinyasa flow class. Quick movements with my body curled up scare me, but yoga offered long and slow movements where I could feel a deep stretch and get a good workout. Today, I'm amazed to say that I didn't have surgery and have absolutely no pain—partly due to yoga.

Not convinced? Turn the page for five more reasons to toss the myth that yoga isn't manly enough.

INDIVIDUAL POSES



1

Standing Forward Fold

Good warmup at the beginning of any workout.



2

Downward Facing Dog

Alleviates chronic tightness in the hips and hamstrings, lower back pain, and tight shoulders.



3

Warrior I

Targets tight shoulders and hips. Builds knee strength and stability.



4

Boat Pose

Strengthens the lower back. Opens up the chest and tight shoulders, and builds flexibility.



5

Reclined Big Toe

Stretches the hamstrings, hips, and IT band.



JASON'S 5 REASONS DUDES SHOULD PRACTICE YOGA

1. YOUR UPPER BODY WILL GET STRONGER. I feel stronger, my muscles are more defined, and I haven't lifted a weight in more than 2 years. This is all thanks to yoga. Just holding Plank in a basic yoga sequence provides an incredible upper-body workout.

2. YOUR CORE WILL THANK YOU. Sit-ups and crunches and all those other fun exercises take you only so far, because they are repetitive and your body becomes familiar with the movement. Yoga helps you use and develop your core in relation to your other muscles and body parts, which is what really tones and lengthens. Hello, six-pack.

3. YOU'LL ALLEVIATE STRESS. Unlike most women, most dudes hold stress in (I'm guilty, too) and don't necessarily deal with it in a healthy way. The result often is sleep deprivation, lack of focus, poor eating habits, or going to a few too many happy hours. Yoga helps you check your stress at the door. A regular practice will help you concentrate and relax, which will pay off at work, at home, and in every other area of your life.

4. IT'S A CHEAP DATE. When I got married, my wife and I needed to find an activity that was fun and kept us in shape. Lifting weights together isn't really a romantic option, and running is tough on my knees. But taking yoga classes together fits the bill. We both get a workout, it's never boring, and my wife is happy. Priceless.

5. THE WOMEN. If you're single, there's no better place to meet a woman than in a yoga class. First of all, the girl-to-guy ratio is heavily in your favor. And let's be honest, being surrounded by shapely ladies in tight pants doing intricate poses beats the hell out of happy hour! Obviously, you don't want to treat a yoga class like your personal pick-up spot, but there's a good chance you'll meet girls you'd actually want to spend some time with. Use this book to build confidence and strength, and watch the ladies line up behind your mat.

CHAPTER 9

Yoga for Emotional Health

Moves for maximum mind/body bliss



If only life could be all rainbows and unicorns—we'd chase the shadows and demons away with pixie dust and optimism! The unfortunate truth is that life isn't always so bright and cheerful. It gets complicated, confusing, and at times even overwhelming. Basically, there's a strong chance that you'll struggle with some kind of

depression or emotional issue at some point in your life.

A 2010 *BioPsychoSocial Medicine* article revealed that long-term yoga practice can significantly reduce fear, anger, and fatigue. Researchers administered the Profile of Mood States (POMS) questionnaire to two groups of healthy women—one group of women who had more than 2 years of yoga experience and one group of women who had never practiced yoga. The long-term yoga practitioners had, on average, lower mental disturbance, tension–anxiety, anger–hostility, and fatigue scores than the control group.

Whether you're down in the dumps after being dumped, need motivation to get out of bed and get through the day, or just feel out of sorts emotionally, yoga can help you get back on your feet. Don't despair in times of darkness! I've been there too, and I've found that there's always something valuable to learn, even when all the lights have gone out. Your yoga practice is like a flashlight to illuminate your way out. Use these sequences as helping hands in times of need.

Calming, Mood-Boosting Sequences

Anxiety

[Cobra](#)

[Camel](#)

[Bow](#)

[Revolved Head to Knee](#)

[Comfortable Seat with Salutation Mudra](#)

[Alternate Nostril Breathing](#)

Mild Depression

[Standing Forward Fold](#)

[Downward Facing Dog](#)

[Crescent](#)

[Dolphin](#)

[Handstand](#)

[Upward Facing Bow](#)

[Wild Thing](#)

Insomnia

[Cow and Cat](#)

[Seated Forward Fold](#)

[Plow](#)
[Shoulder Stand](#)
[Legs Up the Wall](#)
[Corpse \(Savasana\)](#)

Vertigo

[Seated Neck Stretch](#)
[Seated Trapezius Stretch](#)
[Mountain](#)
[Warrior II](#)
[Seated Meditation](#)
[Corpse \(Savasana\)](#)

Relaxation

SEQUENCE 1

[Alternate Nostril Breathing](#)
[Cow and Cat](#)
[Standing Forward Fold with Variation](#)
[Wide-Leg Forward Fold](#)
[Seated Forward Fold](#)
[Bound Angle](#)
[Reclined Bound Angle](#)
[Legs Up the Wall](#)

SEQUENCE 2

[Downward Facing Dog](#)
[Knee to Nose](#)
[Warrior I](#)
[Warrior II](#)
[Triangle](#)
[Half Moon](#)
[Seated Half-Fish](#)
[Side Crow](#)
[Child's Pose](#)

Broken Heart

[Sun Salutation A](#)
[Boat with Bent Knees into Half Boat](#)
[Goddess](#)
[Flying Pigeon](#)
[Seated Meditation with Palms Over Heart](#)
[Double Pigeon](#)
[Corpse \(Savasana\) with a Bolster Under the Knees](#)

Mudras

Strike a pose. Mudras (hand gestures) can be seen on ancient sculptures and paintings, as well as in modern-day yoga classes and music videos. These beautiful hand gestures go way beyond aesthetics. A mudra is a physical formation used to cultivate a more intense state of mind, and can elevate your practice to a higher level. I've chosen some of the most common and useful to get you started.

TIP

A path with no obstacles often leads to nowhere. Use these mudras to help you through any speed bumps, both in your practice and your life, to get you to a stronger and more knowledgeable place.

Salutation Mudra (*Anjali Mudra*)

This is the perfect way to start your practice or encourage a meditative state of mind. Salutation Mudra reminds us that all the answers we need are there if we set our intentions.

- Bring your palms together in front of your chest with the thumbs resting lightly on the sternum.
- Press your hands firm and evenly into each other.
- Bow your head slightly and keep the shoulders soft as the chest lifts.



Knowledge Mudra (*Gyana Mudra*)

This mudra helps to discriminate between what is right and wrong. It aids in focus, and sharpens memory and mental concentration.

- Place the tips of your thumbs to the tips of your index fingers.
- Press gently into the pads of your fingers.
- Rotate the palms up if you're looking for energy or help, spin the palms down if you're looking to calm and focus yourself.



Lotus Mudra

The lotus flower grows out of mud and blossoms beautifully on the water's surface. It is an iconic image in yoga, symbolizing how beauty stems from even the darkest places. This mudra helps you to remember your inner beauty.

- Join the heels of your palms together above your heart with your pads of your thumbs and pinkies touching.
- Keep your knuckles open and gently open your fingers like the petals on a lotus.



Thunderbolt Mudra (*Vajrapradama Mudra*)

You don't need to ask Harry Potter to know that a thunderbolt represents power. This mudra is used to create unshakeable Zeus-worthy confidence, and helps in times of self-doubt and to overcome fear.

- Rest your palms over your heart center with the fingers crossing and the thumbs pointing up and wide.



Realization Mudra

You'll see this mudra used commonly in poses like Warrior I and III. This hand gesture represents unity. The interlacing of the fingers helps you to reconnect to yourself, as well as those around you.

- Interlace all of your fingers except for your index and thumb.
- Point your index fingers straight up and pull the thumbs lightly down away from the index fingers.



Fearlessness Mudra (*Abhaya Mudra*)

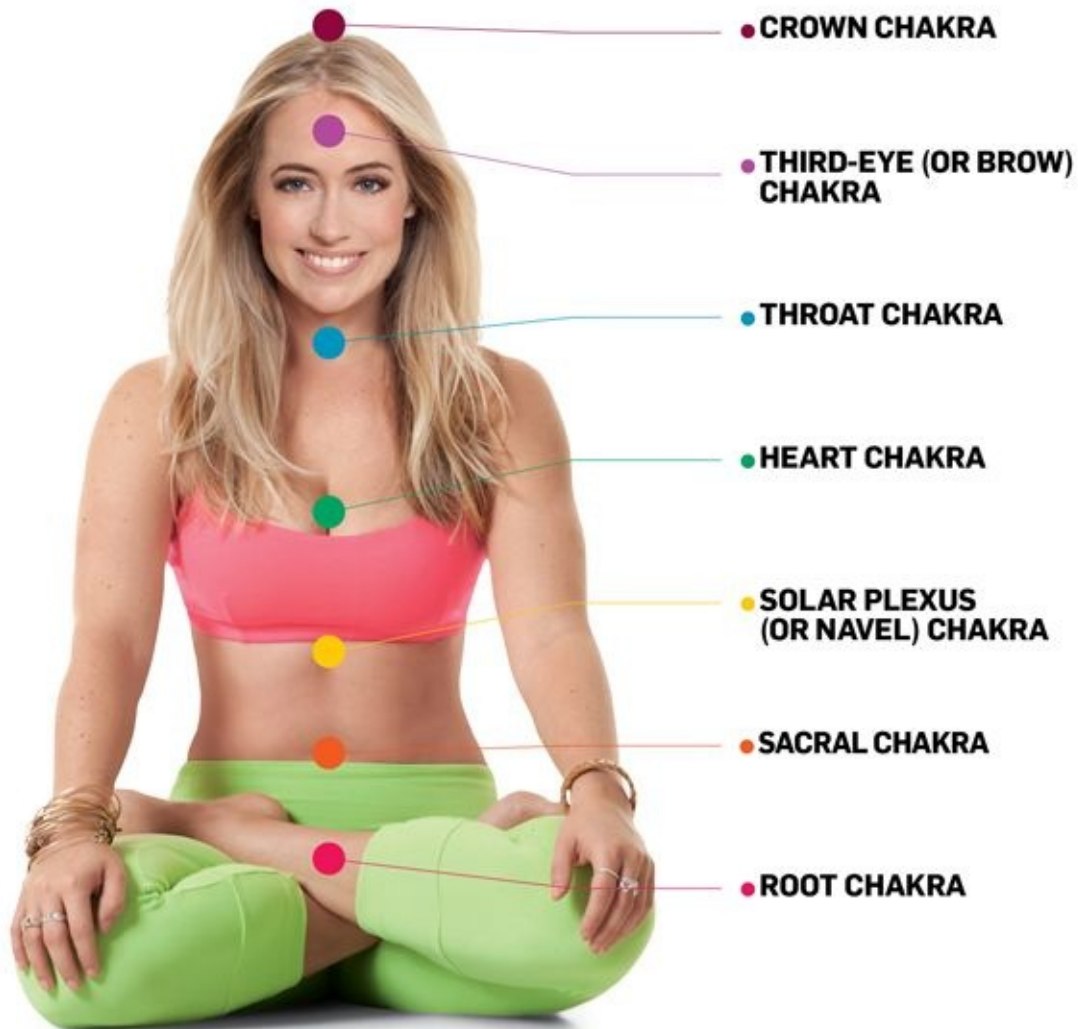
This mudra helps build courage and the ability to think before you act. This is commonly practiced in warrior poses to remember to be a peaceful warrior, moving thoughtfully. It teaches patience, humility and strength.

- Raise your arms keeping your hands at shoulder height with the elbows soft and palms facing forward.



Chakras

In yoga, it is believed that the body contains seven chakras (“wheels,” or energy centers). Keeping your chakras open and flowing is important to maintaining a balanced mind-set and energy level. If you practice yoga with the chakras actively in mind, they can help you target any issues you’re having and break through energy blockages. I’ve listed specific poses here that you can use to focus on any of the chakras. You might be surprised by how much better you feel!



•**CROWN CHAKRA:** The highest chakra represents our ability to be fully connected spiritually
LOCATION: At the very top of the head

EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Inner or outer beauty, connection to spirituality, pure bliss **GREAT FOR:** People with materialistic urges, spiritual skepticism, or apathy **POSES TO PRACTICE:** MEDITATION. The crown chakra represents our highest energy. In acupuncture, it's called the "xi" spot and is where all energy stems from. Use your meditation and breath work to envision unity, with all of your chakras working in harmony to keep your system running. Send out a little invitation to health, prosperity, and spirituality. Start small with 5 minutes of meditation and try to work up to 20.

•**THIRD-EYE (OR BROW) CHAKRA:** Represents our ability to focus on and see the big picture
LOCATION: On the forehead, above the eyes

EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Intuition, imagination, wisdom, ability to think and make decisions **GREAT FOR:** People with headaches, nightmares, concentration problems, eye problems, or creativity issues **POSES TO PRACTICE:** ANY POSTURES WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED. Try balancing in Tree Pose with your eyes closed or standing tall in Mountain while gazing at one point. If you are a true beginner, simply visualize yourself doing beautiful yoga postures even if you've never been able to do them before. This process will tell your body that you can and you will.

- THROAT CHAKRA:** Represents our ability to communicate **LOCATION:** In the throat
EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Communication, expression of feelings or the truth **GREAT FOR:** Smokers, allergy sufferers, singers, public speakers, and those who stutter or have thyroid problems
POSES TO PRACTICE: PLOW, SHOULDER STAND, BRIDGE. These postures help to stretch the neck and open the shoulders to create freedom in this chakra. **TIP:** Try wearing a turquoise necklace to support this chakra and remain mindful!
- HEART CHAKRA:** Represents our ability to love **LOCATION:** Center of chest, just above the heart
EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Love, joy, inner peace
GREAT FOR: People who are shy or lonely, have forgiveness issues or breathing issues, or lack love or empathy
POSES TO PRACTICE: CAMEL, UPWARD FACING BOW, EAGLE POSE, BOW POSE. All of these heart openers or backbends are fantastic for opening the heart. Backbends especially help us build trust and the confidence to truly open up. These poses are fear busters!
- SOLAR PLEXUS (OR NAVEL) CHAKRA:** Represents our ability to be confident and in control of our lives
LOCATION: In the upper abdomen, in the stomach area
EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Self-worth, self-confidence, self-esteem
GREAT FOR: People with digestive problems, eating disorders, or low self-esteem and for victims and perfectionists
POSES TO PRACTICE: CROW, HANDSTAND, UPWARD FACING BOW, BOAT. All of these are sensible risk-taking postures. Use them to confront your fears—physical and emotional—and to break through insecurities and increase your confidence.
- SACRAL CHAKRA:** Represents our connections with and ability to accept others and new experiences and to accept what is
LOCATION: In the lower abdomen, about 2 inches below the navel and 2 inches inward
EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Sense of abundance, well-being, pleasure, sexuality
GREAT FOR: Workaholics who can't experience pleasure, women experiencing infertility, anyone struggling with sexuality
POSES TO PRACTICE: COW FACE, BOUND ANGLE, WIDE ANGLE. All hip and groin poses will help to relieve tension and encourage freedom. Instead of forcing these postures, set alignment up and allow yourself to surrender to the pose. Practice long, quiet holds
- ROOT CHAKRA:** Represents our foundation and the feeling of being grounded
LOCATION: At the base of the spine
EMOTIONAL ISSUES: Survival issues such as financial independence, money, and food
GREAT FOR: People who travel too much, have just moved, are newly separated or divorced, or are out of work
POSES TO PRACTICE: STANDING POSES LIKE MOUNTAIN, WARRIOR I, WARRIOR II, REVERSE WARRIOR, AND SIDE ANGLE. Restorative poses such as Child's Pose and CORPSE. Standing postures will help you to solidify your root and remember how to stand tall and strong. Focus on your feet as the base of your foundation, building your body and all of your energy on top of them. Use the restorative postures to settle an overactive mind and encourage surrender to gravity.

Anxiety

Anxiety is like the bully or mean girl you dreaded in middle school. Even if you started your day full of optimism, she lurked in the shadows, waiting to pounce when you least expected her. Anxiety

works in much the same way—your fears and worries hover around you all the time, preventing you from feeling confident and happy. You may not even notice it at first, but over time, anxiety can build up and make life difficult, and even lead to depression. This sequence uses backbends to create a sense of fearlessness. It exposes your heart and soft underbelly, but in a safe and supported way. These poses encourage you to breathe deeply and open your chest and lungs to keep stressful thoughts at bay. Inhale, and set your intention to feel confident and relaxed. Let your anxiety know that you're in charge.

TIP

Remember that everyone feels like everyone else—good and bad—just not at the same time. Letting go is better than maintaining rigid control. Nothing beautiful comes from overthinking things. The time is now.

1

Cobra

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Camel

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Bow

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Revolved Head to Knee

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Comfortable Seat with Salutation Mudra

([comfortable seat directions](#) | [salutation mudra](#))



Alternate Nostril Breathing

[\(directions\)](#)



Mild Depression

To this day, I have never left a yoga class feeling worse than I did before I entered. I can walk into a yoga room wanting to curl up in a ball and by the time I rise from Savasana I feel like a phoenix, resurrected from the ashes of everything that was wearing me out and holding me down. I feel rejuvenated, and, more important, my perspective is refreshed. I've suggested that before you start your yoga routine, you choose an intention, something to focus on during practice. When you're not feeling particularly happy, try to make your intention about joy, and invite it back into your life, pose by pose, breath by breath.

Mild depression can be eased with rejuvenating, playful yoga postures. Poses like Handstand remind you how to feel as carefree as a kid, while backbends are proven to release endorphins. Use this

sequence when you're singing the blues. It'll help you pick up the tempo and let your heart sing.

TIP

Start your day with a gratitude practice. As you brush your teeth and get dressed, mentally list all the things that make you happy: your parents, friends, a new outfit, that fabulous meal you had last night. Starting the day remembering your blessings makes you less likely to long for things that you think you lack.

1

Standing Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Crescent

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Dolphin

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Handstand

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Upward Facing Bow

[\(directions\)](#)



Wild Thing

[\(directions\)](#)



Insomnia

Insomnia—that evil, sleep-stealing monster that lurks under the bed! It feeds off of stress, anxiety, and what we in yoga call “the constant fluctuations of the mind,” or racing thoughts. Tonight, try this sequence to calm your mind, relax your nervous system, and put those pesky sheep-counting nights behind you. Discover the magic of blissful, uninterrupted sleep!

TIPS

- For more restful sleep, try to limit your exposure to light and other stimuli for about an hour before you want to go to sleep. Answering e-mails, surfing the Web, and watching TV all keep your mind firing and make it hard to unwind. Exposure to light slows down your ability to produce melatonin, which helps you fall asleep. If you're sleeping in a room with too much light, invest in an eye mask.
- Rub warm sesame oil on the soles of your feet and into your temples before you go to bed. Sesame oil is known to pacify stress-related symptoms and help you calm your mind.

1

Cow and Cat

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Seated Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Plow

[\(directions\)](#)



- If you need more support, move your palms to your lower back to help support your hips when you lift them.

4

Shoulder Stand

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Legs Up the Wall

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Corpse (Savasana)

[\(directions\)](#)



Vertigo

Vertigo can be triggered by many things—an inner ear infection, spinal dysfunction, temporomandibular joint disorder, or even stress and anxiety. I know firsthand how depressing vertigo can be because I struggled with it for 5 months straight. (What a joke: A yoga teacher with vertigo!) I constantly felt like I was walking on a boat that swayed from side to side, unable to find my balance or firm ground. It was horrible. It turned out that my vertigo was triggered by anxiety. I immediately incorporated quiet meditations into my daily life, as well as jaw and neck stretches to relieve stress and tension. I threw in good, long warrior holds to remind myself that I could stand strong. If you suffer from vertigo, I hope this sequence helps you as it did me.

TIP

Create a list of things you say and do to appease those around you or fit in, then mark “healthy boundaries” to help define who you are and what you stand for. Use your yoga practice to grow the confidence to be yourself!

1

Seated Neck Stretch



- Gently add pressure to the side of your head.
- Walk your hand away from your body, keeping your arm straight.

2

Seated Trapezius Stretch



- Hug your elbows toward your face.
- Interlace your fingers and gently pull your chin to your chest.
- Round your upper back.

3

Mountain

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Warrior II

[\(directions\)](#)

Hold for 2 minutes on each side.



5

Seated Meditation

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Corpse (Savasana)

[\(directions\)](#)



Relaxation

We all know how hard it is to relax in a world of perpetual motion—our days are packed with meetings and phone calls and social events, not to mention the constant checking of e-mails, text messages, and social media sites. But we also know how critical it is to be able to tune out all this noise and clear our heads.

Ask yourself: Is it easy for me to unwind or do I get distracted if I try to sit still for 30 seconds?

The good news is that I have a sequence for you no matter what you answered. The first sequence is for those of you who can relax if you're just given the opportunity. Practice these poses and you'll feel rejuvenated and refreshed.

For those of you who want to relax but, if given a spare moment, can't help rearranging your sock drawer, try the second sequence. Just like an overactive child, you need to be worn out! Get your body moving, and once you're done, you'll enjoy what it means to have downtime.

"Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens."—CARL JUNG

Sequence 1



1

Alternate Nostril Breathing

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Cow and Cat

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Standing Forward Fold with Variation

Start with [Standing Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Squeeze your arms as close to each other as possible and lengthen as you bend toward the ground.
- Interlace your fingers.
- Keep your feet hip-width apart.

4

Wide-Leg Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Seated Forward Fold

[directions](#)



6

Bound Angle

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Reclined Bound Angle

[\(directions\)](#)



8

Legs Up the Wall

[\(directions\)](#)



Sequence 2

1

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Knee to Nose

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Warrior I

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Warrior II

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Triangle

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Half Moon

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Seated Half-Fish

[\(directions\)](#)



8

Side Crow

[\(directions\)](#)



9

Child's Pose

[\(directions\)](#)



Repeat all of [Sequence 2](#).

Broken Heart

You're in love, blissfully happy, and singing from the rooftops—then suddenly, you find yourself curled up in a ball with a tearstained face and a feeling of despair. A broken heart very well may be the most painful injury ever—with few proven ways of rehab. There's plenty of advice out there: “Time heals all wounds” and “There are plenty of fish in the sea,” but often those words just aren't enough. Sometimes you need tangible help. This sequence is designed to make you feel whole from the inside out. It will rebuild your confidence and remind you that you're completely in charge of your own happiness. Your heart beats for you—and it can never be broken.

TIP

You always have the power to tell yourself that this is not how your story will end. Forget the story and see the soul of the situation. Drop fear and choose love; it will always show you the way.

1

Sun Salutation A

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Boat with Bent Knees into Half Boat

Start with [Boat with Bent Knees](#), then move into [Half Boat](#).



3

Goddess

[\(directions\)](#)



4

Flying Pigeon

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Seated Meditation with Palms Over Heart

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Double Pigeon

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Corpse (Savasana) with a Bolster Under the Knees

Start with [Corpse](#), then place a bolster under your knees.



MEDITATION

Meditation teacher Gary Goldman shared this meditation analogy with me: Imagine you're inside a bottle made of imperfect glass. When you look out at the world, you're looking through all the distortions caused by the bottle. Most of us don't see the world with pure perception—and that's what we strive to create through a meditation practice. Meditating helps us to see the world as it is, without judgment or the distortions and imperfections of the bottles that we look through.

Yoga and meditation help us understand ourselves better by rebooting our systems and attitudes.

Meditation not only promotes a healthy state of mind, but also is good for everyone around you. The clarity you find will help you become more empathetic and compassionate. You'll react differently to everyday challenges and better manage your own stress and anxiety.

As Rod Stryker, the founder of Para Yoga and a meditation expert, says, "We are already complete. All we need is the clarity to recognize the wholeness that is us."

SIMPLE STEPS FOR MEDITATING

Look for a calm, quiet environment that's comfortable, perhaps one with low lighting. Choose a time of day when you know you won't be disturbed. Turn off your phone, computer, and any other electronic devices so you can fully commit to this time. It may help to choose a similar time each day to create a routine that you can look forward to.

Find a comfortable seat

You'll often see people meditating in full lotus pose, but don't let this intimidate you. The key is to keep your spine straight and tall so you stay alert. If you can comfortably sit cross-legged on the floor for a few minutes without pain, try that out. Another great option is to sit in a chair in which you can plant your feet on the floor and sit up tall. Rest your hands comfortably on your thighs. But avoid lying down—it's too tempting to fall asleep!

- Lotus
- Seated on a cushion
- Seated on your heels with a blanket between your bottom and your feet
- Seated on a chair

Relax

One of the objectives of meditation is to let go of restlessness, so take a few moments to ensure that your body is relaxed. Mentally scan your body for any areas of tension and gently encourage them all to let go. Encourage a quiet space to come into your body and send out a full-body invitation to relax!

Breathe

Become aware of your breath. Notice if it is fast, calm, or shallow. Allow it to slow down and even out. There are three different areas of your body you can focus your attention on while you do this: the nostrils, throat, and belly. Focusing on your breath as it passes through your nostrils promotes intuition. It helps to sharpen your mind and perception. Focusing on your breath as it flows through your throat helps to elevate your mind to a heightened state of awareness. Abdominal breathing, which is concentrating on how your abdomen responds to inhalation and exhalation, helps ground us. It promotes integration of the mind and body, as

well as confidence. Choose whichever focus suits you on that particular day.

Start out by sitting for 1 minute, focusing on your breathing. As you grow more comfortable with this exercise, increase it to 5 to 10 minutes. If you find that centering on your breathing isn't helping you focus, try using an object or a mantra to concentrate on. Make the object something neutral or something that encourages you to be calm. If you use a mantra, keep it simple. As you inhale, think, "in." As you exhale, think, "out." Or try saying "I" when you inhale and "am" as you exhale.

TIP

Don't panic! Meditation is challenging and takes time to master. Remember that the natural inclination of your mind is to think and be active. As expert Rod Stryker says, recognizing that your mind gets distracted is very much a part of meditation. Don't stop. Appreciate how distracted your mind truly is, and continue to try and slow down your thoughts by focusing on your breathing to calm and center yourself.

TIP

Meditation teacher Gary Goldman offers this way to visualize meditation: When you first start, your mind will behave like a mountain's white-water rapids—it will be wild, unpredictable, and crashing around. As you travel farther down the mountain, it will turn into a swift river with fewer currents. Over time, it slows down until it joins the ocean, where it's vast and calm.

CHAPTER 10

Yoga and Your Hormones

Balance your body's natural rhythms and feel good inside and out.



My hormones made me do it! Hormonal swings are powerful and often unexpected. One second, you're feeling energetic and in good spirits, then in the blink of an eye the world seems to be plotting against you. I constantly struggle when I'm in tricky hormonal situations: Just as I'm about to lash out—with zero filter—at someone, my inner yoga voice pops up (dressed in full angel garb and munching on granola, of course), saying, "The only reason this person is harassing you is because they're insecure. You should empathize with them and their situation and just let it slide." This sensible voice tackles the little devil inside me, who's ready to pounce. This internal conversation itself seems a bit hormonal, but four out of five times,

my sensible side wins and everyone walks away unscathed.

One of yoga's innate benefits is that it helps you stop and think before you open your mouth. It reduces your stress level, which helps to balance out your hormones, so common PMS symptoms like irritability, bloating, and even breakouts can become things of the past (or at least less of a trial to deal with). Try practicing these sequences if your angel side isn't winning the battle quite yet.

Sequences for a Balanced State of Being

Bloating

[Hero on Block](#)

[Simple Spinal Twist](#)

[Modified Seated Half-Fish](#)

[Shoulder Stand with Block](#)

[Wind Relieving](#)

[Head to Knee](#)

[Legs Up the Wall](#)

PMS

[Seated Forward Fold on a Bolster](#)

[Single Pigeon Fold on a Bolster](#)

[Revolved Bolster Twist](#)

[Supported Reclined Bound Angle](#)

[Supported Legs Up the Wall](#)

Menopause

HOT FLASHES

[Supported Reclined Hero](#)

[Half Plow](#)

ANXIETY, IRRITABILITY, AND INSOMNIA

[Standing Forward Fold](#)

[Wide-Legged Forward Fold](#)

FATIGUE

[Supported Bridge](#)

Breakouts and Blemishes

[Sun Salutation A](#)

[Sun Salutation B](#)

[Standing Forward Fold](#)

[Chair](#)

[Revolved Chair](#)

[Revolved Crescent](#)
[Dolphin](#)
[Forearm Balance](#)
[Headstand](#)
[Child's Pose](#)

Bloating

Even saying the word “bloat” makes me uncomfortable. You know that time of the month has snuck up on you when your jeans feel snuggier than usual, even though you haven’t gorged on a big meal. Or, maybe it’s your body’s way of telling you something you did eat didn’t agree with you. Either way, sometimes it feels like there’s nothing else to do but pray and rub your belly.

Fortunately, there are plenty of therapeutic yoga poses that help to relieve the swelling and calm your stomach. Twists help speed up digestion, while inversions help release trapped gas and toxins. Try this sequence to alleviate your belly blues.

TIP

Buy a bottle of peppermint essential oils, and take a few drops orally after a meal to help you digest food (and freshen your breath), or rub it directly onto your belly to help soothe bloating. It’s also great for sore muscles.

1

Hero on Block



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Simple Spinal Twist

[\(directions\)](#)



3

Modified Seated Half-Fish

Start with [Seated Half-Fish](#), then make these adjustments.



- Wrap your front arm around your shin and outer thigh.
- Draw your rear shoulder back.

4

Shoulder Stand with Block



[\(directions\)](#)

5

Wind Relieving

Draw your knees into your chest, hip-width apart, and hug tightly.



6

Head to Knee

[\(directions\)](#)



7

Legs Up the Wall

[\(directions\)](#)



PMS

This may sound shocking, but when PMS strikes, sometimes chocolate alone just isn't enough. You can eat yourself into a Ben & Jerry's frenzy, but overindulging on sugar only sharpens the premenstrual pain. The result is a quick upswing in your blood sugar that's followed by a rapid decline—and then your headache and hunger strike again. I know the idea of unrolling your mat isn't nearly as alluring as reaching for the remote to watch reruns of *Sex in the City* is, but do yourself a favor and try this sequence out. Make sure you are equipped with a bolster, if you have one (or use folded blankets). It may take a little extra support to make you feel better, but yoga is up to the challenge. Drop the ice cream and kiss your mood swings good-bye.

TIP

A fellow teacher introduced me to rice-filled pillows that can be warmed up in the microwave or oven and used on any sore part of your body. Try adding the warm pillow to your tummy during some of these restorative poses for extra relaxation.

1

Seated Forward Fold on a Bolster

Start with [Seated Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place a bolster along your legs.
- Turn your face to the side.
- Relax your arms.

2

Single Pigeon Fold on a Bolster

Start with [Single Pigeon Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place a bolster lengthwise against your front foot.
- Turn your face to the side.

3

Revolved Bolster Twist

Sit sideways at the base of the bolster, bending both knees at a 90-degree angle while keeping the upper thigh in and the lower thigh back. Twist your torso away from your front thigh and rest your face.



4

Supported Reclined Bound Angle

Follow [Reclined Bound Angle](#), but use a bolster behind your back.



5

Supported Legs Up the Wall



[\(directions\)](#)

YOGA AND YOUR PERIOD

For years, an epic battle has raged about whether a woman should practice yoga during a woman's menstrual period. Some yoga teachers simply say no inversions should be done. Remember Pattabhi Jois, who pioneered the ashtanga tradition? He encouraged women to take an entire "ladies' holiday" from practice.

Personally, I'm an avid fan of "no flow on my flow," because anything more strenuous than reaching for my Trader Joe's dark chocolate truffle bar is a . . . stretch (in the non-forward-fold sense). Not to mention that bulky pads don't look so cute in skintight Lululemon pants.

I officially consider myself out of commission during the few days leading up to my period, as well as on the first days of my actual period. You can normally find me working flips in a handstand until I can't see straight, but at a certain time of the month I'm usually propped up on the couch with a novel in hand and a spoon poised above a container of Almond Dream chocolate ice cream. On these days, the idea of lifting my frontal hip points to engage my core makes my ovaries scream in surrender—and I'd like to point out that "surrender" is a wonderfully common yogic theme, one I like to teach. I admire the yogis who practice daily no matter what, but even the most devoted practitioner can use a rest.

The whole theory behind taking a break from yoga during your period is, in my mind, a form of respect. Some teachers will say you shouldn't invert during your period because the bloodflow will get stuck. Now, honestly, that sounds like an old wives' tale to me, but logistically speaking, if something is trying to get out, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to turn it upside down. Or twist it. Or strain it. Or do anything more than easy, supine postures, some bolster snuggling, light walking, and all those bites of chocolate.

But seriously (and I am very serious about my chocolate!), your period should be treated with great respect. It is your body's time to clean and begin a new cycle, much like the full cycles of postures that we go through in yoga. I constantly teach my students to stop and observe themselves before they begin to move. Notice what is happening in your body (as well as your mind) before you race to get where you think you should be.

My advice? If you need a "ladies' holiday," by all means, take one. Don't ignore the way you feel. Stop, observe, acknowledge, respect, and rest. Honestly, you've earned it. Period.

Menopause

I e-mailed an amazing student of mine who is going through menopause and asked her if any particular yoga poses help to alleviate her symptoms. She replied: "Savasana—lol!" That's not far from the truth! Menopause carries with it an onslaught of frustrating and often painful symptoms—hot flashes, anxiety, irritability, and insomnia, just to name a few. But it's an unavoidable stage of life. Instead of focusing on the dark side, think of it as a rite of passage. In the same way that you should respect your fertile years and menstrual cycles,

menopause is a time to honor your body and its natural shift. It always feels better if you and your body are playing for the same team. Once you've made peace (or at least struck a truce!) with your situation, treat yourself to these poses. Instead of giving you a sequence of moves, I've broken down the postures by the symptoms they help.

TIP

An overwhelming number of women claim inversions help the most to relieve their menopausal symptoms. Practice one of the challenging sequences from this book followed by a Handstand and a Headstand, leaving plenty of time to hold the restorative postures. This will help to burn off anxiety and encourage a state of deep rest.

Hot Flashes

These unexpected flamethrowers send menopausal women for a major loop. The key to alleviating them is to focus on cooling maneuvers and use plenty of props.



1

Supported Reclined Hero

Start with [Reclined Hero](#), then make these adjustments.



- Layer two blankets over a bolster. Place your hips on the ground in front of the bolster.
- Keep your knees touching.

2

Half Plow

Start with [Plow](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your legs straight.
- Rest your feet flat on the seat of a chair.

Anxiety, Irritability, and Insomnia

These poses will help you shut out distractions, soothe your mind, and calm your nervous system.

1

Standing Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Wide-Leg Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)



Fatigue

This pose opens your chest and heart, delivering a renewed sense of energy and joy!

Supported Bridge



[\(directions\)](#)

Breakouts and Blemishes

It's impossible to hide breakouts (you can't wear that floppy hat forever), and acne products tend to make matters worse by overdrying your skin and causing peeling and redness. Yoga isn't a dermatologist, but it can help to clear impurities from your skin. Inversions increase bloodflow to your face, bringing with it oxygen and other nutrients that fight off free radicals and encourage skin cell renewal. They also leave you with a fresh-faced glow when you're back on your feet.

If you have chronic breakouts, you might want to reconsider your diet. Check out the recipes in Chapter 4 for fresh, nourishing meals. You may even want to detox for a few days to get your system back on track. Complement your healthy eating habits with regular twists that help to eliminate wastes and toxins from your body. Finally, don't forget to work up a sweat! Sweating opens your pores and helps to push toxins out. Make sure you use a good facial cleanser after your practice, and drink plenty of water after practice and in general.

TIPS

- For a natural blemish buster, try dabbing a few drops of tea tree oil or organic coconut oil on your blemishes. Tea tree oil is famous for its drying properties, while coconuts have antifungal and antibacterial properties.
- Nibble on green grapes as a refreshing snack. They are high in vitamin C, magnesium, and potassium, which all help clear your complexion.
- Cheers, mate! Drink several cups of chamomile tea daily as an internal cleanser. It reduces skin inflammation (also in lotions).

1

Sun Salutation A

[\(directions\)](#)



Repeat 3 times.



2

Sun Salutation B

[\(directions\)](#)



Repeat 2 times.

3

Standing Forward Fold

[\(directions\)](#)

Hold for 1-2 minutes.



4

Chair

[\(directions\)](#)



5

Revolved Chair

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Revolved Crescent



[\(directions\)](#)

Repeat on the opposite side starting at [step 4](#).

7

Dolphin

[\(directions\)](#)



8

Forearm Balance

[\(directions\)](#)



9

Headstand

[\(directions\)](#)



10

Child's Pose

[\(directions\)](#)



CHAPTER 11

Yoga for Moms

Poses for a healthy pregnancy and your post-baby body



Yoga has the ability to strengthen our bodies, sharpen our minds, and stimulate our souls—but what can it do for a pregnant belly? A 2010 study published in the journal *Quality of Life Research* revealed that, compared with standard prenatal exercises, yoga was significantly more effective at improving the quality of life of pregnant women across the social, psychological, and environmental spectrums.

I couldn't agree with this study more. I see women in all different stages of pregnancy taking classes that range from mellow prenatal

routines to sweat-inducing flow sequences. Yoga not only physically relieves women of the aches and pains associated with these 9 months, but it also offers them other amazing benefits—a sense of support, a fun activity, and, most importantly, a way to calm their minds. A high stress level is the worst possible thing for a woman who's expecting, so a regular yoga practice can be exactly what the doctor ordered.

But here's the real reward: Yoga helps with labor! A 2008 study published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* found that practicing yoga was an efficient way to improve maternal comfort and decrease pain during labor and for 2 hours post-delivery—as well as shorten the length of labor. Sign me up!

Find the level of yoga practice that's comfortable for you and keep at it. Your body and your baby will thank you!

Sequences for the Bump and Beyond

Prenatal

[Cow and Cat](#)

[Opposite Arm–Leg Lengthener and Strengtheners](#)

[Child's Pose with Supported Head](#)

[Plank or Forearm Plank](#)

[Downward Facing Dog](#)

[Crescent Low Lunge with Blocks](#)

[Warrior III with Blocks](#)

[Warrior II](#)

[Side Angle](#)

[Seated Forward Fold with Strap over Balls of the Feet](#)

[Supported Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend](#)

[Bound Angle Pose with Rib Circles](#)

[Corpse \(Savasana\) with Bolster](#)

Mommy and Me

[Boat with Bent Knees](#)

[Leg Lowers](#)

[Chair](#)

[Downward Facing Dog](#)

Prenatal

I've worked with plenty of women who have turned to yoga when they were expecting. My client Giada de Laurentiis was told by her doctor that she couldn't hit the gym after she was about 6 months along. He wanted her to slow down and keep her stress level low. Since she loved to exercise (she had been a gym rat for years), she turned to yoga. I sat down with prenatal and postnatal yoga specialist Heather Seiniger to create the perfect sequence to keep Giada active but relaxed. What we came up with is similar to the sequence Heather contributed in the following pages, and Giada has been hooked since! She, along with countless other mamas-to-be, discovered that yoga helps to keep her chest open, improve her breathing, relax her shoulders, and even increase her leg circulation, which may be reduced by all the additional weight a pregnant woman bears.

Depending on your health history (and your doctor's recommendation), you can keep a fairly strong practice going if you did yoga before you were pregnant. Otherwise, use yoga at your own speed and level of difficulty to feel better and stay calm. I highly recommend practicing every day!

PRENATAL TIPS:

- Keep your feet at least hip-width apart in all standing and seated poses.
- No twisting postures. (If any, keep them incredibly light, focusing on your upper chest.)
- No inverting during your first trimester. If you had a strong inverted practice before your pregnancy you can invert in the second and third trimesters.
- Use only gentle backbends during your third trimester to protect your rectus abdominis.

1

Cow and Cat

[\(directions\)](#)



2

Opposite Arm–Leg Extension

From **Cow and Cat**, keep back straight and extend opposite arm and leg parallel to the ground.



3

Child's Pose with Supported Head

Start with [Child's Pose](#), then make this adjustment.



- Rest your forehead on a blanket.

4

Plank or Forearm Plank

([plank directions](#) | [forearm plank directions](#))



5

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



6

Crescent Low Lunge with Blocks

Start with [Crescent Low Lunge](#), then make these adjustments.



- Place your hands onto blocks at the level of your choice.
- Extend your heart.

7

Warrior III with Blocks

Start with [Warrior III](#), then make this adjustment.



- Place your hands onto blocks at a comfortable height.

8

Warrior II

[\(directions\)](#)



9

Side Angle

[\(directions\)](#)



10

Seated Forward Fold with Strap over Balls of the Feet



[\(directions\)](#)

11

Supported Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend

Start with [Wide Angle Seated Forward Fold](#), then make these adjustments.



- Prop your hips up onto blanket.
- Your chest should be slightly extended.

12

Bound Angle with Rib Circles

Start with [Bound Angle](#), then make these adjustments.



- Prop your hips up on a blanket.
- Roll your ribs to the left, then back, to the right, then forward.

13

Corpse (Savasana) with Bolster

Adapt [Corpse](#) by lying on your side and using a bolster to support your top leg.



STRETCH CAREFULLY

Your joints and ligaments may relax and soften as a result of hormones released during pregnancy (relaxin in the third trimester and progesterone from weeks 28 through 30). This means you'll be much more flexible than normal. But I recommend doing postures at about 70% percent of your capability. Even if it feels good to go deep, back off just a bit. It's better to keep your body strong than to overstretch it. (Think of an overstretched rubber band: . . . no es bueno!)

KEEP CALM AND COOL

Keep your breath flowing and easy, and emphasize your exhalations—doing so can be cooling and calming. If you find yourself overheating, keep your arms down and exhale through your mouth.

Mommy and Me

Feel like you don't have any time to do yoga? No worries—bring baby along! You can incorporate your baby into your yoga routine, which will keep everyone laughing and smiling as you sweat and shed your baby weight! Here's a sequence of poses that will help get you back into your practice and keep your little one occupied at the same time.

TIPS

- Ease back into exercise gradually, to avoid injury. Also, remember to keep your chest open and your shoulders down, as they tend to close and tighten from nursing and carrying your baby.
- For added strength-building, take walks with your baby carried against the front of your body in a sling or carrier. They'll love being close to you, and you'll love shedding extra pounds from the workout.

1

Boat with Bent Knees



[\(directions\)](#)

- Keep your knees bent and your shins parallel to the ground.

2

Leg Lowers

Use your baby to engage your core and lengthen your tailbone.



- Let your little one sit on your belly as you engage your core and legs.

3

Chair

[\(directions\)](#)



- Relax your shoulders and bend your elbows.
- Keep a slight bend in your knees.
- Keep your weight in your heels.
- Bend deeper as you lift your little one higher!

4

Downward Facing Dog

[\(directions\)](#)



- Encourage your little one to crawl through the tunnel!

Giselle Mari



“The practice of yoga is both revealing and challenging—it can shine a light on the dark corners of your being: physically, mentally, energetically, and spiritually. Like any good relationship, the practice keeps you on your toes and can humble you quickly.”

Giselle Mari is an advanced certified jivamukti yoga teacher whose yogic path began in the early '90s. Being a bit of a wild child, she was drawn to the jivamukti yoga method early on and began her extensive study with her gurus Sharon Gannon and David Life, both of whom she has joyfully assisted throughout the western United States.

Yoga has shown Giselle that the inflexibility in the body is secondary to the inflexibility of the mind. She is reminded every day that her body is a vehicle for her highest self and, like any protective case for something valuable, she wants to take care of it while she has it! Her favorite yoga poses are twists and inversions because they literally change your perspective of the world

and ask you to see both sides of what is being presented.

Giselle is based in the San Francisco Bay area and currently teaches dynamic and insightful classes and workshops at yoga conferences and festivals in the United States as well as around the globe. She has been featured in Yoga Journal and Yoga International and has had the honor of appearing on their covers as well. For more information visit funkyjiva.com.

CHAPTER 12

Yoga for Sex

Radiate confidence with routines that take you from the mat to the sack



That's right, I said "sex." You've made it through the essential yoga poses and routines. You've altered your diet to help you be healthy and aware. You've mastered some poses and even have some sequences that you practice on a regular basis, and you feel slimmer, fitter, and more mentally balanced. You have officially graduated to the good stuff. It's time to learn how yoga will rock your sex life! A 2010 study published in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that

yoga was effective in improving women's desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, and sexual satisfaction, and in lessening sexual pain.

Yoga is the total trifecta: It unifies and improves the body, mind, and soul. Sex (or, I should say, really satisfying sex) is also a combination of all three.

First of all, it's about having a strong physical connection with your partner. Sexual desire often boils down to instinctual, primal attraction. Once those pheromones kick in, bam—it's time to communicate without words. But in addition to getting turned on by the sight of hot, rock-hard abs, truly great sex requires a mindfulness that goes deeper than the layer of touchable skin. One-night stands can feel thrilling and risqué, but a meaningful mind-body connection builds trust, which leads to safe sexual exploration. You'll have the confidence to tell your partner what you like and don't like. You'll feel encouraged to try new things, or simply to enjoy the simplicity of the tried and true.

Once you have physical attraction and a deeper connection, you can dive into spirituality. A spiritual sexual connection takes you to a level where you and your partner share the same energy, even though you're in different bodies—you truly become one, as they say. This takes sex beyond a physical act and into one of the deepest and purest ways to connect and share yourself with another person. It's both pleasurable and meaningful, and yoga can help get you there.

Better Sex Sequences

Confidence, Energy, and Endurance

MEN

[Garland](#)

[Bound Angle](#)

[Plank](#)

[Locust](#)

WOMEN

[Happy Baby](#)

[Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend](#)

[Half Moon](#)

[Puppy Dog Stretch](#)

Intimacy and Sensuality

PARTNER POSES

[Seated Meditation Bond](#)

[Seated Inner-Thigh Twist](#)

[Seated Partner Twist](#)

[Buddha Straddle](#)

[Buddha Bliss](#)

[Loving Embrace](#)

[Digging for Diamonds](#)

[Bound Blanket](#)

[Pretzel Savasana](#)

OM-GASM

The French had it right when they nicknamed the orgasm *la petite mort*, or “the little death.” Orgasm is a transcendent moment when the body loses all control—the stars align, poetry becomes the common tongue, and spirituality doesn’t even require a second thought. There is a burst of “life force,” which is referred to as “prana” in yoga. The life force bursts out of our physical bodies, causing a brief death—a complete surrender, if you will.

The feeling of orgasm is comparable only to that perfect salted caramel *pot de crème* or the butterfly feeling in your stomach when you first fall head over heels—it exemplifies love. Unfortunately, this amazing experience is often searched for in vain. There are many reasons why orgasms can be elusive, among them a lack of trust, comfort, surrender, breath, or even body awareness. Yoga tackles all of these subjects in the hope that you’ll reach spiritual enlightenment on and off the mat. (Yes, I mean in bed!) The practice of breath control (pranayama) enables you to live in the moment. It slows down your mind, curbs distraction, and allows you to concentrate on the subject at hand—pleasure.

Try this partner breathing routine to calm your mind and instantly connect with your partner.

Partner Breathing

Assume Buddha Straddle in the buff with your partner. Come into a soft embrace and close your eyes. Begin focusing on your breath, breathing in and out through your mouths. Once you are comfortable with your own breath, begin to sync it with your partner’s. As one of you exhales, the other inhales their breath, and vice versa. Once you hit a rhythm doing this, begin to work the pelvis. As you inhale, arch your lower back. Exhale as you thrust your pelvis toward your partner. Continue breathing as you link your hips without penetration.

Meditate on the Big ‘O’

Often, people who have difficulty climaxing are those who find it impossible to clear their minds. The best thing you can do for your libido is to meditate. Close your eyes and slow down your breathing. Once your breathing has calmed, exhale all of the air from your lungs in one quick breath. Inhale for a slow count of 4. Exhale for 2 counts. Repeat this cycle 3 to 5 times. Now you’re ready to get it on!

Confidence, Energy, and Endurance

Nothing’s sexier than a confident partner. You can do squats till you can bounce a quarter off your butt, but if you don’t believe you’re sexy, it won’t translate to someone else. Practicing yoga blends the physical bonus of gaining strength and an attractive figure with the confidence that your body type is perfect and made just for you.

Once you truly believe you’re a sex goddess (because yeah—you are!), it’s time to jump-start Yoga Sex Boot Camp. You’ve got the

attitude, now it's time to train. Postures that strengthen your lower back will improve your ability to move and thrust without cramping or fatigue. Hip-opening postures increase the blood flood (hello, orgasm buddy!) and allow for a greater range of motion. Core strengtheners help you to sit, swing, and bounce longer and stronger. Put simply: More yoga equals more energy, which equals more (and better) sex!

Here's a list of postures that can help to make your playtime last longer and be way more exciting.

INDIVIDUAL POSES

Men



1

Garland Wide with Palms



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Bound Angle



[\(directions\)](#)

3

Plank



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Locust



[\(directions\)](#)

Women

1

Happy Baby



[\(directions\)](#)

2

Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend



[\(directions\)](#)

3

Half Moon



[\(directions\)](#)

4

Puppy Dog Stretch

Start with [Puppy Dog](#), then make these adjustments.



- Keep your arms straight.
- Press down into all 10 toes.
- Melt your chest and throat toward the ground.

Mary Clare Sweet



“I rarely get sick, I am awake in the morning and tired at night, I never have back or joint pain, and I experience a high level of clarity. Because my mind and body connection is strong and clear, I can honor little red flags my immune system sends my way. I feel like all systems run well because of my consistent yoga practice.”

Mary Clare’s parents introduced her to meditation at a very young age. As she grew up she started practicing yoga as a complement to her ballet and jazz classes. After struggling in her teenage years, she uncovered the secret of the yoga practice when she was in her twenties and began to fall in love with her life.

The practice of yoga has so much diversity that anything is truly possible; that coupled with this idea that we all have the same capacity for love, evolution, and experience is just one of the reasons that Mary Clare practices yoga. It also makes her feel strong and centered. Having a tendency to daydream and float off into outer space, she says the asanas keep her grounded in

the present moment—where the past can't hold her back and the future holds limitless possibilities.

The physical practice keeps our bodies in great shape but the mental practice is just as important. Mary Clare credits her positive disposition to the time she spends meditating in gratitude. She feels that when you focus on abundance, you invite more of what you want into your life than when you focus on the negative. She even attributes her good health and confident body image to yoga. She used to see her body as something that needed fixing. Now she simply checks in with her body to understand how she can serve it more effectively.

Mary Clare owns Lotus House of Yoga, a vinyasa studio in Omaha, Nebraska. The classes she leads are fun, challenging, and filled with love.

Intimacy and Sensuality

Maybe you brought sexy back, but you still can't quite get on the same track as your partner. Broken lines of communication make it almost impossible to sync up in bed. We're all living different, busy lives that don't always mesh at home. You can sit there and talk it out until you're blue in the face, but often a good shared yoga session is all you need. It helps to "speak" a language that transcends careers and opinions to find a way to reconnect.

When words fail you, unroll your yoga mats and practice moving and breathing together. Your heart rates will rise for long enough for you to sweat out stress and then lower again to calm your hearts (just in time to send those pulses racing again!). Yoga will help you to clear your minds and find what keeps you intertwined. Not to mention that breathing and sweating together is pretty compelling foreplay. Be playful, explore each other's rhythms and bodies, and know that simply being in close contact with one another's hearts can be extremely healing and enticing.

TIP

The simplicity of not talking (or nagging) and instead merely syncing your breath with your lover's is a potent tool. The lack of visual cues and reliance on connection through touch and breathing will start to unify your two bodies for the ultimate act of unification.

1

Seated Meditation Bond

Sit in [Comfortable Seat](#), with your backs pressed together. Sit up tall, gently pressing into each other's body and back of your head. Rest your palms facing upward in your lap. Close your eyes and sync your breath, breathing slow, deep, and full inhales and exhales.



- Close your eyes.
- Rest your palms facing upward.

2

Seated Inner-Thigh Twist

Sit tall with your backs pressed together and reach your right arm towards their left thigh and your left arm onto your right thigh. Gently press down on the thigh or slide your hand to their inner thigh. Push your legs down with your hand as you sit tall and revolve your chest to the right. Repeat on the other side.



- Revolve your chest to the right.
- Sit tall with your backs pressed together.

LOVERS' LOCK

One of my favorite T-shirts of all time reads: Mula Bandha Is for Lovers.

This makes me a bona fide yoga dork, but it is rather clever. If you remember from [page 14](#), the mula bandha is the root lock located between the anus and genitals. This is where the pubococcygeal (PC) muscle lies. We engage this lock during yoga practice when we want to lift our body weight up or get that extra bit of “zip” to feel light in a pose. Activating this muscle is often described as making the motion of holding back from urinating. The PC muscle is located deep within the pelvis. It is directly connected to the genitalia, which means that it helps control the strength of and bloodflow to this area.

Toning your PC muscle increases pleasure, performance, and sensation. It also can intensify your orgasms and give you the strength to solidly grip your man—giving him a memorable experience as well! Mastering these muscles can get you one step closer to the elusive “minigasm” that is often a precursor to the real deal. That means longer lovemaking and, maybe, a very happy and joyous moment when you climax together.

3

Seated Partner Twist

Sit in either [Comfortable Seat](#) or [Lotus Mudra](#) facing each other, with your knees touching. Take your right arm behind your back and reach your hand toward your hip. Extend your left arm forward as you spiral your chest toward the right to grab your partner's right hand. Gently pull on each other's arms.



- Press hips into the ground.
- Lift your chest.
- Pull gently to keep chest open.

4

Buddha Straddle

Place yourself onto your partner's lap facing him. Wrap your legs around his torso and bring your palms to both sides of each other's heads.



- Cross your ankles.
- Close your eyes, lightly press the center of your brows together and sync your breathing.

5

Buddha Bliss

Sit in **Buddha Straddle** and grab each other's forearms (or above the elbows). Root your hips down and engage your lower belly. Inhale deeply and lift your chest, then exhale, and lean back. Arch your chests and bring your arms to straight continuing to hold onto each other.



- Engage your lower belly.
- Root your hips down.
- Relax your throat.

6

Loving Embrace

Come into **Bound Angle**. Have your partner come into a wide legged Seated Forward Fold with the soles of his feet pressing into your ankles. Walk your arms and chest forward holding onto his thighs. Your partner should fold gently over your head and upper back to rest his arms on your lower back or hold your hips. Switch roles and repeat.



- Reach toward your partners lower back.

7

Digging for Diamonds

Start in [Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend](#), facing one another. Press the outer edges of your heels into each other's foot or inside of foot. Grab hold of each other's forearms. One person should lean back as the other plants their hips into the ground and extends their chest forward with a flat back. Switch roles and repeat. Talk to each other about what feels good—when to go deeper and when to back off.



- Plant your hips into the ground.

8

Bound Blanket

Have your partner start in [Bound Angle Pose](#). Come onto your knees behind your partner. Wrap your knees around his hips to help secure them into the ground. Place your palms onto his upper thighs. Switch roles and repeat.



- Extend your chest forward and up as you lean against his back.
- Gently press down.

9

Pretzel Savasana

Have your partner lie on his back with his legs spread hip width apart. Sit facing your partner directly in front of his pelvis and drape your legs over his hips so that your feet rest along the sides of his chest. Lie back and rest for 5 minutes. Afterward, massage each other's feet, then help each other up into a seated embrace.



- Relax your neck and close your eyes.

YOGA SEX POSITIONS

Okay, time to stop (really, I mean “start”) fooling around. You have the tools you need to get aroused, stay there, and be strong. Now it’s time to put these efforts to the test! Unravel some of your favorite yoga poses in your bedroom for creative sexual playtime. And have fun! No one’s handing out gold stars at the end of the night. Be creative, breathe, and get down and dirty in your Downward Facing Dog.

Child’s Play

WOMAN: Come into [Child’s Pose](#) with your hips slightly elevated above your heels. Rest your forehead on something soft on the floor and stretch your arms straight out in front of you.

MAN: Come into a wide squat behind your woman and enter her from behind. Hold on to her shoulders for leverage to go deeper.

Route 69 Overpass

WOMAN: Straddle your man’s head, facing toward his feet. Place your hands under his hips to help him lift his pelvis as you pleasure him orally.

MAN: Come into [Bridge](#) with your arms alongside your body.

Tunnel Bridge

WOMAN: Come into [Bridge](#).

MAN: Kneel between your woman’s legs, holding up her hips. Enter her, keeping her hips elevated.

Happy, Baby!

WOMAN: Come into [Happy Baby](#). Lightly lift your hips or place a pillow beneath your lower back for support.

MAN: Kneel facing your woman and enter her while holding her feet. Gently press down to root her hips.

Downward Doggie Style

WOMAN: Come into [Downward Facing Dog](#) (you may need to adjust your stance according to your partner’s height).

MAN: Stand behind your woman with your feet spread wide beyond hers. Enter her from behind, rolling your chest over her with your arms caressing her back or standing tall and holding the creases of her hips.

Plow the Field

WOMAN: Come into a modified [Plow](#) by lifting your legs straight into the air. Hold on to your calves or ankles and gently draw your legs back so that your hips lift slightly.

MAN: Come into [Plank](#) with your hands on either side of your woman’s torso. Enter her from this position, rocking slowly back and forth.

CHAPTER 13

Yoga for Life

Everything you need to take it to the next level

Just like little birdies need to leave the nest to learn how to fly, you'll eventually want to venture beyond these pages to expand your yoga experience. There are plenty of sequences here in the book to work on, but the real (and very big) world of yoga holds a multitude of opportunities. Get excited! You're ready to explore even more beautiful twists and turns (and splits and inversions) that will keep you challenged, intrigued, calm, and smiling.

A home practice is a fabulous thing, but nothing compares to the energy of a public class and the well-trained eye of an instructor to watch your alignment. I highly recommend finding a local studio with an experienced teacher to help you along your path. He or she can answer your questions and, with your classmates, provide a supportive community. (My yoga buddies often become like extended family!) If you're not quite ready to fall out of the nest yet or there's no nearby studio, check out great online resources like yogajournal.com and yogaglo.com. YogaGlo offers classes of varying lengths, levels, and styles, and they're new every day via streaming video. And it's cheap! An unlimited subscription to YogaGlo costs \$18 a month, whereas many yoga classes cost that much per session. If money isn't an issue, consider hiring a teacher for a few private sessions to help build your confidence and awareness.

If you're lucky enough to have a yoga studio on every block, you'll want to do a bit of research to find out which one is right for you. Ask around and check out online reviews on sites like yelp.com. Pop in to experience the vibe and see how comfortable you feel there. It's ideal to find a studio close to home so you can walk or bike there—no excuses! And don't be afraid to try out different studios and teachers before you make a commitment. I did not like my first class experience because the teacher gave me the heebie-jeebies. I was ready to write yoga off completely until my friend dragged me to a different class—with a teacher I absolutely adored. Don't judge yoga itself by the teacher or class; keep exploring until you find a match. Trust me—it's out there.

What's Your Yoga Type?

The best answer to this is, really, whatever you please at any given moment! Don't feel that you need to stick to a specific style of yoga. It can be educational and entertaining to explore them all. That being said, you will find a style that you prefer, so I've created an overview of the main styles to help you identify them.

ANADA

DESCRIPTION: Gentle poses that focus on meditation

IDEAL FOR: Beginners who want to ease into the practice or slow down and do more meditation

OM FACTOR: Chanting at the beginning and end of class

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: Low

ANUSARA

DESCRIPTION: Geared toward heart-opening backbends with a deep focus on postures

IDEAL FOR: Those looking for a playful, loving community

OM FACTOR: Invocation chant with harmonium accompaniment at the beginning and end of class, with stories woven in

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: Medium to high

ASHTANGA

DESCRIPTION: An athletic "flow" style that combines fast-paced movement with breathwork

IDEAL FOR: Type A people who are driven and dedicated, and those who want an intense practice that will have visible results

OM FACTOR: Usually a lengthy but very straight-forward chant at the beginning and end of class

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: High

BIKRAM

DESCRIPTION: Uses the same 26-posture series each time, but it's done in a 105°F room. You will sweat!

IDEAL FOR: Sweat junkies who aren't afraid of intense heat

OM FACTOR: No chanting

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: High

HATHA

DESCRIPTION: A generic term used to describe any form of yoga that includes asanas (poses)

IDEAL FOR: Those who are unsure about which class to take and want a general introduction

OM FACTOR: Depends on the teacher

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: Medium to high

IYENGAR

DESCRIPTION: Poses are held for longer than usual with a focus on alignment

IDEAL FOR: Teacher trainees, those who want to improve their alignment, and those with injuries

OM FACTOR: Depends on the teacher

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: Medium to high

KUNDALINI

DESCRIPTION: Primarily seated positions combined with breathing and movement techniques

IDEAL FOR: Those who want to stimulate energy, focus, and deep meditation

OM FACTOR:

Lots of chanting at the beginning and end of class with deep meditation and energy work
PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: Medium

POWER

DESCRIPTION: A vigorous workout that moves quickly through a series of linked poses and generates lots of sweat and physical release **IDEAL FOR:** Athletes and those driven to work out

OM FACTOR: Depends on the teacher

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY: High

VINYASA

DESCRIPTION: A series of athletic poses combining movement with breathwork **IDEAL FOR:** Those who want a good workout that often is set to music **OM FACTOR:** Usually a brief chant or om at the beginning and end of class **PHYSICAL DIFFICULTY:** Medium to high

TIP: If you're on a budget, consider looking for special deals to pay for yoga classes. Many studios offer less expensive community classes in the middle of the day. Others exchange free classes for work (like manning the front desk or helping to clean or organize the studio). Ask the people at the front desk for options for financial help. Chances are they'll welcome the idea and figure out a way to keep you on your mat.

Yoga Etiquette

Once you're ready to join a group, here are a few tips to keep in mind so you can get the most out of your practice!

HYDRATE BEFORE SHOWING UP

Many classes these days tend to be packed and hot. You'll want to bring a water bottle to class, but many teachers won't allow it because it disrupts the tapas (or heat) and discipline building. Plus, you don't want water swishing around in your belly as you twist and flip upside down. Make sure to hydrate before you enter the class so you'll work up a good sweat. You can replenish afterward. Exception: If you're taking a Bikram yoga class (which is usually held in a room heated to 105°F or higher), bring water, without a doubt.

SAVE DINNER FOR LATER

I made the mistake of eating a big bowl of pasta (and wearing jean shorts!) to my very first yoga class. Not only did my denim outfit truly suck when it got soaked with sweat, my tummy also was not happy with me during the class. It's amazing how disruptive even a small amount of food can be during a yoga sequence. Eat something light (fruit, a protein bar, or almond butter on whole wheat bread) about 2 hours before class. It will make your practice—and your next meal—that much more enjoyable.

ARRIVE EARLY

If it's your first time at a studio, you'll likely be asked to fill out a waiver or other paperwork, so make sure you have a few extra minutes to handle that business and also get yourself settled. Depending on the popularity of the teacher, many classes will sell out, so give yourself time to show up, sign in, and find a space in the room before the stampede. In general, it's nice to have some alone time on your mat before class to slow down and transition from regular life to your practice.

SPEAK UP

If you have any injuries, tell the teacher! Grab them before class or gently wave them over during class to let them know. It's perfectly fine to say that you don't want physical adjustments because something hurts or is bothering you, or that you might need modifications to help certain areas of your body. Just be open and respectful, of both the teacher and yourself.

NO PHONES ALLOWED

Seriously. Putting your phone on vibrate or mute does not count. Just make it a

habit to leave your phone, iPod, pager, BlackBerry, and any other devices in the car or in your locker—anywhere that’s not the yoga room. No matter how hard you try, you will forget one day and be that person whose phone starts ringing while everyone is lying peacefully in Savasana! It’s a surefire way to whip you out of a calm place, as well as to get nasty looks from the teacher and other students. Let yoga class be your time to disconnect from the outside world.

SHOES OFF

Most yoga studios have cubbies outside the room to place your shoes in, so make sure you leave them there. No shoes keeps the studio clean (you put your mat, hands, and face on that floor) and also just shows respect. If you’re worried about someone taking your designer heels, bag them and place them in the back of the room—just don’t come stomping in with them on!

GRAB YOUR PROPS

If you think you’ll want a strap, blocks, or a blanket, grab them at the beginning of class. This will prevent you from having to walk around the maze of students in the middle of a limb-weaving sequence and give you options for modifications for all poses. Remember, using props doesn’t make the pose “easier” or make you look dorky—it makes yoga better for your body. Always choose the variation that makes you feel best.

LATE ARRIVAL

Some studios won’t let you in the yoga room after a certain amount of the class is over. If you do find yourself running late (it happens to the best of us), wait until the opening meditation is finished to enter. Most rooms have peepholes or a window to look in. When you enter, take care to avoid slamming your mat down or tossing your keys and bag to the floor. Come in quietly and find a space. It’s totally fine to ask someone to move over to make space for you—just be kind.

TAKE TIME TO REST

Life is busy, but take the 5 minutes at the end of class to rest in Savasana. Yoga isn’t about building up a sweat and then racing for the hills once the pace slows down. Yoga is all about balance—uniting your strength and surrender. If you know you’ll need to leave class early, make sure to do so before Savasana, and plan accordingly so you don’t disrupt everyone when you leave. If you can stay, though, taking the time to do Savasana is often the ticket to feeling truly renewed when you leave the class. Try bringing an eye pillow to help you relax and move into your own world for just 5 minutes. Enjoy and rest.

Yoga Couture

Technically, you can wear whatever you want to for yoga. The golden rule is to be comfortable, but you should avoid baggy clothing because you'll just end up getting caught up in your own shirt or tripping on your sweatpants. I advise wearing something with spandex so the teacher can see your alignment. Most importantly, wear something that you feel good in. You don't want to have to fuss with your clothes while you practice.

Part of my job is being in the public eye. From writing regular blog posts and articles to teaching weekly online at yogaglo.com, I'm seen all the time. And just like any fashionista, I, too, face the dreaded question: "What should I wear?" Clearly, yoga isn't about brands or what style pants you're wearing, but it can certainly be fun and expressive! Wearing the same black leggings and top every day might be flattering, but nothing lifts my spirits like unique, colorful clothing.

I often receive e-mails with comments like, "Where did you get those great pants?!" so I thought I'd share my favorite brands and shops. Happy shopping!

ALTERNATIVE APPAREL

This awesome company is super hip and eco-friendly, and its clothes come in a wide array of colors, cuts, and options. They offer great transitional clothes if you're not into hardcore yoga gear. Their lines are studio and street friendly, so you can ease into your Downward Facing Dog as easily as you slip into your cute boots and shawl on the way out of class.

alternativeapparel.com

LULULEMON

This quirky Canadian company has taken the states by storm. With more than 140 stores nationwide and a major online presence, it's easy to see why it has become a staple store for yogis. It's famous for its Groove Pant, which makes anyone's derriere look superb! They also offer flattering tops, cover-ups, jackets, and hoodies, as well as a great line for men.

lululemon.com

ELISABETTA ROGIANI

This sassy Los Angeles-based Italian wants to make you look sexy. Her tights are my all-time favorites—they're incredibly flattering (never cutting into your passion handles) and come in all colors of the rainbow. Her fabric feels like butter and you often get a personal phone call from her when you order. Just be prepared to chat for a while. Ciao, darling!

rogiani.com

BEYOND YOGA

This line is elegant and flattering on all body types. I've even seen 80-year-old women rocking its gear! The styles embrace a woman's body and the fabric is deliciously soft. The company also offers seasonal lines with bold, playful colors for spring/summer and rich, darker colors for fall/winter.

iambeyond.com

HARD TAIL FOREVER

This California company is based in Santa Monica, where it has a store you could get lost in for hours, browsing the racks of great styles with edgy cuts and fun patterns. If you're not in SoCal, you can often find its lines at yoga studios or in larger department stores like Nordstrom and Bloomingdale's. Hard Tail offers both yoga and lifestyle clothing for the fashion-conscious yogi.

hardtailforever.com

CHASER

This rocker T-shirt company focuses on soft, flowing shirts with prints from bands like Pink Floyd and Journey. I love to use them as cover-ups on the way to the studio, and they look just as cute over jeans on my way out of class.

chaserbrand.com

TEEKI

This amazing company makes fashion sustainable. All of their products—yoga clothing and bikinis—are made out of recycled water bottles! The cuts are comfortable, flattering and their patterns are complete show-stoppers. Just be prepared for plenty of longing looks and conversations when you wear their line!

teeki.com

KIRAGRACE

This gorgeous line was created by Kira Karmazin, who also developed successful product lines for Lucy Activewear, Victoria's Secret, and Gap. She created an amazing Goddess Collection that brings out women's inner beauty and strength. Her unique and accessible designs are absolute favorites of mine.

kiragrace.com

More Yoga Resources

GAIAM

You can find pretty much anything you need here—mats, props, fitness gear, clothing, and even yoga DVDs (yup, including mine). It's a good one-stop shop. You can find many of its products at most Whole Foods Markets, as well.

Gaiam.com

MANDUKA

These guys make the Cadillac of yoga mats. Their Black Mat PRO is a monster (almost 10 pounds for the 85-inch mat!), but it will last for the rest of your life. They also have a great line of eco-friendly mats, as well as props and bags.

Manduka.com

YOGITOEES

This eco-friendly and innovative Santa Monica company is always on the cutting edge. Owner Susan Nichols perfected the skidless towel to put on your mat, and you'll now see it at yoga studios worldwide. The Skidless is perfect for any yogi who loves to sweat. The company also created a stretch yoga strap—the Strap Stretch—that is incredibly helpful when learning inversions, arm balances, and any pose where you need more shoulder support.

Yogitoes.com

TOESOX

These adorable skidless socks with separate toes can be found in Pilates and yoga studios across the globe. The tiny San Diego-based company that makes them also believes in giving back. I've had the honor of being this company's ambassador for years, and I partnered with it to create Hot Pink ToeSox to benefit Poses for Paws (my personal project to raise money for animal shelters), as well as socks to help raise breast cancer awareness. There's nothing like knowing you're helping others as well as yourself!

toesox.com

POSES FOR PAWS

I co-created the charity Poses for Paws in 2008 to repay the love that animals have brought into my life (my beloved puggle, Ashi, has been my companion for 6 years). Poses for Paws chooses a different animal shelter or organization to raise money for each year. We host yoga events and team up with companies like ToeSox and Tiny Devotions to support these shelters and our overall mission of helping and healing animals in need. For more information, visit www.posesforpaws.com, or follow us on Facebook.

List of Essential Poses and Sequences

Arm Pressure Balance
Boat
Bound Angle
Bow
Bridge
Camel
Chair
Child's Pose
Cobra
Comfortable Seat
Corpse (Savasana)
Cow and Cat
Cow Face
Crescent
Crow
Dolphin
Double Pigeon
Downward Facing Dog
Eagle
Fingertips Abs
Finger Stretches
Firefly
Flying Pigeon
Forearm Balance
Forearm Plank
Garland

Gentle Seated Twist
Goddess
Half Boat
Half Dog at Wall
Half Moon
Handstand
Handstand Scorpion
Happy Baby
Head to Knee
Headstand
Hero
King Dancer
Knee-to-Nose
Legs Up the Wall
Locust
Lower-Belly Lifts
Mountain
Plank
Pushup
Plow
Reclined Big Toe
Reclined Bound Angle
Reverse Warrior
Revolved Chair
Revolved Half Moon
Revolved Head to Knee
Revolved Triangle
Scorpion
Seated Forward Fold

Seated Half-Fish
Seated Twist
Shoulder Stand
Side Angle
Side Angle Revolved
Side Crow
Side Plank I
Side Plank II
Simple Spinal Twist
Single Pigeon
Split
Staff
Standing Big Toe Extension
Standing Split
Sugar Cane
Sun Salutation A
Sun Salutation B
Supported Bridge
Thread the Needle
Tiny Little Package
Tree
Triangle
Tripod Headstand
Twisted Lowering Abs
Upward Facing Bow
Upward Facing Dog
Warrior I
Warrior II
Warrior III

Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend

Wide-Leg Balance

Wide-Leg Forward Fold

Wild Thing

Windshield-Wiper Abs

Sequences by Chapter

CHAPTER 5

Sun Salutation A

Sun Salutation B

CHAPTER 6

15-Minute Sequences

A.M. Yoga

P.M. Yoga

Arms Sequence

Legs Sequences

- **Crescent Sequence**

- **Warrior Sequence**

Core Sequence

Butt

CHAPTER 7

Save Your Sick Days with Health-Focused Sequences

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Back Pain

Hangover

Headache

Jet Lag

Digestion

Energy

High Heels

CHAPTER 8

Boost Performance with These Routines

Runners and Cyclists

Tennis

Golf

Soccer

Basketball

Swimming and Rowing

Climbing

Special Section: Real Men Do Yoga

CHAPTER 9

Calming, Mood-Boosting Sequences

Anxiety

Mild Depression

Insomnia

Vertigo

Relaxation

• Sequence 1

• Sequence 2

Broken Heart

CHAPTER 10

Sequences for a Balanced State of Being

Bloating

PMS

Menopause

- **Hot Flashes**
- **Anxiety, Irritability, and Insomnia**
 - **Fatigue**

Breakouts and Blemishes

CHAPTER 11

Sequences for the Bump and Beyond

**Prenatal
Mommy and Me**

CHAPTER 12

Better Sex Sequences

Confidence, Energy, and Endurance

- **Men**
- **Women**

Intimacy and Sensuality

- **Partner Poses**

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