




Yoga Postures

<p><u>Postures</u></p> <p>Bridge, Cobra, Corpse, Dog,/Cat, Downward Dog, Forward Bend, Half Shoulderstand, Head to Knee, Mountain, Sit/Easy Position, Triangle, Warrior I, Warrior II</p>	<p>Be kind to yourself when you practice yoga. Go slowly, especially in the beginning, and listen to your body. It knows what it can do. If it says "stop," stop. Don't push it. Yoga is <u>not</u> a competitive sport. You don't win points for matching a picture in a book (or on a website). If you push too hard, you probably won't enjoy it, and you may hurt yourself. Whenever possible, work with a teacher, and use books, videos and websites to supplement your classroom instruction. Most of all, stick with it. If you practice, you will improve. And you will feel better. Jai Bhagwan.</p> <p>The chart below describes some of the fundamental yoga postures. The sequence can be performed in order. When you are familiar with the psotures, try some of the vinyasas, or yoga flows, listed to in the column to the right.</p>	<p><u>Vinyasas</u></p> <p>A vinyasa is a flow or sequence of postures</p> <p>Sun Salutation</p> <p>Triangle/Warrior II</p> <p>Great Salutation</p>
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Classic Postures	
	<p>Sit/Easy Position - Sukhasana</p> <p>A starting position that helps focus awareness on breathing and the body; helps strengthen lower back and open the groin and hips.</p> <p>Sit cross-legged with hands on knees. Focus on your breath. Keep your spine straight and push the sit bones down into the floor. Allow the knees to gently lower. If the knees rise above your hips, sit on a cushion or block. This will help support your back and hips. Take 5-10 slow, deep breaths. On the next inhale, raise your arms over your head. Exhale and bring your arms down slowly. Repeat 5-7 times.</p>
	<p>Dog and Cat --</p> <p>Increases flexibility of spine</p> <p>This is really two poses, one flowing into the other. Begin on your hands and knees. Keep your hands just in front of your shoulders, your legs about hip width apart. As you inhale, tilt the tailbone and pelvis up, and let the spine curve downward, dropping the stomach low, and lift your head up. Stretch gently. As you exhale, move into cat by reversing the spinal bend, tilting the pelvis down, drawing the spine up and pulling the chest and stomach in. Repeat several times, flowing smoothly from dog into cat, and cat back into dog.</p>

	<p>Mountain - Tadasana</p> <p>Improves posture, balance and self-awareness.</p> <p>A deceptive pose in that it appears so simple that some students may ask - "why bother?" But just as there's more to breathing than meets the eye, there is more to standing, too.</p> <p>Stand with feet together, hands at your sides, eyes looking forward. Raise your toes, fan them open, then place them back down on the floor. Feel your heel, outside of your foot, toes and ball of your foot all in contact with the floor. Tilt your pubic bone slightly forward. Raise your chest up and out, but within reason - this isn't the army and you're not standing at attention. Raise your head up and lengthen the neck by lifting the base of your skull toward the ceiling. Stretch the pinky on each hand downward, then balance that movement by stretching your index fingers. Push into the floor with your feet and raise your legs, first the calves and then the thighs.</p> <p>Breathe. Hold the posture, but try not to tense up. Breathe. As you inhale, imagine the breath coming up through the floor, rising through your legs and torso and up into your head. Reverse the process on the exhale and watch your breath as it passes down from your head, through your chest and stomach, legs and feet.</p> <p>Hold for 5 to 10 breaths, relax and repeat.</p> <p>On your next inhale, raise your arms over head (Urdhava Hastasana) and hold for several breaths. Lower your arms on an exhale.</p> <p>As a warm up, try synchronizing the raising and lowering of your arms with your breath - raise, inhale; lower, exhale. Repeat 5 times.</p>



Forward Bend or Extension - Uttanasana II

Stretches the legs and spine, rests the heart and neck, relaxes mind and body

Begin standing straight in Mountain pose or Tadasana. Inhale and raise the arms overhead. Exhale, bend at the hips, bring the arms forward and down until you touch the floor. It's okay to bend your knees, especially if you're feeling stiff. Either grasp your ankles or just leave your hands on the floor and breathe several times. Repeat 3-5 times. On your last bend, hold the position for 5 or 10 breaths. To come out of the pose, curl upward as if pulling yourself up one vertebrae at a time, stacking one on top of another, and leaving the head hanging down until last.




Variations




1. Follow the instructions for the basic pose described above, but instead of holding the pose for several breaths, come up on the inhale. Extend your arms forward as your rise until you are standing straight and your arms are overhead. Exhale and bend forward. Repeat the process 5 times.
2. Go into the pose and take 3 deep breaths. Inhale and raise your head, but keep your hands on the floor. Hook each index finger around each big toe, exhale and come down. Hold for several breaths
3. Inhale and raise your head, again keeping your hands on the floor. This time, slide your hands under your feet so that the tips of your toes are touching heel of your hands. Hold for several breaths.
4. After bending forward, fold your arms and hang for as long as is comfortable. A very relaxing pose.
5. To come out of the pose, curl upward as if pulling yourself up one vertebrae at a time, stacking one on top of another, and leaving the head hanging down until last.




Trikonasana - the Triangle

Stretches the spine, opens the torso, improves balance and concentration. Start with your spread 3-4 feet apart, feet parallel. Turn your left foot 90 degrees to the left and your right foot about 45 degrees inward. Inhale and raise both arms so they're parallel with the floor. Exhale, turn your head to the left and look down your left arm toward your outstretched fingers. Check that your left knee is aligned with your left ankle. Take a deep breath and stretch outward to the left, tilting the left hip down and the right hip up. When you've stretched as far as you can, pivot your arms, letting your left hand reach down and come to rest against the inside of your calf, while your right arm points straight up. Turn and look up at your right hand. Breathe deeply for several breaths. Inhale, and straighten up. Exhale, lower your arms. Put your hands on your hips and pivot on your heels, bringing your feet to face front. Repeat the posture on the other side.

	<p>Warrior I I - Virabhadrasana II</p> <p>Strengthens legs and arms; improves balance and concentration; builds confidence</p> <p>Begin in mountain pose with feet together and hands at side. Step your feet 4-5 feet apart. Turn your right foot about 45 degrees to the left. Turn your left foot 90 degrees to the left so that it is pointing straight out to the side. Slowly bend the left knee until the thigh is parallel with the floor, but keep the knee either behind or directly over your ankle. Raise your arms over head. Then slowly lower them until your left arm is pointing straight ahead and your right arm is pointing back. Concentrate on a spot in front of you and breathe. Take 4 or 5 deep breaths, lower your arms, bring your legs together. Reverse the position.</p>
	<p>The Cobra - Bhujangasana</p> <p>Stretches the spine, strengthens the back and arms, opens the chest and heart.</p> <p>Lie down on your stomach. Keep your legs together, arms at your side, close to your body, with your hands by your chest.</p> <p>Step 1: Inhaling, slowly raise your head and chest as high as it will go. Keep your buttocks muscles tight to protect your lower back. Keep your head up and chest and heart out. Breathe several times and then come down. Repeat as necessary.</p> <p>Step 2: Follow the steps above. When you've gone as high as you can, gently raise yourself on your arms, stretching the spine even more. Only go as far as you are comfortable. Your pelvis should always remain on the floor. Breathe several times and come down.</p>
	<p>Downward Facing Dog - Adho Mukha Svanasana</p> <p>Builds strength, flexibility and awareness; stretches the spine and hamstrings; rests the heart.</p> <p>Start on your hands and knees. Keep your legs about hip width apart and your arms shoulder width apart. Your middle fingers should be parallel, pointing straight ahead. Roll your elbows so that the eye or inner elbow is facing forward. Inhale and curl your toes under, as if getting ready to stand on your toes. Exhale and straighten your legs; push upward with your arms. The goal is to lengthen the spine while keeping your legs straight and your feet flat on the ground. However, in the beginning it's okay to bend the knees a bit and to keep your heels raised. The important thing is to work on lengthening the spine. Don't let your shoulders creep up by your ears -- keep them down. Weight should be evenly distributed between your hands and feet. Hold the position for a few breaths. Come down on and exhale. Repeat several times, synchronizing with your breath: up on the exhale and down on the inhale.</p>

	<p>Head to Knee -- Janu Shirshasana</p> <p>Stretches and opens back and hamstrings, improves flexibility</p> <p>Sit on the floor with legs extended in front of you. Bend one leg, bringing the heel of the foot as close to the groin as possible. You may want to place a pillow under the bent knee for comfort. Make sure your sitz bones are firmly grounded on the floor and that your spine is straight. Turn your body slightly so you face out over the extended leg. Inhale and raise your arms over head. Exhale and begin to move forward slowly. Try to keep the back as straight as possible. Instead of bending at the hips, focus on lifting the tailbone and rolling forward on your sitz bones. Inhale and lengthen and straighten the spine. Exhale and roll forward, however slightly. To get a bit more forward movement, engage your quadriceps (thigh muscles) as you move forward. This releases the hamstrings, giving you a bit more flexibility. When you've moved as far forward as you can, lower the arms and grasp your foot, or leg. Hold the position for a moment and breathe. Then on the next exhale gently pull yourself forward. Go slowly and remember to keep the back straight. When done, straighten up and do the other side.</p>
	<p>Half Shoulderstand -- Ardha Sarvangasana</p> <p>Promotes proper thyroid function, strengthens abdomen, stretches upper back, improves blood circulation, induces relaxation</p> <p>You probably remember doing this as a kid. Lie on your back and lift your legs up into air. Place your hands on your lower back for support, resting your elbows and lower arms on the ground. Make sure your weight is on your shoulders and mid to upper back -- not your neck. Breathe deeply and hold for at the posture for at least 5-10 breaths, increasing the hold over time. To come down, slowly lower your legs, keeping them very straight -- a little workout for your abdominal muscles.</p>
	<p>The Bridge - Sethu Bandhasa</p> <p>Increases flexibility and suppleness; strengthens the lower back and abdominal muscles; opens the chest.</p> <p>Lie on your back with your knees up and hands at your side Your feet should be near your buttocks about six inches apart. To begin, gently raise and lower your tail. Then, slowly, raise the tailbone and continue lifting the spine, trying to move one vertebra at a time until your entire back is arched upward. Push firmly with your feet. Keep your knees straight and close together. Breathe deeply into your chest. Clasp your hands under your back and push against the floor.</p> <p>Take five slow, deep breaths.</p> <p>Come down slowly and repeat.</p>

	<p>The Corpse -- Savasana Relaxes and refreshes the body and mind, relieves stress and anxiety, quiets the mind Possibly the most important posture, the Corpse, also known as the Sponge, is as deceptively simple as Tadasana, the Mountain pose. Usually performed at the end of a session, the goal is conscious relaxation. Many people find the "conscious" part the most difficult because it is very easy to drift off to sleep while doing Savasana. Begin by lying on your back, feet slightly apart, arms at your sides with palms facing up. Close your eyes and take several slow, deep breaths. Allow your body to sink into the ground. Try focusing on a specific part of the body and willing it to relax. For example, start with your feet, imagine the muscles and skin relaxing, letting go and slowly melting into the floor. From your feet, move on to your calves, thighs and so on up to your face and head. Then simply breathe and relax. Stay in the pose for at least 5-10 minutes.</p>