

YOGA

FOR BEGINNERS



**POSE
GUIDE**





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Not all of the yoga instruction in this book and accompanying video are suitable for everyone. To reduce the risk of injury, consult your doctor before beginning the yoga program. The following instructions are in no way intended as a substitute for medical counseling. The author and publisher disclaim any liability or loss, personal or otherwise, resulting from the procedures in this book and video.

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PREFACE

I began practicing yoga in 1974, and soon felt the difference it made in my life. My practice brings me personal fulfillment, joy, and the ease of well-being. It also helps me bring skill and determination to my daily activities.

I have learned yoga through a self-discipline inspired by my love for it and by the example of my teacher, B.K.S. Iyengar. His mastery of yoga and passion for excellence have challenged and inspired me to go deeper in my practice. It is with gratitude that I dedicate this video to him. I have also been inspired by Dona Holleman, whose dedication to yoga has enriched my life.

*It is my hope that **Yoga Practice for Beginners** will encourage you in the practice of yoga, and that with time and perseverance you will find beauty in the art of yoga.*

Namaste,

Patricia Walden



INTRODUCING YOGA

To most Westerners, the term “yoga” brings to mind Indian gurus in long, flowing robes and pretzel-like poses of popular lore. But behind these stereotypes lies a rich, time-honored teaching on how to achieve physical health, psychological well-being, and spiritual peace.

Yoga (the term means literally “union”) aims at the integration and harmonization of all the various human faculties—mind, emotions, body, spirit. In India, where it originated, this process of harmonization takes many forms: the yoga of devotion, of meditation, of selfless service, of knowledge and study. But the discipline that is usually referred to when one says simply “yoga” (and the one this video teaches) is Hatha Yoga, literally “the union of the opposites.” Through a series of physical poses, called asanas, Hatha Yoga teaches us how to quiet the mind by placing attention on the breath and on the movement and stillness of the body.

THE BENEFITS OF YOGA

One can engage in Hatha Yoga on many different levels: as a brief and relaxing interlude in a hectic life; as a more demanding regime for strengthening and invigorating the body; as therapeutic practice for particular physical difficulty or ailment; or as a path to higher states of consciousness and union with the Divine. Whatever your motivation or level of practice, Hatha Yoga offers profound benefits that affect all aspects of your life: work, recreation, eating habits, family life, and relationships with others.

By making the body stronger and more flexible, Hatha Yoga can free you of your habitual defenses and allow you to face life with greater poise, openness, and equanimity. By teaching concentration and awareness, yoga can snap you out of your “consensual trance” and draw you gently but firmly into the reality of each moment.

Just as ecology teaches us to live in harmony with the other beings on our planet, so yoga teaches us to live in harmony with all the different parts of ourselves. As we achieve balance inside, we come to recognize balance outside, learning, as Native American wisdom puts it, to “walk in balance” on the Earth



A BRIEF HISTORY

Although yoga had its beginnings in Indian prehistory, it is not a religion and does not teach subservience to a guru, god, or dogma. Rather, Hatha Yoga is a psychophysical technology developed and refined over the centuries by spiritual aspirants who needed to strengthen and energize their bodies for long hours of meditation. As such, it can be used with great benefit by anyone, regardless of his or her religious or philosophical beliefs. The term “asana,” which eventually came to refer to the yoga poses themselves, originally referred to the grass, cloth, or animal skin on which the yogi would sit.

Two of the oldest Hindu scriptures, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, mention the importance of physical postures in the practice of meditation, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, a collection of aphorisms set down in the second century A.D., details an eightfold path of spiritual observance of which asana practice is but one part. Not until the turn of the first millennium were manuals of Hatha Yoga poses compiled, some of them making extravagant claims for the therapeutic benefits of yoga. For the most part, the yoga scriptures that do survive read more like skeletal outlines than fullbodied sourcebooks, and most of today’s Hatha Yoga wisdom has been orally transmitted over the centuries from teacher to student.

THE IYENGAR APPROACH

After some tentative contacts during the first half of this century (most notably through the Self-Realization Fellowship), Hatha Yoga began reaching thousands in United States through the pioneering work of teachers like Swami Vishnu-devananda and B.K.S. Iyengar, whose illustrated yoga manuals first appeared here in the 1960s, and Swami Satchidananda, whose widely publicized appearances at Woodstock heralded the dawn of a new generation.

In *Yoga Practice for Beginners*, we have chosen to use the system taught by B.K.S. Iyengar because we believe it to be unsurpassed in grace, subtlety, and precision. Suitable for both beginners and for more advanced practitioners, this video has been conceived and written by the editors of America's premier yoga magazine to provide you with expert instruction in yoga basics:

- *Standing poses for flexibility, strength, and stamina*
- *Seated poses for a healthy back, poise, and reflection*
- *Forward bends for calming and nurturing the body/mind*
- *Inverted poses for circulation and stress reduction*
- *Breathing awareness and deep relaxation for energy and renewal*

One of India's best-known yoga teachers and author of the classic *Light on Yoga* (Schocken), B.K.S. Iyengar, now in his 70s, began his own study of Hatha Yoga as a teenager and continued for many years under the guidance of Shri T. Krishnamacharya, a classically trained Hindu scholar and yoga master who was for many years instructor to the Maharaja of Mysore. From Krishnamacharya, Iyengar learned, among other things, the importance of regulated breathing; the use of blocks, chairs, and other props; and the therapeutic value of adapting yoga poses to the needs and limitations of the individual student.

PREPARING FOR PRACTICE

The eight “limbs” of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* form the philosophical foundation for the practice of Hatha Yoga. Rather than steps or stages, they are actually interdependent aspects of a holistic way of life and include guidelines for cultivating the body, the mind, and the spirit. In addition to asanas, there are precepts (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*)—such as non-violence, honesty, non-stealing, purity, and study—that lay the groundwork for the practice itself; regulated breathing (*pranayama*), which brings the mind into harmony with the body; sense restraint (*pratyahara*) for keeping energy from dispersing; concentration (*dhyana*) for realizing our true nature; and *samadhi*, ultimate realization itself.

Those of us who take up yoga as a refreshing antidote to a busy, stressful life certainly cannot be expected to follow the rigorous guidelines set down by the yogis of old. What we can do, however, is adapt them to our needs, remembering that asana practice is but one aspect of a yogic lifestyle and will have little benefit in isolation.

Thus, you may find as your practice of yoga progresses, that you lose interest in some of the habits and addictions you have acquired over the years. You may suddenly give up smoking, for example, or lose your taste for white sugar or red meat. Or you may discover that you are less given to emotional outbursts, or that you no longer tell the little “white lies” that have gotten you through in the past. Or you may sleep less or crave fresh air or more relaxing leisure time. All these are welcome signs that the practice of Hatha Yoga is having its beneficial and wide-ranging effects on your life.

If possible, set aside a warm, quiet corner of your home for practice, a place where you can store your yoga mat, bricks, and strap, and be free from compelling distractions. Mornings are generally best for yoga, especially before other family members have awakened or after they have left for the day, but late afternoon or evenings are fine too. Allow three to four hours to elapse after a big meal and one to two hours after a snack. And try to bring to your yoga practice an attitude of openness and exploration—you may find that your body and mind are the most wonderful teachers you will ever have.

GETTING STARTED

In *Yoga Practice for Beginners*, we have given you all the resources you will need to get you started on the practice of yoga. Once you have mastered the basics and experienced some of the unique benefits that yoga can provide, you may find yourself yearning to experiment with more challenging postures or explore in greater depth some of the poses you have already learned. This is an indication that you are ready to advance to the other award-winning videos in our *Yoga Practice Series: Yoga Practice for Flexibility, Yoga Practice for Strength, Yoga Practice for Relaxation, Yoga Practice for Energy, and Yoga Practice for Meditation* which feature Patricia Walden and Rodney Yee who combined have over 35 years of yoga experience. Containing two-to-five practice sessions each, these videos (available individually or in a boxed set) are designed to guide you as you deepen, develop, and refine your practice.

By stepping onto the path of yoga, you are embarking on a lifelong journey of growth and awakening. The world's most ancient mind-body practice, yoga is meditation in motion. It cultivates flexibility, strength, endurance, and most important, an open heart and a calm mind. Yoga strengthens your immune system, improves circulation, reduces stress, increases energy, and enhances overall health and well-being. No matter what your age or fitness level, you'll find that yoga offers you keys to a whole new way of being with yourself and the world.

Stephen Bodian

Editor, *Yoga Journal*

PRACTICING YOGA

By Patricia Walden with Linda Cogozzo



GUIDELINES

- Consult your physician before beginning this yoga program. If you feel any pain or discomfort in the poses, seek the advice of your physician and a qualified yoga teacher before resuming practice.
- Women who are menstruating should avoid strenuous practice and inverted poses. Pregnant women should consult their physician before beginning a yoga program.
- Set aside some time each day to practice. Choose a warm, quiet place, free from distraction. Avoid practicing in direct sunlight.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and have bare feet.
- Using props offers a supportive and satisfying way to learn the poses. You will need:

A non-slip surface or non-slip yoga mat

Two to three blankets

Two yoga blocks (or two stacks of books)

A chair, folding type if possible

Two washcloths or two small towels

A cushion or pillow

A bare wall

A yoga strap, belt or tie

- Never practice immediately after eating. Allow three to four hours after a large meal, one to two after a snack.
- Remove your glasses or contact lenses (if convenient) and wristwatch for Relaxation Pose (Savasana).
- Use your remote control device to tailor the video portion of this program to suit your individual needs.
- View the video and read the book at least once, to familiarize yourself with the instruction before practicing the poses.



SIMPLE SITTING POSE *Vajrasana*

Props: *One or two blankets, Two washcloths or small towels*

Begin Simple Sitting Pose by kneeling on a blanket on the floor with your knees together and the sides of your feet touching. Slowly sit back on your heels. Place your hands on your thighs, palms down. Sit with your weight evenly distributed on your sitting bones, not tilting to one side or the other. Keep your spine erect, chest open, and gaze straight ahead.

If you experience discomfort in your ankles, place a rolled washcloth (or small towel if you need a thicker roll) between the front of each ankle and the floor. As your ankle flexibility increases, adjust the thickness of the rolls so you feel a stretch in the ankles, but no discomfort. With

regular practice you may find you can easily sit on your heels without the props.

If you feel any knee pain, place a folded blanket between your buttocks and heels. Adjust the thickness of the blanket (you may need more than one) until you feel no pain. As your knee flexibility increases, adjust the thickness of the blanket. But go slowly—it may take some time before your front thighs stretch and your knees become flexible enough to practice without blankets.

You can stay in this variation of the pose for 30 seconds, gradually increasing your time to one minute or longer.

For the next variation of the Simple Sitting Pose, interlace your fingers and lift your arms overhead, palms turned toward the ceiling. Inhale, press the sitting bones down. Exhale, lengthen the spine, and press your palms toward the ceiling. As you press through the palms, lower your shoulders away from your ears. With the arms overhead you will probably feel the breath in your upper chest. Release any gripping in the chest, and soften your throat and eyes. Take three complete breaths. Exhale, and lower your arms. It is important to work both sides of the body, so change the interlace of your fingers so the opposite thumb is on top this time. Inhale, and lift your arms overhead. Again lift the spine and extend through the arms. Breathe deeply and gently. Lower your arms and place your palms back on your thighs.

It is a common reaction, especially when doing something new, to hold the breath. Remember to breathe in the poses—holding the breath locks tension in the body. For the final variation of Simple Sitting Pose, also known as Child's Pose, separate your knees and place your hands on your hips. Inhale, and, on your next exhalation, bend forward. Rest your forehead on the floor and stretch your arms out in front of you. Use the next few moments to breathe, stretch, and let go. Hold for 30 seconds. With regular practice, you can gradually lengthen your time in this variation to one minute or more. On your next inhalation, slowly sit up. Sit to the side of your feet and straighten your legs out in front of you. Usually lengthen your time in this variation to one minute or more. On your next inhalation, slowly sit up.

Benefits:

- *Develops hip, knee, and ankle flexibility.*
- *Calms and centers you for practice.*



MOUNTAIN POSE *Tadasana*

Mountain Pose is the basis for the other standing poses and teaches correct posture. Poor posture misaligns the body and is source of many health problems.

Stand with your feet together so the big toes are touching and heels are slightly apart. Let your arms hang freely at your sides. If you feel unsteady with your feet together in Mountain Pose, separate them hip-width apart. Distribute your weight evenly between your feet and between the balls and the heels of your feet. Spread and lengthen your toes. Bring attention to your knees and use the front thigh muscles to lift the kneecaps. They should now be facing directly forward. Creating a strong foundation with your feet and legs will give you a feeling of stability and confidence.

The pelvis is the main support of the spine. By positioning it correctly, you will keep your back healthy. Balance the pelvis on the legs, neither tucking the tailbone under nor overarching the lower back. The side pelvic rims should be parallel to the floor.

To extend the spine, begin from your feet. Stretch your inner legs upward from the inner heels to the groins. Feel the support of the abdomen. Continue to lengthen upward, relaxing the diaphragm.

As your spine lengthens upward, open your chest. Drop your shoulders and lengthen the back of your neck. Relax your face, your throat, and your eyes.

Hold the pose for up to one minute. Your body should feel firm and free as you continue to lift from your feet through the crown of your head.

Benefit

- *Teaches correct posture*



TRIANGLE POSE *Utthita Trikonasana*

Props: *Non-slip surface or mat, yoga block*

Stand in Mountain Pose. Inhale, jump your feet three to three and one-half feet apart. Pivoting on your heels, turn your left foot in 60 degrees and your right foot out 90 degrees. Place the block to the outside of your right foot.

In all wide-leg standing poses, make sure the heel of the front foot is in line with the arch of the back foot. Distribute the weight evenly between the heels and balls of the feet. Lengthen and spread the toes. Do not hyperextend the knees. Use the front thigh muscles to draw the kneecaps up. Draw your shoulders down and extend through the fingertips.

Inhale and, with your next exhalation, swing your pelvis to the left, and extend your torso over your right leg. Lengthen both sides of the spine evenly. Place your right hand down on your shin or on a block. If you're more advanced, place your hand on the floor. Bring your left arm overhead, palm forward. Make sure the torso and legs are in one plane by directing the left sitting bone toward the left heel.

On an exhalation, turn your head and gaze up at your left hand. Release the throat and jaw, soften the eyes. Activate the legs by lifting the fronts and backs of both thighs. The more you can feel your connection to the ground through your legs, the more you will be able to lengthen the spine and release the neck. If you feel any discomfort in your neck, look forward. As your stability and flexibility increase, turn your head and gaze at your hand.

Hold the pose for 30 seconds on each side, gradually increasing your time to one minute on each side. Remember that learning yoga takes time, and that the time you hold a pose need not necessarily increase from day to day or even week to week. Let your practice build slowly.

To come up, press down through your left leg and foot, and extend through your left arm. Turn your feet forward, making sure they are parallel. Practice on the other side. Come back to Mountain Pose.

Benefits:

- *Tones the thighs, calf muscles, and hamstrings.*
- *Strengthens the spine and muscles of the back.*



SIDE STRETCH POSE *Utthita Parsvakonasana*

Props: *Non-slip surface or mat, yoga block*

In Side Stretch Pose, the feet are jumped wider apart than in Triangle Pose. Stand in Mountain Pose and jump your feet four to four and one-half feet apart (or so your foot and ankles are lined up under your wrists). Turn your left foot in and your right foot out. Keep your back leg strong as you bend your front leg to form a right angle. Make sure your right knee is directly over your right ankle. Inhale; and with an exhalation, extend the right side of your torso over your right thigh. Lengthen both sides of the spine evenly. Place your right hand on a block, or, if you are more advanced, on the floor. Extend your left arm overhead, palm forward.

Keep your legs active, and feel your left shoulder moving away from the right to an imaginary wall behind you. Turn your left palm to face your head. Reach up with this arm and then lower it until it is parallel to your ear. On your next exhalation, gently turn your head to look up at the ceiling. Open the chest. If you feel any discomfort in your neck, look forward.

Remember, the more you use your legs, the easier it is to release and lengthen the spine and neck. Extend through the left leg and press the outside of the left foot down. Keep your right knee over the foot as you lengthen the inner right thigh toward the knee and move the outer thigh toward the left heel.

Hold for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time to one minute on each side. If you become short of breath, it may mean that you have reached your limit for today. Don't force any pose, but practice with attention to your body's signals.

To come up, extend through the left leg, and make a wide arc with the left arm as you raise the torso. Turn the feet forward, keeping them parallel. Practice on the other side. Return to Mountain Pose.

Benefits:

- *Tones the legs and develops the chest.*
- *Reduces weight around the waist and hips.*





STANDING FORWARD BEND #1 *Uttanasana, variation*

Prop: *Folding chair or stool (without rollers)*

This variation of Standing Forward Bend is wonderful pose that can be used as a resting pose between each standing pose.

Stand in Mountain Pose about two feet away from the back of the chair. Separate your feet hip-width apart and make sure they are parallel.



Place your hands on your hips. Lift the front thighs, exhale, and bend forward from the hips. Bend your arms and clasp your elbows. Rest your arms on the top of the chair back and your forehead on your arms.

Keep your legs active. Release the spine completely. Remember, this is a resting position. Release the muscles around the eyes. Soften the skin at the temples. Breathe easily.

Hold the pose for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time to one minute.

To come up, press your feet firmly to the floor. Inhale, and lift your torso from the strength of your legs.

Do not arch your back or lead from the chin.

Benefits:

- *Stretches the hamstrings and releases the back.*
- *Calms and cools.*
- *Can be used to rest between the standing poses.*



PROUD WARRIOR *Virabhadrasana II*

Props: *The wall, non-slip surface or mat*

Stand in Mountain Pose. Inhale, then jump your feet four to four and one-half feet apart. Reestablish your foundation. Distribute the weight evenly on your feet. Lift the front thigh muscles and draw the tailbone down. Lift the front and back ribs and draw the shoulders down. Extend through the arms and fingertips.

Draw an imaginary line down the center of your torso, beginning at the top of your head and going down your face, neck, and breastbone, and continuing all the way to your pubic bone. Keep your awareness of this line as you turn your left foot in and right foot out. Exhale, and bend your right knee to form a right angle. Make sure your right knee is directly over your ankle. On your next exhalation, turn your head to gaze at your right hand.

Feel the legs and arms equally stretching away from the median line. Keep the spine lifted and rib cage open. Hold the pose for 20 seconds on each side, gradually increasing your time to one minute. Inhale, and come up from the strength of the back leg. Turn your feet forward, keeping them parallel. Practice to the other side. Come back to Mountain Pose.

To learn more about using the back leg in Proud Warrior, practice with the heel of the back foot at the wall. The wall will support you as you develop the leg strength necessary for the standing poses. You can hold this variation for 15 seconds on each side. You may want to practice at the wall first and then try the pose in the center of the room. Notice how your legs feel with the support and without it.

When doing a physically demanding pose like Proud Warrior, we often use aggressive effort to hold us “up.” For example, we might hold the breath or use muscular force. One of the most important principles of yoga is non-violence (ahimsa), an essential quality to bring to Hatha Yoga practice. Don’t expect the impossible or strive for some idealized form of what the pose “should” look like. Instead, listen to your body. It will tell you when to go deeper, how long to hold the pose, or when you need to work in a modified way.

Benefits:

- *Strengthens and tones the ankles, legs and back.*
- *Tones the abdominal organs*
- *Develops flexibility in hips and pelvis.*



STANDING FORWARD BEND #2 *Uttanasana, variation*

Prop: *The wall*

Stand in Mountain Pose about one foot away from the wall. Place your hands on the wall and rest your buttocks against the wall. Separate your feet hip-width apart. Make sure they are parallel. Lengthen and spread your toes. Lift the front thighs.

Inhale; place your hands on your hips. With an exhalation, bend forward from the hips. Take your hands onto your buttocks and lift the flesh away from the sitting bones. This will enable you to come forward more easily.

Bend your arms and clasp your elbows. The more active your legs are, the more the spine will lengthen and release. The neck and head are an extension of your spine. Release them completely. Relax your throat and soften your eyes. Hold the pose for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time to one minute. To come up, release your arms, inhale, and lift your torso from the strength of your legs. Stand in Mountain Pose.

Benefits:

- *Restores and refreshes.*
- *Provides a supported way to practice forward bending.*



EXTENDED LEG POSE *Prasarita Padottanasana*

Props: *Non-slip surface or mat, chair, 2 yoga blocks*

Place the back of the chair against a wall. Stand in Mountain Pose about three feet away from the chair. Inhale, then jump your feet four to four and one-half feet apart.

Place your hands on your hips. Exhale and bend forward from your hips, stretching your arms out in front of you and placing your hands on the chair seat. Keep your thighs active and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. If your lower back is very flexible, take care that you are not hanging in the lower back or pressing the lower ribs toward the floor. Instead, lengthen the front of your torso from the abdomen to the breastbone. Hold the pose for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time in the pose to one minute.

To come up, place your hands on your hips. Inhale, raise your torso from the strength of the legs, jump your feet back to Mountain Pose.

If you are more flexible or experienced, you can do the following variation. If you are less flexible, repeat with the first variation until you feel ready to move on.

Place two blocks in front of you, so that when you bend forward they are under your shoulders. Begin in Mountain Pose. Jump your feet apart. With your hands on your hips, exhale and bend forward. Place your hands on the blocks. Lift the sitting bones as you push the floor away with your hands. Arch your back slightly and raise your head to look forward. Keep your gaze soft. Release the throat. As your practice develops, you can remove the blocks and work with your fingertips on the floor. Hold this variation for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time in the pose to one minute. To come up, place your hands on your hips, inhale, and raise your torso. Jump your feet back to Mountain Pose.

Benefits:

- *Stretches hamstring and inner thigh muscles.*
- *Aids digestion.*
- *Increases circulation to the torso.*



STANDING FORWARD BEND #3 *Uttanasana*

Stand in Mountain Pose with your feet hip-width apart. Place your hands on your hips and lift your thigh muscles to stabilize your shins and thighbones. Exhale, bend forward and clasp your elbows. The more you can feel your feet connected to the floor and strength in your legs, the more you can release the spine forward. Release any tension in the lower abdomen or in the diaphragm. Then, from the thoracic, or mid-back, release your neck. Soften the throat and eyes. Hold the pose for 20 seconds, gradually increasing your time in the pose to one minute. To come up, bring your hands on your hips, inhale, and raise your torso, as always, from the strength of your legs. Stand in Mountain Pose. Observe how you feel.

Benefits:

- *Beneficial for the liver, spleen, and kidneys.*
- *Soothes the nervous system.*



DOWNWARD-FACING DOG *Adho Mukha Svanasana*

Props: *Non-slip surface or mat, two blocks, wall*

Inverted poses like Downward-Facing Dog should not be practiced by women during menstruation.

Begin by sitting on your mat in Simple Sitting Pose. Separate your knees and rest your torso on your thighs. Stretch your arms out in front of you, shoulder-width apart. Rest your forehead on the floor.

From Simple Sitting Pose, come to a kneeling position. Separate your knees and feet hip-width apart. Make sure your upper arms are parallel and the line of your wrists is straight across. For most students this will mean that their middle fingers are pointing forward; others may need to turn their hands slightly in or out.

This is the first pose taught in which the hands bear weight. Learning the proper hand placement is important both to ensure the proper stretching in the arms and shoulders, and to create ease in the pose. Distribute the weight evenly between your hands, and between the bases of the index fingers and mounds of the thumbs, and between the bases of the little fingers and outsides of the hands.

Turn your toes under. Inhale, and on your next exhalation, lift your sitting bones and straighten your legs. Keep the weight balanced between your hands as you stretch through both arms. Keep the feet parallel and heels lifted off the floor. If you are more experienced, continue to lift the sitting bones as you lower the heels to the floor. In either case, keep the thighs active and bring the tops of the thighbones up and back.

Don't let weight fall forward on the wrists. Press the hands firmly down as you lift your forearms away from your wrists. Continue this lift through the upper arms, to the armpits, and then from the breastbone to the pubic bone. Don't grip the abdomen, but draw it gently back toward the spine.

Remember that your neck is an extension of your spine.

Don't arch your neck or tuck your chin, but keep your head in line with the spine. Keep your throat soft. Hold for 30 seconds, breathing evenly. Gradually increase your time in the pose to two minutes.

To come down, bend your knees and come back to Simple Sitting Pose.

To understand more about how to work the arms and shoulders in Downward-Facing Dog Pose, place two blocks at the wall so that they are shoulder-width apart. Kneel with your legs hip-width apart and place your palms on the blocks. Take the time to balance the weight on your hands. Inhale, and with next exhalation, lift your buttocks and straighten your legs. Keep the heels lifted off the floor. Press both palms firmly into the blocks as you stretch through the arms and shoulders. Continue to lift the sitting bones.

If you are more flexible, you can begin to lower your heels toward the floor. If you lower your heels, do not sink in the lower ribs. Instead, continue stretching through the arms and lengthen the front body back

(Downward Facing Dog continued)

toward the groin. Hold for 20 seconds, breathing evenly. To come down, bend your knees and rest in Simple Sitting Pose.

Using the legs correctly is important when practicing Downward-Facing Dog Pose. In the next variation, rest in Simple Sitting Pose with your toes touching the wall. Separate your knees and rest your torso on your thighs. Stretch your arms out in front of you, shoulder-width apart. Inhale, turn your toes under, and on your next exhalation, raise the buttocks and straighten your legs. Keep your heels in contact with the wall. Stretch through your arms and press the heels into the wall. Draw the tops of thighbones up and back and lengthen the spine. Hold for 15 seconds. Bend your knees and rest in Simple Sitting Pose.

You may want to vary your routine by practicing these variations of Downward-Facing Dog Pose on alternate days. Or you can practice a variation and then try the full pose in the center of the room. Explore what feels best to you.



STAFF POSE *Dandasana*

Prop: *One or two blankets*

Staff Pose is the basic sitting pose. In standing poses, the feet and legs are your foundation. In sitting poses, your foundation is the sitting bones and legs. While the standing poses develop strength, flexibility, and stamina, the sitting poses have a more calming effect on the body and are more introspective. They develop poise and concentration.

Sit on the edge of a folded blanket with your legs out in front of you. Place your hands by your sides and keep your spine erect. Balance your weight evenly between your sitting bones and between the legs. Keep your ear, shoulder, and hips in the same plane. If your back is collapsed and the pelvis is rocked backward, adjust the height of your blanket (you may need more than one). Your pelvic rim should now be parallel to the floor.

The more you can ground yourself through the legs—that is, descend your thighbones — the more you will be able to lengthen the spine. Inhale; feel the thighbones moving downward. Exhale; lengthen the spine. Don't grip in the abdomen or the diaphragm to hold the pose. Instead, keep the abdomen and the diaphragm passive as you continue to descend the thighbones and breathe evenly.

Hold for 30 seconds, increasing your time to one minute.

Benefits:

- *Stretches the hamstrings.*
- *Increases hip flexibility.*
- *Reduces the waistline.*
- *Relieves bloating in the abdomen.*



SITTING FORWARD BEND *Paschimottanasana*

Props: *One or two blankets, one tie or strap*

This pose is a modified version of Sitting Forward Bend. Sit in Staff Pose on the edge of a folded blanket. Keep the spine erect. Inhale, then lift your arms overhead, palms facing each other. On your next exhalation, bend forward from the hips and take hold of your toes. If you can't reach your toes, place a tie or strap around the metatarsals. Hold the ends of the tie with both hands.

Descend the leg bones. On your next exhalation, lengthen the spine from deep in the pelvis. Remember that the neck and the head are an extension of the spine. Continue to lengthen from the lower abdomen through the crown of the head. Release the throat. Take three complete breaths.



If you are working at your limit, don't come any farther into the pose. Listen to your body. If you feel you can, bend farther forward, but remember to keep the spine lengthened. You should not feel a burning behind the knees, but a healthy stretch in the hamstrings. Hold for 20 seconds, slowly increasing your time to one minute. On your next inhale, come back to Staff Pose.

Benefits:

- *Tones the abdominal organs and improves digestion.*
- *Rejuvenates the heart and spine.*
- *Increases vitality and rests the mind.*



COBBLER'S POSE *Baddha Konasana*

Prop: *One or two blankets*

Sit in Staff Pose on the edge of a folded blanket. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together. Bring your hands onto the floor behind your buttocks. Keep your torso aligned as in Mountain Pose and your pelvis balanced. If you find that your back is rounded, you may need to refold the blanket so you are sitting higher (or you may need more than one blanket.) Don't try to force your knees toward the floor. Instead, inhale, soften the groins and lower abdomen. Exhale, lengthen the spine. As the groins soften, it will become easier to lengthen your spine and bring the knees down. Hold this variation for one minute.

Now take hold of your feet or ankles with both hands. Again, don't force the knees down. Make sure the pelvis is level with the floor. Inhale, allow your chest to open. Exhale, lengthen the spine. Relax your throat. Relax your eyes. Inhale, do nothing. Exhale, soften and release the groins. The more you can soften the groins, the more the legs will release downward. The more the legs release, the more lift you will feel through the spine. Hold this variation for 30 seconds, gradually increasing your time to two minutes.

To come out of this pose safely, without putting stress on your knees, bring your hands behind you again. Straighten one leg at a time out to the side, beginning with your right leg. As you straighten each leg, lengthen from the inner groin through the heel. Slide off the blanket, roll your thighs in, and sit in Staff Pose.

Benefits:

- *Improves circulation to the pelvis and abdomen. (One of the few asanas that can be done after eating.)*
- *May be helpful for women with irregular menstrual cycles and for pregnant women.*



SUPPORTED SHOULDERSTAND *Viparita Karani*

Props: *One or more blankets, eye pillow and neck pillow*

This version of Supported Shoulderstand (Viparita Karani, which literally means “reversing the creative process”) is a wonderful way to begin practicing inversions and is suitable for most practitioners.

To begin, place a folded blanket at the base of the wall. Sit on the side of the blanket so that your left shoulder touches the wall. On your next exhalation, swing your pelvis toward the wall and your legs up the wall. Your sitting bones should be as close to the wall as possible, and the blanket should support you from the waist to the sitting bones. If the hamstring stretch is too intense in this position, move away from the wall slightly.

The most important thing to do in this pose is to do “nothing”—just relax. When the rib cage is open and the diaphragm and abdomen are relaxed, a message of relaxation is sent to the brain. So before you begin, place your hands on your abdomen. It should feel completely relaxed. Next place your hands on your diaphragm, just below the breastbone. Inhale; do nothing. Exhale; release beneath your hands. Now bring your hands to your sides, palms up. Roll your shoulders downward to open the chest. Close your eyes. Descend your chin slightly.

As you rest in this pose, feel the movement of the rib cage. As you inhale, feel the ribs opening to receive the breath. As you exhale, feel them moving back. Release your eyes. Feel your hips resting on the blanket and your shoulders making contact with the floor. Feel the legs resting against the wall. Stay in the pose for three minutes, gradually increasing your time to 10 minutes.

To come out, open your eyes, bend your knees, and rest for a few breaths with your feet on the wall. Next, roll on to your right side. Take your time before coming to a seated position.

Benefits:

- *Completely restores and nourishes the body.*
- *Improves circulation and endocrine function.*
- *Beneficial for those with hypertension.*
(If you have hypertension, proceed with care. Practice Supported Shoulderstand by lying on the floor with your lower legs supported on a chair seat. After several weeks you can then practice at the wall, but without a blanket under the pelvis.)
- *Opens the chest to facilitate deep breathing.*
- *Soothes the nervous system.*
- *A gentle way to begin practicing inverted poses.*



RELAXATION POSE *Savasana*

Props: *One or two blankets, a pillow or cushion, an extra blanket or sweater nearby (in case you feel chilly), eye pillow and neck pillow*

Each practice session of Hatha Yoga concludes with Relaxation Pose. If you wear glasses, please take them off. If you wear contact lenses, remove them if it's convenient. B.K.S. Iyengar says that you can learn to relax simply by keeping the body still. This pose will teach you how to do that, and will leave you feeling invigorated and refreshed. Relaxation Pose soothes the nerves and pacifies the brain. This quiets the mind and allows you to enter a place a stillness.

To begin, spread your blanket on the floor. Sit on the blanket with your legs bent and feet resting on the floor. Place a folded blanket or pillow behind you for your head.

Before lying down, balance your weight evenly on both sitting bones. Without disturbing the position of your legs, lower your torso slowly so the right and left sides of the spine touch the floor at the same time. Once you're lying down,



interlace your fingers at the back of your neck, and gently draw the skin toward your head. Release your hands and bring your arms to rest at the sides of your body. Slightly lower your chin toward your chest.

Now stretch one leg away from you at a time. Begin with the right leg. Slide your foot away from you, extending from the groin all the way through the heel. Let your leg roll out to the side. Now slide your left foot away, again extending your leg from the groin through the heel. Let this leg also roll out to the side. Your feet should now be about hip-width apart.

Stretch your arms away from your body so there is space between your upper arms and your chest. Turn your palms up.

Before you close your eyes, observe how your body is making contact with the floor. Is the weight distributed evenly between the right heel and the left?

Between the right and left buttock? Right shoulder, left shoulder?

Is the weight centered evenly on the back of your head? Draw your shoulders away from your ears.

(Relaxation Pose continued)

If you experience any discomfort in your lower back, place a rolled blanket or cushion under your knees. If you feel chilly, cover yourself with a blanket.

To relax completely, the physical body must relax first. Gently allow your eyes to close. Raise your eyebrows just enough to release any tightness around the skin of the eyes and forehead. Let your eyeballs move away from the eyelids, and direct your eyes downward.

Now you're ready to withdraw from the outer world and look inward. To help you focus inward, relax your eyes. Relax your jaw. Release your tongue. Let go completely.

Release the muscles at the base of the neck. Feel that these muscles are drawing away from the center of your neck. Then bring your awareness to the front brain, right to the edge of your hairline. Allow the front brain to rest on the back brain. Allow the brain cells to descend to the back of the head. Soften the skin of the forehead. Release. As you move deeper and deeper into Relaxation Pose, you'll feel your eyeballs becoming smaller and smaller. Next, release the roof of your mouth. Relax the tongue—from the base of the tongue to the tip. Let your tongue rest on your lower palate. As you relax more deeply, you'll experience a fullness in your tongue.

With your mind's eye, look into your rib cage. Notice your breath. No need to change it. Just watch it. Notice how the breath fills the right lung. The left lung. Both lungs. Inhale, feel the ribs expand very, very slightly. As you move deeper into relaxation, your exhalation will become slightly longer. Normal inhalation. Slow, soft, deep exhalation.

As you relax, the slight pause between your inhalation and exhalation will also increase. Observe the space between inhalation and exhalation. Observe your own silence. Each time you exhale, move deeper in. Surrender to your exhalation completely. Stay in Relaxation Pose for 10 minutes or longer.

Always move out of Relaxation Pose slowly. Begin by taking a few deep inhalations and exhalations. When you feel ready, open your eyes. Observe how you feel. Keep your gaze soft. To come up, first roll onto your right side. Rest in this position for a few breaths.

Then move from that place of stillness to a sitting position that's comfortable for you for a few moments more before standing up.

Benefits:

- *Promotes relaxation.*
- *Calms and nourishes the body/mind.*

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