

POSE BOOK
FOR
POWER YOGA FOR
SPORTS
TEACHER TRAINING

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STANDING POSES



Standing Mountain Pose

Tadasana

Standing Mountain Pose may not seem like a difficult task to complete but it is the basis for all other poses and should be visited in the beginning to each class. While this pose may not be as gratifying as a fancy arm balance it can give you important clues to your practice going forward.

How To: Standing Mountain Pose

Standing with your feet together, have your heels slightly apart, so there is a 1-2 inch space and your feet are parallel. Roll around on your feet for a little bit until you liven the arches and find yourself in the center of your foot. Roll your shoulders up and gently back to open the chest and rotate your palms to face forward, feeling the shoulder blades on your back. Check on your back and keep it in a neutral position to relax the pelvis. Inhales lengthen your spine and on the exhale maintain the

height you created. Feel a mild external rotation from your thighs and left the kneecaps slightly to engage the legs.

Benefits of Standing Mountain Pose:

The role of standing mountain pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Improves posture
- Strengthens legs, knees and feet
- Strengthens butt and abs
- Helps develop arches in flat feet
- Gives opportunity for full body assessments

Not only is it a great way to strengthen the lower half of the body, doing this pose in front of a mirror or in the presence of your yoga teacher/coach it is a great tool of assessment. It is very important in the philosophy of Power Yoga for Sports and all yoga to keep constant awareness of your own body/tool. Athletes as well as the soccer mom or kids need to learn about their bodies in order to sideline injuries before they happen or strengthen the body in the case of a jarring incident, in that case it is a matter of walking away rather than a trip to the ER. Doing this pose in front of the mirror on a regular basis is how you get to compare one side of the body to the other, notice misalignments, see asymmetries and address them through your training. For example I always look to my shoulders for stress and tightness. I look for one shoulder being higher, rotation of each shoulder, how my hand faces forward on each side and if my back torques to one side or the other. Then consult my yoga teacher for advice. Consider the first time you do this as a baseline test for you to compare to for the rest of your life and even consider taking photos and archiving them for comparison for the future.

Doing this pose is also an opportunity to stand still and take some deep productive relaxing breaths.

Another nice option is to do this pose while standing against a wall, have the backs of your heels your sacrum, or low back and shoulder blades flush up against the wall.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Low blood pressure
- Severe sciatic pain
- Recent surgery



Standing Forward Bend

Uttanasana

As widely recognized as downward facing dog, standing forward bends should be a staple pose in your yoga routine. Even if you have never stepped into a yoga studio or attempted a DVD, chances are you have folded over into simple standing forward bend.

How to: Standing forward bend

As basic as you may think this pose is, it is very important to learn proper technique, in order to keep your back safe, and open the hamstrings to their fullest.

Stand with your feet shoulders width apart and take time to make sure they are parallel. Plug your feet equally into the floor, with your weight slightly forward, but not so far that you grip your toes. Bend your knees a little and fold over at your hips. Never fold from your waist. Connect your chest and belly to your thighs, while the knees are still bent. Constantly check that your knees, when bent track over your toes, it is key for the safety and integrity of the knee joint to have the knees positioned this way at all times. Keeping your chest and belly connected

to your thighs start to slowly straighten your knees, feeling like you are lifting your hips up to the sky. Once you feel like the chest is separating from your legs you went a little too far.

If you feel stable enough then grab opposite elbow with opposite hand and hang. Start this for 1-minute holds and work up to 10 minutes. Continue to check that your feet line up with each other and that they stay parallel. Although it will be tempting to close your eyes and relax here, DON'T, you will lose your balance. You should not be afraid to sway back and forth and bend and straighten the knees, anything to negotiate further into the stubborn hamstrings. I always encourage my students to drape a 12-pound sandbag over their forearms while holding the pose. This method will get you to the next level faster. Another variation is to do this same pose with your back leaning up against the wall. Oh boy, you will feel the hamstrings deep.

Benefits of Standing Forward Bend

The role of standing forward bend is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Calms the brain
- Relieves stress
- Great for mild depression
- Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips
- Strengthens the thighs and knees
- Improves digestion
- Reduces anxiety

Standing forward bend clearly opens the hamstrings. It is very important to keep the hamstrings open to reduce strain and tightness in the back. Long hours and hard work, long drives and poor sleep are only a few things that contribute to tight backs. Since the hamstring attaches on the lowest part of the pelvis, if the legs are rigid, it easily pulls down on the pelvis putting unnecessary stress on the back. In time without addressing this, a big chain reaction will happen. Tight hamstrings...to strained back...to unstable hips...to knee problems. Doing this stretch you will not see improvements overnight, but in time your legs will free up and you will see a huge difference in how your

body feels so stay committed. It is a great pose to commit to your breath and practice some visualization, actually see your hamstrings open up.

For the athlete, this pose is important for assessing postural needs and imbalances, as well as the above. It is important for athletes to constantly evaluate their bodies. Sports figures from every game can benefit from hamstring improvement. When a competitor has flexible legs it will improve their speed. I stress that the formula for power is strength plus flexibility. Speed and better agility are always concerns of the athlete. In addition as I mentioned before, it is always welcome to have less strain on their backs to reduce injury and increase time of play.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you recently had back surgery (have a trained teacher near)
- You should also have your teacher near if you have recently had knee surgery or hamstring surgery



Chair

Utkatasana

Sometimes known as “fierce” pose or “powerful” pose, it is part of the yogi’s beloved Salutation to the Sun B. Chair pose is a relatively easy pose to learn for all abilities. Do not let its ease of explanation fool you into thinking it is easy. Some of the best thigh/ quadriceps training and burn comes from long chair holds.

How to: Chair Pose

Begin in standing mountain pose and observe all the alignments you normally would. Feet are together and there is equal weight in both feet. Lengthen and strengthen the legs, gently tuck pelvis to avoid over arching the low back. Lift the spine; open the shoulders and chest and take a few deep breathes. Lift all ten toes, to bring awareness and energy. Lengthen and lower them to the ground. Start to lower your hips and sit into the pose. Sit as deep as you can while keeping your feet flat. It is imperative you keep your spine neutral and back FLAT. In the beginning you can practice chair with the knees together and in time

with practice you will keep a tiny space between the knees. Always keep the knees pointed over the feet.

Keep breath steady and chest open. Chin is parallel to the ground. Begin to raise your arms over head, without lifting the shoulders. Extend the arms with all your energy and rotate your palms to face each other. Continue to drop the shoulders out of your ears and draw your shoulder blades down your back. From a side view there will be one beautiful line from your hip joint up through your torso, beyond your arms to your fingertips. As you sink your tailbone on the exhale, extend your body and arms on the inhale. Become aware of a great dynamic opposition.

Beginners can start this pose against a wall, or only lift your arms parallel to the floor.

Benefits of Chair Pose

The role of Chair is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthens the supporting muscles of the major joints, like shoulders, hips, knees, ankles
- Develops core strength
- Strengthens quads and gluteal
- Helps protect knee joint, by building stability
- Builds heat in the body
- Opens shoulders and chest
- Improves breathing

Chair pose elongates and lengthens the back. Chair builds vigor in the anterior and posterior spine. Additionally, since the pose opens the chest and builds power in the spine, it is a great pose for people who have breathing issues. Whenever you open the rib cage and chest it enables the lungs to have added space to breathe as well as opening the spaces between the ribs (intercostals) for additional lung potential. It is a great pose to do for people and yoga practitioners who have or are

having problems with the knees. Chair will build great strength in the quads, which the major supporter of the vulnerable knee joint.

For the Athlete chair pose benefits as I mentioned above, include strengthening the quads. If you look at the pose for a moment you will notice its resemblance to the position taken in skiing, and ready position for a fielder in baseball. It is an awesome pose to hold for those who play hockey as well. All sports that require a solid thigh, like a lineman in football too. In addition, chair pose is utilized to build integrity in the susceptible Achilles tendon. As you sit in the pose it gently stretches the tendon allowing the ankle more flexibility and range. The more open and strong the muscles of your ankles and feet the more power to run. This pose will also help athletes open their shoulder joint and elongate their side body. This would make is a nice pose for basketball players as well who need huge range in the shoulder in order to feel comfortable reaching the arms over head to defend.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Those with knee problems should begin against a wall
- Severe back problems
- Recent ankle surgery



Triangle

Trikonasana

Popular in many styles of yoga, tri means three and kona means corner or angle in Sanskrit, thus triangle pose. Triangle is a therapeutic pose that provides the practitioner with many benefits including strengthening of core and legs.

How to: Triangle Pose

Starting from standing mountain pose, turn sideways on your mat. Walk or jump your feet apart approximately the length of one of your legs. Many teachers say feet should be 3-4 feet apart, the aforementioned way is much more accurate a measurement, as people are infinitely different in proportions. It is very important to start this pose with perfect alignment so as you get deeper your pose is right on. So look down at your feet, and make sure if you draw a straight line from your

left big toe it would line up exactly with your right big toe. This is to insure your hips are perfect from go!

Turn your right toe out 90 degrees and turn your left foot in about 45 degrees. Make sure you have a full external rotation (turn out to the right) of the right thigh so the right knee is aligned directly over the right foot. This means your rotation of the right leg comes from the hip joint not the ankle joint. Lift your arms up and extend them out directly from your shoulders. Make your arms parallel to the floor, palms facing the floor. Take a deep breath and drop your shoulders out of your ears.

Extend your torso to the right directly over the right leg. Imagine your body is between two panes of glass. Bend from the hip NOT the waist. Keep activating and PRESSING down through the outer left foot to secure your pose and lengthen your body. Also, keep pressing your whole right foot down being careful not to roll off your big toe connection to the floor. You should imagine that the right side of your body is just as long as the left. Do not crunch up the right side just to go deeper. You slide the back of the right hand down the inner right shin until you feel resistance, then stop and hold. Do not hold on to your ankle, doing that deactivates your abdominal muscles and causes you to sink your right shoulder into your right ear.

You want to maintain a feeling of pressing the back of your hand against the inner right leg and at the same time pressing slight back against the hand with the right shin. Drop your right side body (shoulder and torso) and open your left body. Your head should be held neutral. Don't let your head drop out of alignment. If you want to go deeper you can turn your head to gaze at your left hand. You want to feel long and extended and still be able to take in your breath.

Benefits of Triangle Pose

Done properly and consistently there are many benefits to triangle pose including:

- Stretching legs, muscles around the knee, ankle joint, hips, groin muscles, hamstrings, calves, shoulders, chest and spine
- Strengthens legs, knees, ankles, abdominals especially obliques, back

- Stimulates function of abdominal organs
- Relieves stress
- Improves digestion and constipation
- Helps to alleviate back pain and symptoms of menopause
- Used therapeutically for anxiety, infertility, neck pain and sciatica

Triangle pose is a great back strengthener. The rigors of everyday life have a tendency to weaken our backs. This is a pose that will work to strengthen the back and core at the same time, so they can support each other. Because it is also a gently twist it helps our newly strong back stay supple and flexible as well, therefore helping to stave off detrimental effect of arthritis and osteoporosis. It works the spine from your sacrum (base) all the way to the top of the neck. The twisting action also acts like a massage to our internal organs, helping them to remain in top function and maintain their ability to rid toxins more efficiently. We could all use a little help with detox in this world of chemicals and fumes.

For the Athlete, like the Yogi this pose is great for strengthening the core and back. Having a strong yet flexible core and back is a quality many sports require. Think of the actions of a soccer player, changing direction on the field every second. Also a hockey player and his ever-changing direction are in great need of not just physically powerful abs, but an equally strong back and flexibility to match. Another reason athletes should practice triangle is because of its ability to open the muscles of the groin area. This is a spot of great vulnerability to any athlete, so it is a good idea to keep the groin area flexible as well. Since this is a standing pose it also calls on the body's balance, which is an obvious attribute an athlete looks for. Finally, the positioning of the legs in triangle requires a sturdy ankle. Keeping your ankle with the right balance of stretch and openness will decrease the likelihood of twists and sprains.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you are experiencing diarrhea,
- You are suffering from eye strain,

- Varicose veins,
- Extreme fatigue.
- Use caution when suffering from low blood pressure,
- Have heart conditions,
- High blood pressure,
- Diagnosed neck problems.



Pyramid Pose/ Standing Head to Knee

Parsvotanasana

This pose is recognizable for yogis and non-yogis. You can often spot this pose being done instinctively by runners and team sport players during their warm up. Pyramid Pose should be a staple for all who desire more open, flexible hamstrings.

How to: Pyramid Pose

Start with your feet 3-4 feet apart and feet parallel. Turn your right foot out 90 degrees to point directly to the front of your mat. Turn the back foot in about 45 degrees. If you drew a line from the right heel back to the left foot the heel would bisect the left foot. Firm your feet and feel a slight external rotation of each thigh.

Take a deep breath and elongate your spine. Put your hands on your hips and be sure to square the hips to the front of your mat, swinging the left hip forward and pressing the right thigh back. Start to fold your torso, from the hips, over the right thigh. Keep folding over with a flat back until your back is parallel to the floor. Without rounding bring your fingertips to the floor. If you cannot reach, stack blocks on each side of the right foot so your hands can rest comfortably.

With every inhale, elongate the back. With every exhale, deepen the stretch. If your hamstrings allow, you can continue to fold with a flat back until someday your forehead touches your right shin, at the same time maintaining the strong feet, externally rotated thighs, long back and active core.

Stay for several breaths negotiating the hamstrings to open and elongate

Benefits of Pyramid Pose

- Mild inversion calms the brain, flushes the sinus
- Stretches the spine
- Strengthens the legs and spine
- Improves posture
- Aids digestion
- Elongates hamstrings

For the beginner, Pyramid pose elongates the back and lengthens the hamstrings. Tight hamstrings for most people result in changes in the angle of the pelvis. When the pelvis tucks too much, the result is stress and strain on the back. It is a great habit for anybody and everybody to stretch the hamstrings to maintain a healthy back for life. When your back is aligned and strong your gate and entire body is more at ease during regular everyday routine chores. This is a very important point, since a united body creates less stress on all joints of the body, most particularly the vulnerable knee joint.

For the athlete, the need for open hamstrings includes the aforementioned, however their jobs often depend on flexibility of the legs. We know good posture and healthy joints are critical for longevity of athletes of all ages, but let's not forget the golden rule of Power Yoga for Sports, that strength + flexibility = power on the field of play. When an athlete not only focuses on the squats and lunges that fortify their legs, but also gives as much attention to the length of their muscles, the results are huge increases of power. Look at the gymnast, who generates more power during competition than them?? So whether you are a soccer player who must run 8-9 miles a game and create forceful kicks or a basketball player who has agile moves of a cat as well as high flying leaps, it is critical to the game of play to focus a lot of time and attention to your hamstrings.

Although you should always consult a physician and research a properly trained Yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent back surgery



Extended side angle

Utthita parsvakonasana

This pose is very familiar looking even for the non-yogi. Most people who have worked out, whether its cardio or lifting weights, have done this move or seen it done by others.

How to Extended Side Angle

Start with your feet about 3-4 feet apart. Anchor your heel and turn your left foot in about 45 degrees, as long as it can remain flat and plugged in to the floor. Turn your right foot out 90 degrees. Feel the external rotation or turn out of your right thigh. Tuck your hips under slightly so as not to put unnecessary pressure on your low back. Slowly bend your right knee to form a perfect 90-degree angle. Be very resistant keeping your knee tracking directly over your right foot to assure the knees safety. Feel the connection between both feet. Lift your torso, be long and extended. Bring your arms up shoulder height palms facing down; looking much like a warrior two pose. Take a deep breath in and on your exhale bring your right hand to the floor on the inside of your right foot. If this is too hard then bring the right elbow to rest gently on your right thigh, and if the original direction is too easy bring your right hand to the floor on the outside of your right foot. The key to this pose is to NOT collapse your right side body while positioning yourself. Try to think that your right side body is just as long as the left side body.

Next, take your left arm, lengthen it, and bring it up over your head. The angle of the left arm should be a continuation of the angle you have created with your extended left leg, one nice long line.

Hold and breath, extend as the name indicates, Switch and do it on the other side

Benefits of Extended Side Angle Pose

The role of extended side angle is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthens and stretches the legs, knees, and ankles
- Stretches the groins, spine, waist, chest and lungs, and shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina
- Increase breath capacity
- Builds stability in the legs

This pose is a great pose to build critical strength in the legs. This is important to build your practice into more challenging holds. It is a great transition pose when you are planning a flowing vinyasa practice. Extended side angle helps the practitioner build enormous strength in the spine. We can all use a stronger more stable spine to avoid slipped discs, herniation, and chronic pain. All these ailments can be experienced by repetitive movements during a typical day, like driving, computer work, getting walked by your dog and constant poor posture. Feel the extension and increased feeling of height this pose can give you and breathe a sigh of relief, literally.

For the athlete, this is a great pose in addition to the above-mentioned benefits, to open groin inner thigh. Not only will it elongate the groin, a constant source of injury to all athletes, keeping the hips and thighs open and supple will build an environment in the body where less stress and strain is placed on the knees. Athletes are always asking me about ways to relieve pressure to the vulnerable knee joint. If the inner thigh is taut and pulling, it causes the placement of the foot to change - possibly pronate or collapse inward, and subsequently puts pressure on the medial knee. Also, it is a great advantage for an athlete, especially athletes that participate in true cardio sports like soccer and basketball, to keep the ribcage open to allow for greater lung capacity. When you can breathe efficiently you are able to stay on the field longer, decrease anxiety and win!

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent spinal surgery
- Recent ankle surgery
- Recent knee surgery



Runners/ Crescent Lunge

Ashwa Sanchalasana

This pose is a very familiar looking pose. Most of you have done it without even knowing its roots are in Yoga. It is many stretches all in one, which makes it a great stretch for athletes to incorporate into their routines. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the particulars of runner's stretch so you are assured perfect alignment.

How to: Runner's Stretch

Begin the pose on your hands and knees (table pose). Bring the right foot forward between the hands, bring it forward enough so the right knee is directly over the right ankle or heel and forms a 90-degree angle. This will create a strong base with the least amount of strain and effort. Tuck the left toes under and extend the left leg so much the leg straightens out completely. You can also perform a variation of this pose with your left knee down on the floor. It is important that you peek down and make sure your left heel is straight up to the sky and you are on all five left foot toes. This will guarantee the safety of the knee. Lift up onto the fingertips and start to extend the spine and elongate the neck. You can place blocks under the fingers too, if you need more

room. Square the hips to the front of the room, your shoulders as well. Make certain that your knee always tracks directly over your foot, again to secure the safety of the right knee. You can start to tuck the tailbone under to increase the left hip flexor (front top of the thigh). Press all the way back through the left heel and lengthen the energy all the way through the top of your head.

You can stay here for several breaths or you can climb the hands onto your right thigh and hold, or you can bring your arms up to the sky...palms facing each other with extraordinary length in your side body and hold. Whatever variation you chose, think as much about length in your spine as you do the depth on flexion in your right knee. Come out of the pose and switch sides.

Benefits of runner's stretch

The role of runner's stretch is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthening support muscles of the knee
- Strengthens and aligns the legs and hips
- Opens hip joint in extension and flexion
- Helpful for sciatic problems
- Strengthens the abs
- Opens the quadriceps and hip flexors
- Stretches the calves
- Opens the bottom of the foot and toes to reduce plantar fasciitis
- Helps athletes increase speed

This pose is a great choice for helping you increase your balance. Anytime you are working with balance in a pose you are tapping into the use of the abdominal muscles, it is very subtle but effective. When balance is achieved you are forced to be in a more focused state...therefore clearing your mind and deepening your breath. Balance is not always the point in the center, once it is realized peace is prevailing and everything can rest easy. There is no conflict in the body. That is a great lesson for us to feel and conquer to translate over into our daily lives.

For the Athlete, in addition to a superior way to work and obtain balance, it is a perfect choice to open the hip flexors and front of the thigh. We focus a lot on the tightness of the hamstrings; the truth is you

need to address the complimentary muscles just as much to increase flexibility. When an athlete opens both muscles, it becomes easier to run and jump and of course recover! You reduce the incident of future injury by being more symmetrical, so there is less stress and strain in one direction. You also help the pressure on the knee by opening and releasing the hip joint more deeply.

Although you should consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

1. Recent knee surgery
2. Hip or low back issues should use modifications
3. Recent neck surgery
4. Acute foot pain



Goddess Pose

Utkata Konasana

Not a widely known or used pose in vinyasa flow or power yoga classes, however a commonly seen pose for practitioners of Kundalini Yoga. This pose is a great blend of strength, stretch, and mental toughness.

How To: Goddess

Start standing, separate your feet the approximately the distance of the length of one of your legs. You can turn your feet out to a comfortable degree, usually 45 degrees is comfortable.

Raise your arms out straight from your shoulders and bend them at your elbows to form a ninety-degree angle. Have your palms facing forward and fingers energized and extended.

Start to slowly bend your knees until they also reach a ninety-degree angle and hold the pose.

Be very careful that as you bend your knees they do not knock inward, be sure that the knees always track directly over the toes, even if that means modifying the angle of your feet.

This is so important to build the correct strength in the legs and to protect the very vulnerable knee joint.

Benefits of Goddess Pose

The role of Goddess Pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include

- Open the hips, legs and chest
- Strengthen the legs, calves, abs, and knees
- Stimulates the uro-genital system and pelvic floor
- Strengthens and stretches the shoulder joint

Goddess pose does a lot to strengthen the legs and help train you to get a sense and feeling for a long, strong back. I find this a great place to do a long hold and therefore add a long series of breath of fire breathing technique. It is also a nice place to judge which joints are weak and tight for assessment purposes. For the Athlete, of course all the preceding benefits would apply but uniquely the advantage of an athlete doing this pose would help:

- Open groin
- Stretch hips
- Stretch elongate Achilles tendon
- Increase core strength
- Challenge their focus and mental toughness by holding for long periods of time
- Increase shoulder strength without building bulk

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Chronic knee problems
- Recent knee surgery.



Straddle Forward Bend Twist

Parivritta Prasrita Padottanasana

Considered a beginners category of poses, this pose can prove to be very challenging for most, especially people that are tight in their trunk rotation and hamstrings.

How To: Straddle Forward Bend Twist (sfbt)

Start with your feet apart, the distance between your feet should be approximately the length of one of your legs. Make sure your feet are on the same line and that they are parallel. Take a deep breath in and on your exhale fold yourself over FROM the hip joint. You will be folding your pelvis over your legs. It is very easy to not pay attention and fold from the back, but you should not do this. No matter how tight your hamstrings are you can get the fold you need and a proper stretch in the back of the legs and not over stretch the back. If you find your hamstrings are so tight then modify the pose. Modifying entails starting out the same way, but have a bend in the knee, this will give some lax in the hamstrings and allow you to feel how you should fold properly. You will hang here for several breaths, stabilizing yourself and focusing on the feel of the stretch.

With both hands on the floor in front of your feet take a deep breath in and come halfway up with a strong flat back. The flat back is critical to be able to move forward in the poses twist action. When you come up halfway with the flat back extend out through the top of your head do not lift your chin, stay neutral in the neck, two feet and your right hand. Continue to extend the back flat, round here will restrict the twist. Start to twist your chest open to the left. Drop your right shoulder and open the left chest shoulder. Every inhale get longer and flatter and every exhale twist deeper. Keep your hips squared, avoid the desire to drop your right hip into the twist. Hold for several breaths.

If you want a little more chest stretch bring your long extended left arm up around and behind the back, eventually tucking the left hand into the front of the left thigh. Keep breathing and twisting. Release gently and repeat on the other side. The whole time you are holding this pose, keep in mind that you are keeping your feet flat and strong into the floor. Feel a connection at all time at the base of the big toe base of the pinky toe inner and outer heel. The temptation is to release all your energy to the outer ankle and that can in time strain and tire the ankle out.

Benefits of Straddle Forward bend twist:

The role of straddle forward bend is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Increased flexibility in the back of the thigh and leg.
- Open the hips
- Lengthen the neck
- Strengthen the back
- Increase lung capacity by opening the ribs
- Improve the trunks rotation ability
- Strengthens the legs and ankles
- Stretches inner thigh
- Calms the brain, as it is a mild inversion
- Fights headache fatigue and mild depression

It is a great combination of balance, strength and stretch. The triple threat always improves the body mind spirit. The pose opens the legs decompresses the spine for greater vitality and energy. SFBT teaches

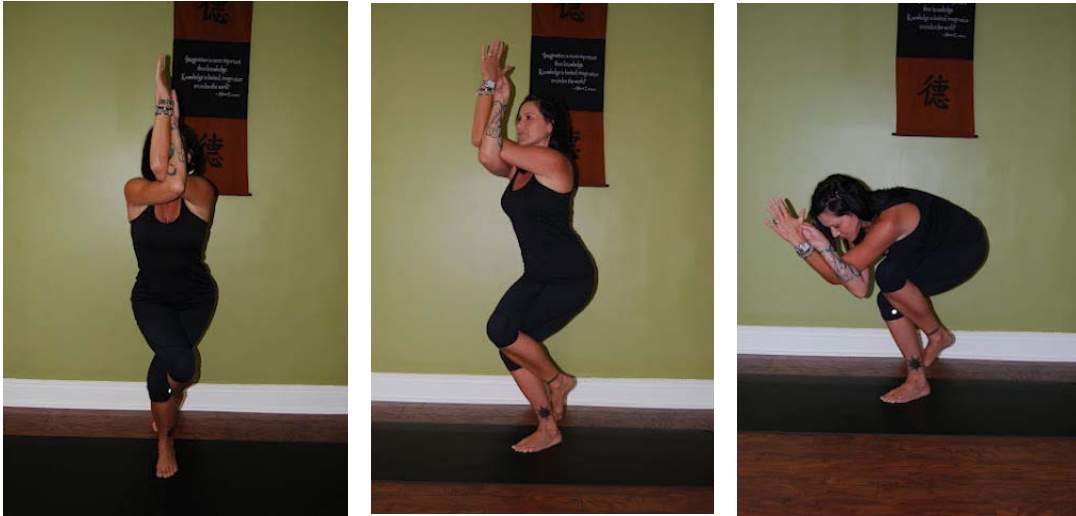
the practitioner to open and let go but remain in control and present so that you do not topple over.

For the Athlete, this pose is amazing for opening the hips and hamstrings. You can surrender to the pose without the force and constant yanking of a seated forward bend. It is extremely effective to maintain strength and stability of the ankle joint. Great for people who play on unstable surfaces such as ice or athletes who command great agility on the field like soccer players or racquet sport competitors. It is crucial to the game to have strong ankle to support quick moves. This pose also is great to help athletes improve their rotation in the trunk. This becomes a huge advantage to players like wide receivers, soccer players, hitters at home plate, and golfers to name a few. All these participants depend on power in the twist to hit a home run or make a quick turn to catch a pass. This pose coupled with deep hip openers like pigeon pose creates superior power in play.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Lower back injury
- Herniation's of the spine
- Concussion
- Glaucoma

Have fun exploring this pose and learning about your body



Eagle Pose

Garudasana

Eagle pose is a posture that generates great stability of the joints and balance of the body. This pose demands your full attention for its success. Eagle pose needs you to focus equal attention to the upper and lower body at the same time. The more you release your muscle tension on your exhales the better their release.

How to: Eagle Pose

Begin this very twisted looking pose by putting all your weight on your left leg. Bend your knees and though you are about to sit in a chair. Keep your spine extended long. Lift your right leg and place it over across your left leg. It should start to look like you are sitting in a chair with your legs crossed. If it is possible your right thigh should be above your left knee. In time and with practice you will be able to hook your right ankle behind the left lower calf. If that is not possible right away place the top of the right foot on the left calf or press it against the inner left calf. Take time to squeeze the inner thighs together, this will bring you into a more solid center.

Keep your hips squared to the front of the mat and try to bend the left knee even deeper.

Bring your arms out to the side, like you are walking a tight rope and need them for balance. Open and expand your chest. Now cross your left elbow over the right in front and center of your body. Keep wrapping and twisting your arms until the palms come together. This full expression of the pose may take time and practice to open the shoulders enough to perform.

Relax your shoulders out of your ears, and keep the shoulders squared to the front of the mat just like your hips. Gently raise your elbows to shoulder height and slowly press your hands toward the front of the mat until you feel a nice opening between your shoulders and deep in the joint. From the waist down feel your body sink deeper into the ground. From the waist up, lift and lengthen. Maintain the pose for several deep breaths, and slowly unwind the body and repeat on the other side. Just about every joint of your body is affected in this pose.

Benefits of Eagle Pose

The role of Eagle pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthen arms, legs, knees and ankles
- Opens the shoulder joint and creates space between the shoulder blades
- Opens hips, and IT band
- Increases circulation to all joints
- Improves digestion and elimination
- Improves balance
- Improves focus

Eagle pose offers many therapeutic applications. Since it opens the back it is an important pose for people who suffer from Asthma. It helps to open the rib cage and intercostal therefore improving your breath capacity. Eagle opens the hips, legs, calves, and knees in doing so Eagle has been known to significantly improve symptoms of sciatica. When you sit deeply in this pose it releases all gluteal muscles, as well as piriformis. Piriformis is a pear shaped muscle that lies deep in the

glutes. There is a hole in this muscle that the sciatic nerve passes through. Releasing piriformis automatically relieves tension on the nerve and brings relief to nagging pain. Many people find low back and gluteal stiffness due to long days sitting at desks and driving. Eagle pose will lengthen your back and release your hips to undo all your days' stresses.

For the Athlete, while all the things mentioned above will benefit athletes, this pose is great for maintaining strength and integrity of the ankle joint. Many sports rely on a grinding running and cutting game, like soccer football and tennis to name a few. The ankle can take a beating. Athletes must take time to keep the joint open clean and strong for power and longevity. As well, gamers need to remember to address the needs of the Achilles tendon to avoid a blowout, and this pose recognizes that too. Your ankle joint need to be strong and agile but flexibility is crucial in order to avoid injury. Say a player on the football field makes the play successfully but at the end of the play another athlete lands on their ankle. It may hurt to be landed on however a properly trained ankle with bounce back immediately, or very quickly without long-term damage. Also, any pose that helps keep the hips open will contribute to a healthy knee. It is the athletes with the most range of motion in their hips that that avoid any major damage or injury to the knee.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- People with a history of low back, knee, hip problems, should begin with modifications or lying on the floor



Squat

Malasana

Squat pose, is a pose of grounding and centering. It affects internal organs as well as the hips. It represents the epitome of balance, strength, stretch, focus, breath and internal change. It is touted as a relaxer and purifier of the entire body.

How To: Squat

Start standing with feet approximately shoulder width apart. Bend your knees and drop your hips toward the floor. Go as deep as you can with your heels staying flat on the floor. If your heels come up you went too far for now. Once you are at a relatively comfortable position, adjust your feet. Do so slowly and with focus, so not to tweak your knee. Initially feet could be significantly turned out; in time you will try to bring them to a parallel position. You never want to force the feet into parallel until they are ready. Doing so will put undo stress and strain on the vulnerable knee joint!

Keep gaze ahead of you, and bring your hands into heart center, prayer position. The back of the upper arms will gently press against the knees. This encourages the pelvis and hips to open further and further. Make a clear and full connection from one hand to the other.

Now, bring your attention to the feet. There must be a full foot connection to the ground. Do not roll to the outer or inner edge of the

foot. Also, focus on the base of the big toe, base of the pinky toe, inner and outer heel engaged into the floor. You can eventually lift your toes off the floor in squat. Think of dropping the tailbone and lengthening the spine. With time and practice your back will be very upright, and flat like you were leaning against a wall, no roundness. Skull ascending, sacrum descending.

Benefits of Squat

The role of squat is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Builds strength in the legs, feet, calves and ankles
- Excellent for people with low back pain
- Opener for the groin, hips, ankles and Achilles
- Stimulates abdominal internal organs
- Spinal stabilizer
- Stimulates sex glands and spleen (purifier)
- Aids release of lumbar nerve plexus

Squat elongates the spine and builds strength in the back. Today's world is inundated with back problems. It becomes imperative for people to work their abdominals to support the anterior (front) spine, and back muscles to support the posterior (back spine). Total back health comes when there is a balance between the anterior and posterior spine. Most daily activities have us leaning forward weakening the abdominals and overstretching the back, leading to imbalance and injury. Squat is one pose you can do daily to open the hips and focus on the balance of the spine. Also, the invention of the chair and high heels has meant the demise of the Achilles tendon. Both of which significantly shorten the vulnerable tendon. Shortened Achilles will bring more stress to the knee and less stability in the ankle leading eventually to tweaks and tears.

For the Athlete, this pose as mentioned above is critical for Achilles tendon health. Once you have pain or aggravation in Achilles you risk inefficient running and decreased runtimes. Pain in the Achilles will increase the likelihood of unconscious changes in your gate and will lead to knee and ankle issues as well as strain on the shins. You will

unknowingly change the way you land on your feet to decrease pain. Another vital reason for the athlete to practice squat is for deep hip opening. As you can visualize, sinking into the pose opens the hips intensely. Keeping unlocked hips also notably reduces pull and torque on the knee joint. Anytime the hip is tight and not moving to its fullest capacity extra tension will go the most susceptible place, the knee. You can clearly see the connection between a catchers stance in baseball, as well a defensive infielder's stance. You will notice the importance of this pose to an offensive lineman, and for goalies in soccer. It is related to a primary ready position in sports.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose completely:

- Recent knee surgery
- Severe back pain or acute herniation
- Begin with modifications or under careful supervision

FLOOR POSES



Easy Cross-Legged

Sukasana

Sukasana, Easy cross- legged, criss cross applesauce, Indian style, a multitude of familiar names for one basic pose. The most widely recognized Yoga pose and home to most meditators this pose is a building block as well as an assessment staple.

How To: Easy Crossed Leg

Sitting with your hips propped up slightly higher than your ankles, prop yourself up on a folded towel, yoga bolster or a pillow. Stack your spine on top of your sitz bones and elongate on every exhale.

Fold one leg in so your heel is tucked in up to your groin, then fold the second leg. I really does not matter which leg folds in first, but you should be mindful to switch your habit side every now and then.

Extend your hands out on to your knees and hold

Benefits of Easy cross-legged

The role of easy cross-legged is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Stretches hips knees and ankles
- Calms the mind

- Increases blood flow to the abdominal organs
- Strengthens the back

Easy cross-legged is the position of meditation. You can free your mind with this easy-seated pose and focus on the lift of the spine, while at the same time expand the chest and belly with breath. It seems the perfect pose to feel the stacking of the spine without the worry of balance. Not having the worry of complicated poses or holds frees the mind to develop a meditation practice, the reason for practicing.

For the Athlete, easy cross-legged can often be difficult. I insist that athletes starting yoga sit on a sturdy yoga block or two! This will allow the back to lift to its capacity without the hips inhibiting the pose. For the athlete it is a serious pose of assessment. At first most people will not be able to sit up tall and they will find that they are sitting behind their sitz bones. This is a great clue that your hamstrings NEED WORK. As you hold the pose you will find there is nothing “easy” about it and the groin grips the hips shake with exhaustion, with constant practice and attention this will easy and you will master being still and able to breathe and read your body. If you are recovering from knee surgery, you may want blanket supports under your knees and/or do not have your feet as close to your body at first. I LOVE to add a seated twist movement here to warm up athletes before every yoga practice to further assess their needs. Even the most seasoned athlete can find this pose a challenge as they are made to be still and read what the body requires.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent knee surgery
- Recent serious hip injury
- Ankle difficulties



Cobblers Pose

Baddha konasana

From the football field, gymnastics mat to the tennis courts and dance studios this pose has been done by most. In sports it is fondly known as the butterfly stretch. This pose is useful for every sport as well as recreational athletes and should become a part of every workout warm up or cool down.

How to: Cobblers Pose

Start seated on a stable even surface, I recommend no matter what your level of expertise in this pose that you fold a blanket or towel and sit up on it. This makes your hips higher than your heels and gives you ease in the pose with less force. With your hips propped up you will have a slight feeling of going downhill in the pose.

Bend your knees and bring your feet together. Take some time to perfectly align you're the bottoms of your feet and gently press them together.

Hold on to your lower leg or foot. Do not hold your toes, unless you are very flexible or familiar with the pose. When you grab the toes you tend to pull your ankle and foot out of alignment, which can stress the knee and encourage an improper stretch. Begin to let your knees drop down. Position your heels as close to your body as you can without strain on the knee.

You can hold here, focusing on breath and a tall straight back, or you can begin to fold forward. If you fold over, use your elbow on the inside of your legs to help encourage the knees to drop down further, NEVER

FORCE, OR BOUNCE. Take it slow. Fold with a flat back having the feeling that your chest would touch the floor before your forehead would.

Benefits of Cobblers Pose

- Stimulates abdominal organs, ovaries and prostate gland, bladder, and kidneys
- Stimulates the heart and improves general circulation
- Stretches the inner thighs, groins, and knees
- Helps relieve fatigue
- Soothes menstrual discomfort and sciatica
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Therapeutic for flat feet
- Consistent practice of this pose until late into pregnancy is said to help ease childbirth.

This pose is great to add to the warm up or cool down of your workout. Cobblers Pose also helps tone and strengthen the thighs that can help you improve your yoga game or if you do not practice yoga strong legs are useful for many of life's daily activities. The more you practice this pose with a strong tall back the more you can improve your breathing and reduce daily anxiety too.

For the athlete, cobbler's pose is amazing for releasing tight groin inner thigh pre or post game. Taking time to open the hips in all directions is a sure way to reduce the stress and strain on the vulnerable knee joint, So Cobbler away. When you set yourself up in this pose yourself up in this pose it is a perfect way for you to observe which hip, groin side is tighter on you, therefore giving you clues to go ahead and work on the tight side a little more. So observe which knee is higher if any and that is the tighter groin hip side. As mentioned before this pose is utilized and effective for anybody from the soccer player to hockey players, who are always on unstable surfaces, to the agile tennis great and fluid breaststroke swimmer. A must do for all athletes.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent back surgery
- Groin or knee injury: (Only perform this pose with blanket support under the outer thighs.)



Opposite arm opposite leg

Not exactly a yoga pose, more of a yoga movement. I start all my yoga classes with this centering warm up movement.

How to: Opposite Arm Opposite Leg

Start by lying on your back, arms stretching overhead, and toes stretching to the front of your mat. Reach and arch the back, this move will almost send you into a big yawn. After taking a few breaths here, press your low back into the mat engaging your abs.

Leave your head on the floor and lift your right arm up and left leg up and touch your fingertips to your leg. In a perfect world the fingertips will touch the toe tips. This means that your hamstrings are nice and open. I hear over and over athletes say, “my arms are not long enough!” That is not the case. Some people will start out only able to touch their knee, with time and practice this will gradually improve.

Then repeat the other side and continue this alternating motion until 2 minutes has elapsed.

Grab your knees into your chest when you are finished.

Benefits of opposite arm opposite leg

The role of this movement is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- More lubricated shoulder and hip joints
- Stretching the hamstrings
- Opening the shoulder joint and hip joint
- Strengthening the abdominals
- Sync breath with the movement
- Overall centering

This movement is a great habit to get into before starting their yoga practice. It is a perfect way to disconnect from the outside world and center your breath and your thoughts to prepare you for a better more focused practice. This is a great time to also, tune into your body and identify a tight spot or misalignment to focus on going forward in the practice. Notice which hamstring is tighter, which feels more restricted etc....

For the athlete, this movement of opposite arm opposite leg is also an opportunity for them to tune into misalignments and imbalances, as well as sync the breath with the movement. Too often athletes hold their breath during workouts, this will help them get into a great habit of breathing when they move. More than that, it is an amazing way to warm up the whole hip joint to prepare you for a grueling day on the field of play. The more open the hip before taking to the field the less pressure on your knee joints and the quicker and more agile you will be right from the get go. Every athlete is looking to explode on the field. To the same effect it warms up the whole shoulder joint. Big motion done deliberately to warm the joint before it has to weight bear or catch a pass, or throw a fastball. Finally, it is a gently way to engage the abdominals creating more strength and stability in the core.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this movement entirely:

- Recent shoulder surgery
- Pins in the shoulders, modifications can apply
- Pregnancy in the late stages
- Low back injuries



Reclined Big Toe Pose

Supta Padangusthasana

Reclined big toe pose is exactly as it sounds and is a great tool for opening deeply in the legs. You may have done this pose without even knowing its name, and seen this pose done on the sidelines by coaches and trainers with their athletes.

How to: Reclining Big toe Pose

Start by lying on your back; draw your right knee in to your chest. At the same time, extend the left leg strong along the floor through the heel. Take a strap and wrap it around the bottom of the mid right foot. Slowly, straighten your right leg pushing through the right heel as well. Always be mindful of pushing through both heels. Try to achieve a 90 degree angle with both your legs... in time with practice you will be able to pull both sides of the strap and open the right hamstring further. While pulling the right leg in be sure not to pull so hard that you lift your shoulders off the floor. Keep your shoulders broad and flat on the ground. Also, press the left thigh down and try not to over arch your back. Finally, keep both hips on the ground and keep them square. Eventually you will not need the strap and you will be able to maintain perfect form while holding your right big toe with your right first two fingers and thumb...to make more of a challenge lift your left leg up off the floor about 2-3 inches.

Switch legs and hold each side for 1-3 minutes repeat if time permits

Benefits of reclining Big Toe Pose

The role of reclining big toe pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Stretches hips, hamstrings, calves and groin
- Helps strengthen the knees
- Improves digestion
- Helps to become aware of asymmetries in the legs
- Relieves back pain
- Helps relieve symptoms of sciatica

This pose is a clear-cut choice to improve the flexibility of the hamstrings groin and calves. It gives you the opportunity to see the differences in each leg and perhaps address a serious issue before it becomes an injury. It is the pose to prepare you for utthita hasta padangusthasana...the same pose only standing up. Once you create the muscle memory of the pose while you are laying down adding the standing balance element becomes easier.

For the Athlete this pose is as said essential for the health of the hamstring. I find it a better choice than seated forward bend, because athletes with tight hamstrings tend to over pull their back doing seated forward bend. This lying pose makes the back a non-issue. This is a great pose for athletes who depend on the legs to be open and agile, what sport doesn't, to grab a partner and get them to carefully help them push the stretching leg further and further.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you have high blood pressure
- Serious neck issues
- Recent knee surgery



Plank Pose

A very basic pose used widely in the Yoga world as well as the sports world. Although this pose looks to be an insignificant transition move, it is a critical pose to assess your body. This pose, like several in yoga, tend to go untaught and teachers hold an assumption that the student is versed in the nuances of the pose. That is a mistake. Plank is a great teaching tool for the student.

How to: Plank Pose

The best way to get to this pose is to start in downward facing dog. From there, press forward so that your shoulders are over your wrist joints. It is important to make sure wrists are directly under the shoulders and the wrist forms a 90-degree angle. The body should be in one line from the top of your head to the heels. You should not dip your hips or raise your hips. This is the same positioning as top of a push up. You need to push back through your heels and forward through a neutral neck out through the top of the head. At the same time, press firmly down through your whole hand and do not let your chest sink.

While here, check that you have a hand that is totally engaged into the floor. Make sure hands are flat and fingers spread, with even spacing between each finger. It is important not to press so firmly in this pose that you end up with a hyperextended elbow. From there gently slide your shoulder blades down your back so your shoulders are out of your ears and your neck elongated. Your head should be a natural extension of

the spine. If you have slight pressure in the low back here then pelvic tilt until the feeling dissipates. Legs are strong, straight and engaged. You also need to take a quick peek at your heel and make sure they are pointing directly up to the sky, and foot is square.

Benefits of Plank Pose

Done properly and with consistency, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthening of the arms, wrists, spine, quads, abdominals
- Toning of the core

Plank pose elongates the body and lengthens the neck. It helps the determination of a neutral body position. Building the strength in the back is a great opportunity to counteract all the wear and weakening the back undergoes on a daily basis. Building a strong back and abs at the same time are great for spinal support and the development of better posture.

For the athlete, this pose is particularly important for developing wrist integrity. Whether you play soccer and are in constant danger of falling on the wrists, play racket sports and power in the wrist is crucial, or you are an offensive lineman and strength in the wrist will determine how long and well you play your position. Plank pose will help these and many more sports. Every athlete should be able to open their wrist to the 90-degree angle to avoid future injury and wear. Holding plank will accomplish that goal. Having your body in the plank with knees off the floor give the athlete the body weight to build strength while they are increasing flexibility.

There are a few variations to enhance the athletes' performance. One variation is plank pose on the forearms. Here, instead of the wrists being under the shoulders you would have the elbows under and elbows shoulders width apart. This variation will open the shoulder joint for the athlete. The full expression of the pose is having the forearms parallel, which will only happen if the shoulder joint is clean and open. Holding forearm plank, as you will quickly notice is a great abdominal, and shoulder strengthener.

The other variation in this pose to further the flexibility of wrists is wrist turns. While holding plank you would turn one hand around at a time until you could turn each wrist 180 degrees someday. Hold for several breaths returning the first hand to neutral position and turning the next. It is important in wrist turns that you make sure the turning hands wrists are still under the shoulder and 90 degrees. Watch how much heat you create in the body quickly by holding wrist turn variation.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly-trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely: If you have a history of carpal tunnel syndrome, and if you have a history of degenerative low back problems.

NOTE: Even with history of carpal tunnel syndrome under the supervision of a highly qualified Yoga Teacher, plank pose can help the recovery of carpal tunnel syndrome.



Side Plank

Vasisthasana

This pose is classified as a balancing pose. It demands full concentration as well as determination. Side plank is also a great pose to develop a strong stable shoulder as well as wrist.

How to: Side Plank

Begin in plank pose, or in a position at the top of a push up. Be sure your shoulders are directly above your wrists, creating a 90-degree angle in them. Your body is in one line without sagging in your hips or belly. Hold your legs strong and core tight. Drop your heels to the right; slowly bring your left arm up to the sky. You should now be aligning your left arm through your chest down to your right wrist. Your chest opens to the left. In time you will be able to look up at your left hand. If this is too difficult a modification for beginners is, from plank drop your right knee to the floor so the knee is directly under its own hip. Drop your left heel to the right and bring your left arm up to the sky as you did above. Once you become confident and strong, and develop stable wrists you will be able to execute this without being on the knee. Be sure your legs and core stay strong throughout the hold. Maintain even deep breaths and elongate your body. Hold for a few breaths and then switch sides.

Benefits of side Plank

The role of side plank is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthens the shoulder girdle
- Strengthens the wrists and elbow joint
- Increases abdominal strength
- Firms and tones the body

Side plank opens the chest and heart. Anytime your focus is on opening the chest, you are expanding the rib cage, which enables you to increase your lung capacity. This increases oxygenation to the body. This pose also helps to strengthen the back and chest at the same time in order to achieve balance in it. In our overly forward bending lives we need to focus on balance of the front and back body to reduce the likelihood of injury to the spine. In addition, since it is a balancing pose it automatically gets to our core increasing stomach strength and reducing strain on the back.

For the athlete, not only do I utilize this pose to increase the abdominal strength, which is a concern for all athletes, from soccer players to tennis players, it helps build a great support system for their back muscles. Another reason to add this pose to your routine for athletes is to increase strength stability and the integrity of the wrist joint. As an athlete from tennis to golf and football to baseball you need to open the wrists and keep them flexible. Whether you are blocking a defense or swinging for a hole in one if your wrists are rigid you are assured to run into carpal tunnel problems or sprains of the wrist. The more open strong and flexible the wrist is the more power to swing your racket in tennis. Another critical reason to keep the wrist open is in the event you fall during a swift soccer play, you want the wrist to be able to handle the fall instead of breaking. Holding the side plank builds strength while stretching, therefore if you do fall on one hand during the game your body is accustomed to taking the weight.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent abdominal surgery
- Serious eye problems
- Recent shoulder surgery
- Severe neck pain



Inverted Plank Pose

Purvottanasana

Inverted Plank is a pose of stabilization as well as back bending. It is a great pose that affects several glands in the body, including: adrenals, thyroid and thymus. Doing this pose will stimulate organs of the abdominal cavity as well as the diaphragm and breath.

How To: Inverted Plank

Start by sitting on the floor legs extended straight out in front of you, back tall and arms down by your sides, (seated mountain pose). Bring your arms behind you about 12 inches. The correct distance will place the wrists directly under the shoulders when you are fully expressing the pose. Make sure your fingers are full spread and hands are completely plugged into the floor. Also, have your hands separated the distance of your shoulders. Lean back on your hands slowly pouring weight into them. Start to expand your chest with breath and feel the shoulder blades come closer together on your back. Press equally into your hands and your heels and begin to raise your hips off the floor. Ultimately raising them until your body makes a clean line from your toes up your legs through the torso, chest and head. Reaching that point will take diligent practice. Be sure not to over lift the hips or let them sag. Beginners can keep their chins tucked into their chest and as you progress drop your head back opening your throat.

Press equally and firmly through both heels. There is a slight internal rotation of the thighs to aid in getting and keeping the big toes connected to the ground. Elongate the top of the foot and in time with practice you will extend the foot to have the toes touch the floor. Keep the line of energy up the legs strong. Press the hands down into the ground getting full extension of your arms and elbows. This will strengthen the wrists, which should now be in a ninety-degree angle. Continue to open the chest with your breath expanding and lifting it. Keep your pelvis and low back neutral. Feel the torso and legs stretching away from each other.

Hold for several breaths and be conscious of areas of stress or strain. Your eyes can be open or closed.

Benefits of Inverted Plank Pose

The role of inverted plank is valuable. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Stabilizes the pelvis
- Strengthens the buttocks, back, legs, arms and shoulders
- Increases oxygenation by opening the chest and ribs to allow for greater lung capacity
- Massages the abdominal cavity
- Stimulates glands mentioned above

Inverted plank is a powerful pose of purification since it stimulates the kidneys. Most people day to day are very forward. We have desk jobs, driving, and taking care of little ones leave us hunched forward for most of the day. We would all benefit from stretching strengthening, and lengthening the front body. In addition, strengthening the back body, which becomes overstretched from our day-to-day grind, is of great relief to the internal organs and integrity of the abdominals. Inverted plank also opens the wrist joint; this type of stretch of the wrist is medicine and prevention for carpal tunnel syndrome. If this pose is too difficult for beginners it is wise to bend the knees to ninety degrees supporting your lower body with both feet firm into the floor. This variation is sometimes referred to as inverted table pose.

For the Athlete, this pose is a great pelvic stabilizer. Pelvic stabilization and suppleness is important to lessen the strain on knees. However, more important it is superior for building strength, stability and openness in the wrist joint. For most sports from football to soccer and hockey the risk of falling onto a single hand is high. An athlete must have a strong wrist in order to support their builds. If you do not practice wrist openers and weight bearing poses of the hands the likelihood of you falling and damaging the wrist and hand are one hundred fold. Also, inverted plank extends the elbow joint. This is important because many athletes have developed bicep muscles, leaving the elbow with less range of motion. Less range of motion will decrease power especially to a baseball pitcher and football quarter back, where power of the throwing arm is a necessity. Finally, inverted plank pose decreases the anterior tilt of a tight shoulder, again which will lessen the range of motion, and perhaps even start to torque the trunk out of alignment. A centered core is important to most athletes including golfers.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Should pain or injury history
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart disease
- Modifications should be made for those with back, and neck issues



DOWNWARD FACING DOG

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

Probably the most basic of yoga poses, even if you stopped somebody on the street they would have heard of “down dog.” Heck, even our dogs do it! As commonplace as it is, it is not to be taken lightly and is often assumed and untaught in the yoga studio. Downward facing dog has many jobs and functions, among them it is an: assessment pose, transitional pose, resting pose, strengthening pose, inversion pose and a rejuvenator.

To start the pose resembles that of an upside down letter V. Your hands should be shoulders width apart, by that I mean your own shoulders, be honest! Take a look at your hands your wrist line (joint) should be parallel to the front edge of your mat, your fingers will have equal space between each of them and in general your middle finger will point straight ahead. It is VERY important that you engage or “PLUG” your entire hand fully into the ground at all times to avoid excess strain on your wrist joint. Your feet are hips width apart and they are to remain parallel to each other, meaning your heel is directly behind your second toe. If you were to draw an imaginary line from left middle toe down to left heel, left heel across to right heel, and right heel up to right second toe, right second toe over to left second toe.... this will create a perfect square. From there you will look at your lower leg or shin area. The shin area from ankle to knee will create a perfect RECTANGLE when in the proper position. Your lower leg should never resemble a potential triangle, with your knees knocking in towards each other, that

risks tension on the inside knee. You should be supported equally by your upper and lower body, and not rest heavily in the legs. You will always be pushing the floor away and engaging the shoulders and the upper body, elongating, not sinking your neck into the shoulders and upper back. From a side view you will see a nice V no rounding in the back especially the low back and not arching of the back either. Beginners or people with tight hamstrings (back of the upper leg, thigh) will start with bent knees.

The roll of downward facing dog is vast. The most immediate and direct effects you will notice are: stretching the shoulders and shoulder blade area, hands/ wrists, low back, hamstrings, calves and Achilles tendon. Down dog strengthens your entire back and shoulder girdle, therefore easing back pains. It elongates your cervical spine/neck giving the opportunity to relax your head and benefit from the traction, which will ease tension and headaches. Done properly and consistently, the pose will expand the chest, which will deepen respiration, lessen anxiety and stimulate full body circulation. When circulation is increased and stimulated you are refreshed, renewed and glow. Again with a commitment to a regular practice, this pose will stimulate the nervous system, which helps with memory and concentration. Maybe we should have Math class, English class lunch, and Down dog!!!

Downward facing dog elongates and lengthens the back. Think about how critical this is for an office worker who is stuck at a desk all-day and hunched forward to boot. As a matter of fact, most people whether they are Moms, Brokers, Drivers, Teachers, etc. are in a constant forward bend all day and would benefit immensely by stretching and lengthening the back shoulders and front body. Not only that down dog is, as mentioned a mild inversion (since the head is lower than the hips) and inversions are great for increasing blood flow to the brain and eyes.

For the athlete, this pose is essential for assessing their postural needs and imbalances. You can feel upper and lower body imbalance by the techniques I mention above. It is an important habit to be in for athletes to check themselves and recheck BEFORE something gives way. It is a gentle way for them to open the hamstrings for quickness and speed. Stretch shoulders; keep their wrists strong and supple, for grip

strength for baseball to pushing on the offensive line. Keep lower back open and strong, complimenting a strong core, this is important for agility on field from soccer and football to tennis and golf. Finally, stretch toes, calves and arches. Open, flexible feet translate directly to speed for any sport that includes a run or sprint.

I also must mention some contraindications to downward facing dog. Although you should always consult your physician before starting a yoga practice as well as research a registered properly trained teacher, you should avoid this pose if you have a

- History of carpal tunnel syndrome,
- If you are in the late stages of pregnancy
- If you experience sudden sharp pains while performing the pose.



Upward Facing Dog

Urdvah Mukha Svanasana

Aside from downward dog, upward facing dog is one of the most widely known and recognized yoga poses. Usually upward dog is done during the Sun Salutation Series.' Upward dog has several functions, benefits and therapeutic uses. It is the cousin to the Cobra pose and is considered one of the easiest of the back bending poses. It is also thought of as a pose of assessment. It is often held in pain with a lot of pressure in the low back.

How to: Upward Facing Dog

Start by laying face down on your mat, legs should be long with a feeling of extension through the length of the toes, and your legs should be hips width apart. Bend your elbows and place your palms flat to the ground, fingers spread, hands completely plugged into the floor and have your finger tips along side your chest. Your wrist joints should be parallel to the front edge of the mat. You should look to see that your wrists are at a 90-degree angle and your elbows also create a 90-degree angle. Check that your elbows stay tight to your sides. From here, press down through the tops of the feet. The tops of all 10 toes should be pressing into the floor. There is a slight internal rotation of the legs (rolling the legs weight towards the pinky toe). Press the palms down and gently lift your body off the floor. The ONLY parts of your body touching the ground in updog are the tops of the feet and the whole hand. Keep energy through them and keep them strong. Once your arms are fully

extended double check that your wrist joint is still under your shoulder, stacking the wrist, elbow and shoulder joints in one line. This positioning is critical and insures a safe less stressed lower back. The most common mistake in updog is having your hands too far out in front of you, not stacking the joints of the arm creating tremendous low back pressure.

It is very important here to press down through your hands and lift through the top of your head. Lengthening the neck and having the feeling of pushing down avoids the common mistake of “the turtle head” and the look of the head disappearing into the neck. While adjusting this you must also roll your shoulders back, shoulder blades toward each other. Press your heart forward and up. Never over arch the back. The action in the arms and legs collectively gives you this result. Another point to remember is not to let your elbows bow or hyperextend. The bends in the elbows should face each other. At the same time keep opening your chest (external rotation), getting the feeling like you were opening a childproof medicine bottle.

To further relieve pressure on the low back, press your tailbone down with a tucking action. Look straight ahead keeping a neutral neck to avoid compression on the neck and stiffening the throat.

Benefits of Upward Facing Dog

Consistent and determined practice of upward facing dog result in the following benefits:

- *Strengthening of the spine, arms, and wrists
- *Firms the buttocks
- *Stimulates the organs of the abdomen
- *Improves posture, by stretching anterior spine and strengthening posterior spine
- *Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders and abdomen
- *Helps to relieve depression, fatigue and pain of sciatica
- *Opening chest space increases lung capacity therefore is therapeutic for asthma

For the beginner, upward facing dog is just what the doctor ordered. Poses like this are critical for a healthy back. Many of our daily postures and chores include the forward fold of the torso. When we are forward all day, at our desks, and driving for example for hours on end, we over stretch our back muscles and weaken our abdominals. This is a huge reason for poor posture in epidemic proportion. Back bending poses like updog counteract this growing problem. Once we are in better, more lifted postures it automatically puts our abdominal organs into a better functioning position. It is also a great pose to tone our arms and legs and open our hearts.

For the athlete, this pose is great for a many reasons. First, sports of agility and speed often call for a supple flexible spine. A back that can be open in all directions is more efficient to make wide receiving plays on the football field, acrobatic plays in soccer and strong swings on the tennis court. Second, upward dog stretches the quadriceps (front of the thigh) and the hip flexors (front of the hip). Balance between the front and back leg will keep the leg in harmony and lessen the risk of pulled hamstring, or quad. Third, updog keeps the wrists strong and flexible which is the equation for power, and a strong stick play in hockey to a finessed shoot in basketball. Finally the ability the pose has to open the rib cage and increase the breath capacity is very interesting to athletes who have to deal with aerobic sports of endurance. It will also help athletes who suffer from exercise-induced asthma.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you have a history or are suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome,
- Late stages of pregnancy,
- Have had serious back injury,
- Disk problems.



Childs Pose

Balasana

Often used as a respite for a yoga grind, Childs pose is the option to turn to when you need a rest. Childs pose offers a range of other benefits to consider.

How to: Childs Pose

Start on your hands and knees. Widen out your knees as far as shoulders width apart. Big toes touch each other. Slowly start to drop your hips back to rest on your heels

Rest your forehead on the floor and you can either extend your arms straight out towards the front of the mat, or drape your arms on the floor alongside your body.

Here is the place to focus your breath and intention and rest your body with full attention.

Continue to breathe and feel your spine lengthen and feel a great release of the low back.

Benefits of Childs Pose

- Stretches the legs: ankles, thighs, hips, knees
- Relieves stress and fatigue
- Calming
- Releases back tension
- Releases neck tension

Childs pose is the go to place in the middle of a practice when you are feeling overwhelmed, tired, or too challenged. It is also a very

comforting protective pose to go to when you are feeling stressed. It eases low back tension and aids blood flow to the spine and brain. It is an easy place to stop and take breaths. You can get a nice feeling in the hips of a deep forward bend without the restraint of tight hamstrings. Stay here for 1 minute to 10 minutes.

For the athlete, this pose also offers the de-stressing place, however in addition it is a valuable tool. Athletes from long distance runners to soccer players and golfers should visit this position to keep the ankles supple and flexible. It stretches the tops of the foot and therefore the shins, helping to avoid the painful shin splints when practiced often. In addition, child's pose increases the flexibility in the knee joint. For hockey players to tennis Pro's a flexible knee joint is a huge advantage to avoid injury and absorb shock that may be incurred from the game of play. Finally, child's pose opens the hips and quads. Whether you play baseball and need great hip torque for power or you are a stop and go player of Lacrosse, or even a weekend warrior, many injuries can be avoided if the hips are open and strong.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent knee surgery
- Recent back surgery
- Late stage pregnancy
- Acute stomach problems



Thunder Bolt / Hero Pose

Virasana

Pose of the hero may appear to be a regular position to watch TV or sit, however there are many particulars to executing this pose safely. It is a pose that requires proper attention and a strong foundation

How to: Hero's Pose

Starting on your hands and knees slowly sit back onto your heels. The most important part of this pose is to constantly check that the tops of your feet are on the floor; bottoms of the feet are completely facing up. Try to have your thighs together, unless you feel strain in the knees, then, separate them accordingly. This is basically the entire pose, although there are many subtleties too. For some just sitting back on the heels can prove to be painful. If this is the case place a block on the floor between your feet and sit back on the block until you are secure and open enough to take it away. You want to get to the point where you can sit up nice and tall while sitting on the heels. Press the shins and tops of the feet into the earth and ground through the little toe side of the foot. Lift your rib cage evenly and lengthen through the crown of your head. Relax your shoulders. If you are extremely tight or are rehabbing from knee surgery then roll up a towel behind your knees and then sit back. This will reduce any risk of over flexion of the knee.

Rest your hands on your thighs and relax into your breath. If you have no pain in the knees and the ankles and shins are open and flexible

enough, then move deeper into the pose by separating the feet gently roll the thighs inward and try to sit on the floor between your feet. It will take time and practice to deepen this pose. Try to remain tall and lifted and not round the back at all.

Benefits of Hero's Pose

The role of Hero's pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Increases flexibility in hips, legs and knees
- Encourages proper alignment in hips, legs and knees
- Opens hips
- Stretches quads
- Encourages and trains internal rotation
- Strengthens the low back while lengthening the spine
- Good for virility

Hero's pose is a great pose to align the body and find comfort in to meditate. It gives the practitioner the opportunity to strengthen the back and spine. At the same time open the chest and heart and help increase lung capacity. It is a great cooling pose to find your center and add some shoulder stretches at the same time. It stimulates and brings blood and oxygen to the root chakra, which is beneficial to people suffering from reproductive problems or sexual issues past and present.

For the athlete, I teach this pose with two variations.

- Toes tucked: this helps athletes who rely on speed and agility open up the plantar fascia of the foot. It opens under the toes contributing to increased speed. Most importantly it stretches and keeps supple the vulnerable Achilles tendon. This pose is a must for soccer players, runners, wide receivers, tennis players and basketball players who need explosive feet.
- Toes untucked: as mention above, this variation is great to keep the shins free of strain and the tops of the feet open, again contributing to increased speed.

Doing these variations also helps athletes stay away from dreaded turf toe. By keep the toes as flexible as possible the impact that they face day in and day out play after play is lessened and cases of turf toe reduced.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained Yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Modifications should be made if you are currently suffering knee pain
- Modifications can be made if you have just had surgery
- If you have pins and plates in your knees you should avoid this pose all together
- Recently ankle surgery



Seated Staff Pose

Dandasana

Probably a beginning/ starting pose for many vinyasa or advanced poses, dandasana is a great place to set your intention, feel your ground and begin holds or other vigorous practices.

How to: Seated Staff Pose

Sit on your mat legs extended out in front of you. Inhale your back nice and tall and feel that you are sitting directly on your sits bones. If your hamstrings are too tight to sit in the sits bones with a tall straight back, then either sit up on a block or two, or slightly bend the knees until you can achieve the lifted feeling. Imagine your back is straight up against a wall, or actually bring yourself to the wall.

There is a slight internal rotation of the thighs so to engage them and take a look at your feet. Your feet should look as though they are rested up against an imaginary wall in front of you. Look for asymmetries that may indicate tightness or impending injury.

Inhale and lift your spine. On the exhale, remain lifted right through the top of the head. Stay here for several minutes and feel the effects. Although this looks easy it may prove to be a challenging pose.

Benefits of Seated Staff Pose

- Stretches the hamstrings
- Stretches the back
- Strengthens the back and legs
- Improves posture
- Improves digestion

Seated staff pose is a great way to improve the muscles that are responsible for perfect posture. Once perfect posture is achieved then one can also benefit from increased oxygenation and blood flow to in abdominal organs, this is important for optimum functioning. This is a great pose to assess asymmetry in the hips legs and feet, therefore perhaps curtailing an injury before it happens. Awareness is the key and as Power Yoga for Sports professes it is proactive training not reactive training that is most efficient.

For the Athlete, this pose is an amazing option to strengthen the back and improve abdominal strength. From agile soccer players to acrobatic hoop stars, it is always important and obvious to spend time on these areas for most favorable performance. It also gives the athlete the opportunity to observe the asymmetries mentioned above. And finally this strengthens the hip flexors and quads. All that an athlete has to do is hold this position for several minutes to know that they need work in this area!

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Recent back surgery



Boat pose

Navasana

Boat pose is recognizable to workout enthusiasts as well as Yogi's, as it is a staple to help strengthen the abdominal muscles. This pose resembles a letter V, and can be an important addition to everybody's workout or yoga routines.

How to: Boat Pose

Start seated on your mat, knees bent feet flat. Slowly lean back, slightly rolling your tailbone under so it does not grind into the floor. As you lean back lift your legs off the floor so that you are now balancing on your butt. Lengthen and flatten your back, trying to eliminate any roundness in it. Lift through your sternum or upper chest. Slide your shoulder blades towards each other behind you and keep lifting long through your neck and head.

Level one: extend your arms and gently hold onto your knees. Your arms will be parallel to each other and to the floor; also your lower legs will be parallel to the floor

Level two: keep the legs the same but release your grip on the knees and energetically reach your hands toward your feet, (arms still parallel to the floor) and at the same time keeping the shoulders back so as not to round the back.

Level three: keeping all the previous in mind, now straighten your legs, maintain a flat back lifted chest, long strong legs that are about a 45 degree angle to the floor and approximately eye level.

Keep your energy flowing in all directions and breath calm and deep. Hold for several breaths, challenging your abdominals, legs, hip flexors and back.

Benefits of Boat pose

The role of boat pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthens abdominals, hip flexors, and spine
- Stimulates kidneys, prostate, thyroid and intestines
- Relieves stress
- Improves digestion

For the beginner this is a great pose to master for many reasons. The first and most popular reason is that it is a great way to improve the stomach muscles strength and tone. A popular variation in doing knee in and out motions while in this pose to further challenge the core. I recommend this pose because it works many areas at once. For example, holding this pose for several deep breaths will help to undo the forward bend we all are dictated by throughout our daily routines, works the abs, open the chest increasing lung capacity, stimulating the thyroid (with the position of the head) to increase metabolism, and strengthen and tone the legs, quadriceps and deep hip flexors known as the psoas. Increasing power and potency of the psoas/ hip flexors helps the pelvis stay in better position making stride its most efficient. Who wouldn't want to do this pose?

Ailments associated with psoas dysfunction

Psoas - the major core muscle is partially responsible for:

- Chronic low back pain
- Sciatica
- Intense menstrual cramping
- Hip socket tension

- Groin pain
- Chronic quadriceps strain
- Knee, neck and ankle tension
- Bladder and digestive disturbances
- Structural imbalance
- Poor flexibility in the core
- Poor core strength
- Lumbar joint immobility
- Organ dysfunction

For the athlete I think it is best we refer to the words of Richard Martinez:

Pretty much all athletes overuse their psoas during training and competition. If you're an athlete, you do not want to have a tight psoas. A tight psoas causes the quads to overwork. If you have chronic quad strain, look to the psoas for answers. Other common ailments among athletes due to psoas dysfunction are chronic low back pain, groin pain, sciatica, and knee and ankle tension - just to list a few.

Any sport involving running and jumping can lead to psoas injury. Dancers often have psoas issues due to excessive jumping and the strain placed on the psoas during single leg lifts, especially when the leg is held in a lifted position for a while. We work with many dancers at our studio and most have psoas issues.

Cyclists are prone to psoas issues due to the structure of the bike. It doesn't allow for full extension of the psoas and ***muscles in a shortened position for prolonged periods of time remain short***. Stretch that psoas after your rides.

Triathlon training poses a special problem to the psoas due to the nature of the bike/run combo. The psoas is kept shortened during biking and must lengthen during the run. A psoas stretch is essential between the two. Many cyclists will instinctively try to elongate their hip flexors while riding their bike by standing on their peddles and pushing their hips forward. This will elongate your psoas and other muscles in the front of your bodyRichard Martinez

Even though he speaks of the importance of stretching this muscle, you can easily see through his words how vital it would be to keep it strong as well. As I say over and over Power=strength + flexibility.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Diarrhea
- Low blood pressure
- Neck issues or injury
- Pregnancy



Cow Face Pose

Gomukhasana

Cow face pose is a challenging seated pose. It is a deep hip opener, as well as being famous for its difficulty to people with tight shoulders. Although it is a seated deep stretch pose, it is noted as being a restorative one as well, for its ability to allow you to sit and go inward in order to get a full muscle release.

How to: Cow Face Pose

Starting in a seated position, place the bent right knee on top of the bent left knee. Knees are trying to be perfectly stacked one on the other directly under your center (chin). Heels are equidistant from each hip. It is VERY important that you are fully plugged into the floor through both hips. If this is not possible, then prop your hips onto a blanket or a block to allow equal and even weight on both sit bones. If one hip is higher than the other you are starting the whole pose off crooked and this will dramatically change the back and shoulder position, causing potential harm. Before moving on to the arm position, be sure you can lift your sternum and achieve a flat tall spine.

Bring your left arm up to the sky. Bend the left elbow so the left palm rests on the upper back. Bring the right arm out to the side, palm facing back and thumb down. Bend the right elbow and move the right hand behind your back palm facing out. The right forearm will be parallel to the spine and the hand is between the shoulder blades. Next, try to hook the fingers together behind your back. Energetically lift your left elbow towards the ceiling keeping the elbow close to the left side of the head, and lower the right elbow toward the floor and closer to the body.

If it is not possible to connect your fingers, place a strap in the left hand. Let the strap hang behind your head and grab the other end with the right hand. Working the fingers closer and closer to each other until eventually they connect. Work on sitting straight and tall in the back, remembering that both hips remain in contact with the floor. It is easy to over stretch your left side (top arm side) and collapse your right side body, so try to keep both side bodies equally long. If you feel you can go deeper, fold from the hip joint resting over the right thigh. Do not round your back.

The emphasis on this side is the right anterior shoulder; therefore this side will be more difficult for right-handed people. This pose may be frustrating in the beginning; however the shoulders have a tendency to open quickly so stay focused and determined and results will come quickly.

Hold the pose for one to five minutes and then switch sides.

Benefits of Cow Face Pose

Performed properly and consistently the benefits includes:

- Deep stretch of hips, ankles, thighs, shoulders, armpit, chest, deltoid, and triceps
- Aids chronic knee pain
- Strengthens spine and abdominals
- Helps decompress low spine (during folded variation)
- Clears hip joint

Cow face pose opens the shoulder joint giving a wider range of motion. It is a key pose for opening the hips. Hips are the known storage depot for stress, anxiety and fear. Sitting in this pose for several minutes while concentrating on your breath and release of these deep muscles, your body will overcome the negative affects of the aforementioned. It will improve your posture because of the intense focus on the lift of the spine.

For the athlete it is a great pose to test their ability to stay tough in a difficult situation. Working to open the shoulder joint this pose is an obvious choice for Pitchers, and Quarterbacks or any position athlete that depends on powerful accurate arms. It opens and cleared the rotator cuff while strengthening the supporting back muscles, to add power. Stretched and strengthened hips and thighs are the equations for power and speed in running games from Tennis to Soccer. Opened glutes give more power to push for speed. Improved postures for athletes translates into more space in the chest cavity, leading to greater lung capacity and breathe control for runners, wide receivers, basketball players and any players whose aerobic capacity is key to their success and longevity in their sport.

Although you should always consult your Physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should generally avoid this pose entirely, if you:

- If you have sciatica, the use of a prop under the hips or folding forward could aggravate the condition.
- If you have serious neck or shoulder problems
- If pregnant, do not fold forward during first trimester
- If you have serious knee problems
- Untreated herniation's in the spine



Bow Pose

Dhanurasana

By all appearances Bow pose looks like a very challenging advanced pose. Bow is a great therapeutic pose for those with lives that are always on the move and putting us in positions of leaning forward or bending forward. The best way to undo a slouchy posture or long day on the computer is by practicing Bow Pose.

How to: Bow

Begin by lying on the floor face down. Take a second to extend and expand your body. Bend both legs and reach around with your hands and try to grab onto your ankles or lower legs, thumbs facing down. For beginners it is best to grasp the outer ankle and in time you will externally rotate your shoulder and grab the leg on the inner ankle side, thumbs facing up.

Broaden your chest and slides your shoulder blades towards each other behind you and down your back. Relax your shoulders down away from your ears. You lift the chest up by the pure power of your legs. Arms are straight and legs press back and feet press up. Tune into your pelvis and tilt it until you feel less strain on your lower back.

Do not over lift your chin keep a gradual backbend finishing through the top of your head. Remember your head is a natural extension of your spine. Keep your gaze neutral and do not over lift your eyes.

On the inhale lift your upper body, on the exhale lift your lower body and get a gently rocking motion going. Press the chest and legs away from each other, “stringing the bow”

Gently let go and release back into child’s pose.

If it is not possible for you to grab your ankles you can wrap a strap around the front of then and hold a side of the strap in each hand.

Benefits of Bow Pose

The role of bow pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Heats and strengthens the entire body, mostly legs, back, and buttocks
- Massages the abdominal organs
- Aids digestion
- Helps people with respiratory ailments
- Aids fatigue
- Aids anxiety
- Stretches opens whole anterior spine
- Improves posture

Bow pose should be considered when plagued by constipation. The stretching of the anterior spine while in this gentle backbend creates a massage for the abdominal organs. It also eases tightness in the stomach, and helps bring additional blood and oxygen to the area to aid elimination. Regular practice of this pose will relieve lower back pain and release tension and strain on the upper back and neck. I do not know anybody that would not benefit from extra TLC of his or her back.

For the athlete, this pose is a tremendous additional to their stretching routine. In addition to the above-mentioned, bow pose increases the flexibility of the back. Athletes that play soccer, hockey, tennis and wrestling all can appreciate the advantage having a supple spine can offer him/her. Torqued goal saves, powerful serve returns and compromising

Positions of a wrestler all require great strength in the back as well. Most of these sports are also concentrated on being in a spinal flexion position (forward bending). A hockey
Players constant forward lean, and a soccer goalies anticipatory ready position put continuous regular stress on the spine. Being in this gentle back bend is a welcome opener for the lungs and vertebrae. Bow pose also opens hip flexors and very often tight in athletes, psoas. Leaving the athlete again with greater spinal flexibility, rotation and less strain. With this winning combination you are sure to increase your agility.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Avoid if you are pregnant
- Contraindicated for those with recent abdominal surgery
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Those with serious low back problems



Pigeon

Kapotasana

Quite possibly this is the one pose just about everybody from professional athletes to office workers should include in their daily routines. This pose is a key hip opener, as well as a significant pose to reduce and eliminate negative effects of stress on the body. We have spoken of this pose before however I think it is valuable to bring it back as an ALL STAR POSE.

How to: pigeon pose

Starting on your hands and knees, in table pose, be sure the hands and knees are in neutral and free of pain. Slowly, bring the right knee forward between the hands; this position is a modified pigeon. The shin is directly under the thigh. Begin to slide the left leg back as far as your hip flexor, or front of the left hip and quad will allow. While positioning yourself be careful to keep your hips square. Do not list to the left or on the right hip.

If you can, start to slide your right thigh from pointing straight ahead to having the knee point to one or two o'clock. Support your body by pressing down into the floor with your hands and lengthen your torso. On an exhale, lower down to your forearms. Again, be sure your hips are square. With more practice you will be able to bring your right foot /ankle closer to the front edge of your mat, until one day your right shin is parallel to the front of your mat.

As you sink into this pose you should feel deep right glute, or hip. Some people feel it radiate to their hamstring. You may also feel the front of the left thigh, left hip flexor. Stop doing the pose, unless under qualified

supervision if you feel knee pain at all. Hold form one to 5 minutes then repeat on the other side.

Benefits of Pigeon Pose

The Role of Pigeon pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Opens the hip joint
- Is a significant stretch for opening the buttocks, gluteal, and piriformis muscles, which is very helpful for sciatic problems
- Opens hip flexors
- Helps relieve low back pain and stiffness

Pigeon pose is a great hip opener. Regular practice of opening the hips should be a major consideration for everybody. The hips are the storage depot for stress, traumas, fear, and anxiety. People suffering from any of those feelings (and who isn't) should make a regular habit of stretching the hips. It is a primal reaction to store those feelings in the hip area and create unbelievable tightness and resistance in that area. If you practice this pose regularly you will realize how true this is. Gauging how open your hips are to the tough or easy week you are currently having.

For the Athlete, this pose is critical. Not only is this pose great for stress relief for athletes, keeping the hips open contributes to two major factors, speed and knee health. I don't know of an athlete who is not interested in increasing their speed and keeping their knees free and clear of injury. An open hip as well as a strong hip is the equation for power, increased power is increased speed. The more range of motion you have in the hip joint the better your speed. Probably even more important is keeping knees healthy flexible and strong. The more open and flexible as well as strong your hips are the greater the chances of minimizing knee injury. The reason being that any impact on the knee whether from being hit or running impact, or any excess torque on the knee due to agility moves the energy has to be absorbed through the body in some way. If your hips are open your whole body will be more accepting to the energy exchange, however if your hips are stiff and tight the energy will go

to the least resistance which is always the vulnerable, complex knee joint. Results.....torn knees too often!!!!

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga instructor before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Those with recent hip or knee surgery
- Those with severe sciatic aggravation
- Those with current severe hip, knee or low back pain



Frog

Mandukasana

At first glance frog is as awkward as the striking angles it displays. Frog pose is not as common as down dog or warrior one, however its benefits have made it a staple in my teaching repertoire. It is perhaps one pose that actually looks just like its namesake.

How to: Frog

Begin in table pose, on your hands and knees. Make sure your hips are directly over your knees and your lower legs are parallel to each other. Lower down to your forearms and begin to slowly separate your knees as far as they can go. From a side view your hip joint will be in the same line as your knee joint and your ankles will be directly behind your knees. Your toes will be facing out to the left and right respectively. Your knees hips and ankle joints will all be in 90-degree angles. Come to a depth where you can feel a significant stretch and still breathe comfortably. Try to relax your shoulders out of your ears.

It is particularly comforting to hold this pose with blocks under your chest and or pelvis. Once you release all your weight into the blocks your groin will let go notably.

You can hold this pose starting at one minute and work up to a mind blowing 30-minute mental toughness experience.

Benefits of Frog Pose

The role of frog is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Opens the hip joint
- Improves abduction
- Strengthens the low back while opening hip
- Helps digestion
- Opening of hips reduces strain on knees

Frog is a great pose to sit in for long holds and come into full breathing pranayama practice. Many people with poor posture and sedentary lifestyles end up with severe tightening in the hips. Even those of us with the best intentions and healthy routines can fall into the tight-hipped category. Frog gives the practitioner the opportunity to sit with the hips and negotiate their opening. It also gives the practitioner the chance to tune into their hip tightness and become clear on whether they are tighter on one side. Knowledge of this gives you the potential to sideline an injury before it actually happens. It's like rotating the tires on your car. If you drive for miles and miles and your cars alignment is off you will eventually wear one tire bald and it will blow. However continually checking tires and alignment gives you the stitch in time to avoid the blowout. The same scenario hold true with your body. Knowledge is power.

It is really a simple pose to execute the yogic test comes by holding it and breathing.

For the athlete frog should be a vital part of the routine. From Hockey players especially goalies, to soccer players and base runners, quick agility moves that can prove to be groin rippers will be a thing of the past when frog is a permanent part of their lives. As I mentioned before also giving the hip every opportunity to open and be loose in every direction has been proven to reduce the risk of knee injury. Any quick torque or slick move will direct its energy to the point of least resistance, which is the volatile vulnerable knee joint.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Those with inguinal hernia
- Those with knee or hip pain will perform under supervision with modifications.



Bridge

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

Bridge pose is classified as a backbend, however it should be considered as an assessment pose, as well as a great therapeutic pose. Bridge is a pose accessible to practitioners of all levels, and should not be overlooked by advanced yogis and athletes.

How to: Bridge Pose

Start by lying on your back. Knees bent, feet FLAT and hips width apart. Feet should also be parallel and the ankles directly under the knees. It is important to have the feet parallel to reduce pressure on your low back. When feet are turned out they close the space in the sacroiliac joint and create more stress on the joint than necessary. Begin to pelvic tilt and raise your hips off the floor, by pressing down through the feet and arms. Once your hips are as high as they can get, snuggle your shoulders underneath your upper back and try to interlace your fingers under you. In time and with practice your fingers will be interlaced and arms will be extended fully on the floor, palms connected. If you have a tendency to hyperextend your elbows, be cautious here.

It is important that you get your shoulder blades under you as much as you can. The further they go under the more they lift your spine off the floor creating a canal underneath you. This canal lifts the spine from grinding into the floor. Cervical spine number 6 sticks out a little

further than the rest so if you are not properly set up in this pose it is easy to bruise it or feel too much weight.

It is a help to put a light, soft block between your knees to aid your engagement of the inner thighs. It is also an amazing therapeutic pose if you put two blocks together, on their highest side directly under your sacrum, clasp your hands beyond the blocks and relax and release into the pose holding for minutes. Consider sometimes interlacing your fingers the opposite way than you usually do. This gets your shoulders slightly different and eliminates habit and stagnant practice.

In this pose you should feel a dynamic opposition of pressing down with your arms and feet and lifting the pelvis and chest. Try to get your chest to meet your chin. Press your shoulders down away from your ears.

Benefits of Bridge Pose

The role of bridge pose is vast. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Strengthening the back, glutes, legs and ankles
- Opening the chest, heart, hip flexors
- Stretches the chest, neck, shoulders and spine
- Calms the body, alleviates stress and mild depression
- Stimulates organs of the abdomen, lungs and thyroid
- Rejuvenates tired legs
- Improves digestion

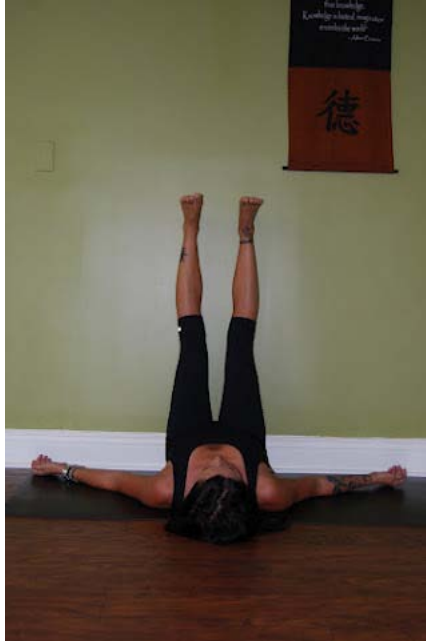
For the layperson or yogi, bridge pose lengthens the front body as well as the back body, creating space between your vertebrae and relieving pressure on the disks. For people who are concerned about thyroid function the bend in the neck and holding of the pose for lengths of time stimulates sluggish thyroid. Thyroid is responsible for stoking your calorie burning fire. In addition, bridge pose supplies the neck with an awesome stretch. It also holds you (especially if you use blocks for support) in a gentle backbend.

For the athlete, this pose is a great tool for assessment. You have a bird's eye view of your chest and sometimes-abdominal area to observe

any imbalances or asymmetry. This will give you a clue as to what poses you will need to improve your game. Bridge pose also gives the practitioner a great easy way to open the hip flexors and psoas, which is essential for keeping their back healthy and strong. It gives them a pose to assist in opening the chest actively, which creates lung space and increases breathe capacity. When you snuggle the shoulders under it gives an amazing stretch to the chest as well as anterior deltoid. When practicing this pose be careful not to sink into it too much but remain very active in it at all times. Finally, holding this pose, without block support will strengthen the hamstrings.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Neck injuries, unless supervised
- Those with low back pain or knee pain should use modifications



Heavy Legs / Legs up the Wall

Viparita Karani

This month we will learn about a therapeutic yoga pose and a pose, which is highly touted in the yoga community as the “destroyer of old age”, and that it rids all that ails you. This pose also could not be easier to perform for people of all levels and all ages.

How to: Heavy legs on the wall

For this very passive pose, you will need a wall. Lie on the floor and simply walk your buttocks all the way up against the wall. Your legs will extend straight up the wall. If you have very tight hamstrings then you may walk your hips about six inches away from the wall, or you can have a bend in the knee. In time and consistent practice you will have your legs straight. Some schools of yoga teach the practitioner to put a soft roll under the sacrum (lowest part of the back). Arms can be out to your side palms face up. Arms can also be extended straight out of the shoulder having a 90-degree bend in the elbow, palms facing up. Once in place, lift your head gently off the floor and tuck the chin to the chest. Then extend the back of the neck as you replace the head on the floor.

Soften your eyes and be very heavy in the floor. Stay in the pose from 1-15 minutes.

To come out of the pose slowly bend your knees and roll over on to your right side, curling up into a fetal position. Linger for a few breaths and then press up to seated.

Benefits of Heavy legs on the Wall

It is a pretty bold statement to say this pose “destroys” old age. That is of old school, more modern schools of thought say most noticeable benefits include:

- Aid, anxiety arthritis headaches insomnia
- Aid, digestive problems mild depression varicose veins
- Aid, menstrual cramps, PMS, and menopausal symptoms
- Helps regulate blood pressure
- Relieves tired cramped legs
- Gently stretches hamstrings back of the neck
- Calms the mind

The benefits of practicing heavy legs on the wall are vast, as stated above. It is a great alternative for those who are trying to start a meditation practice. It is considered an excellent restorative pose. It is usually practiced at the end of a class or in place of final resting pose. People who experience leg edema will find laying in Viparita Karani will eliminate the painful “full” feeling in their legs and feet.

For the athlete, this pose is great for post workout or soreness 24 to 48 hours following a tough game or workout. Many athletes especially those who depend greatly on the strength and stamina of the legs will benefit with this pose. Often athletes complain of the heavy or “dead” leg feeling they get after grueling days on the field. This will alleviate all of that feeling. Anyone will benefit from the lymph drainage action of this pose. Lymph unlike the blood flow is blind ended in the hands and feet. When a person is too sore to run or go about their normal activity, they collect lymph in the feet, Swelling their feet and hands. Sitting in Heavy legs is much more effective and relaxing than just putting your feet up.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained yoga teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you have history of serious eye problems such as glaucoma
- Those with serious neck issues
- Certain people during menstruation



Happy Baby Pose

Ananda Balasana

You can probably imagine what this pose would look like by its title. I often tell my students if they are in a good mood it is happy baby pose, if they are not feeling so great it is dead bug!

How to: Happy baby pose

Lie on your back and draw your knees into your chest. Reach down and grab the outsides of your feet, careful to square your feet to the ceiling. If you cannot reach the feet hold a strap that is draped across the balls of the feet. Make sure your ankles are lined up directly over your knees, knees forming a ninety-degree angle or perpendicular to the floor. On your exhales you will gently persuade your knees in towards your arm pits, if you are really flexible start to bring them closer to the floor alongside your body.

Lengthen the neck and try to lower the tailbone to the floor, giving a nice release to the low back.

Benefits of Happy baby pose

The role of happy baby is vast, done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Helps relieve stress
- Increases vitality
- Gently stretches low back
- Opens groin and inner thigh

- Stretches calves
- Releases neck strain and tightness

Happy baby pose elongates and lengthens the back. The pose offers a safe way to release low back tension, as well as neck strain from long hours at the computer. This pose is also a great way to open the hips and groin. It would be a great warm up pose for people who are getting ready to workout, or a nice morning stretch.

For the Athlete this pose should be considered before the start of any training or work out. It gives an easy groin inner thigh stretch without strain on the back or demand on the legs. For basketball players it is an all-encompassing stretch to include not only groin, but Achilles tendon and calf too. I love to teach high aerobic athletes like soccer players to tennis champs this pose because along with the stretching it is a great pose to do to become aware of symmetry in the hip flexibility. While pulling the feet towards the armpits in this pose it will become abundantly clear which hip is tighter giving athletes great clues as to work that needs to be done to avoid potential injuries. For example if the right knee does not come nearly as close to the armpit as the left it is an indicator that deep hip openers need to be done on the right, like pigeon pose (see past article).

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- Serious neck injury or recent surgery
- Pregnant woman should take caution
- People with herniated disks



Corpse

Savasana

Universally the most anticipated pose of a yoga class, corpse pose, final resting pose or savasana. While it may seem as though you are preparing for nap in corpse pose you are relaxing in a pose that sets your body for meditation...what the whole practice of yoga is preparing you for. This pose is great to practice during the holidays and times of extra stress.

How to: Corpse pose

Not as simple as just lying down on the floor there are a few points you should look to for perfect execution. Start on your back with knees bent, lift the hips off the floor and lengthen the spine along the floor, return the hips. Straighten your legs and let your feet fall out naturally to the sides. Slide the shoulders away from your ears and tuck the shoulder blades under you on the floor, create space in the armpits and stretch your arms out long palm side facing up.

Feel release in the head and let go, while feeling your head heavy in the floor. Breathe naturally in and out through the nose filling your throat, chest and belly with every inhale, be sure to exhale fully.

Relax your eyes into their sockets and focus your eyes on the inside of your forehead between your eyebrows. Feel a sense of stillness and calm and continuously check your body again and again for areas of tension. Try to allow your to do list and anxieties release with every breath.

Stay for 5 to 30 minutes.

When finished slowly wiggle your toes and fingers and bend your knees bringing your feet flat. Roll to your right side and curl into fetal position sit up when you feel ready.

Benefits of Corpse pose

The role of Corpse pose is vast. Done properly and consistently the most noticeable benefits include:

- Calming and balance for the body
- Relaxation for high blood pressure
- Time to take beneficial deep breaths

Performing savasana is a great opportunity to leave the stress and trauma of life behind. Laying in a relaxation pose gives the body and mind time to decompress sort and come to terms with the rigors of the day. It will give you amazing opportunity to train for deep breathing and cleanse the body. This is the perfect chance to commit to a practice of meditation which is so vital to well being.

For the athlete, clearly the above benefits are great as well. In addition when I work with professional athletes I take this opportunity to train them to visualize in this pose. Visualization techniques can be the missing puzzle piece for an athlete to go from good to great. It is here where you see your opponent in the ultimate situation for you and the outcome you desire. You envision details of the play, game, uniform and venue. Get as detailed as you can with your thoughts. Train your brain to think as though you already own the title, championship, or medal.

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- People with diagnosed depression should begin with brief periods or avoid completely

INVERTED POSES



Shoulder Stand

Sarvangasana

Sometimes called the candle pose, or Queen pose. Shoulder stand translated from the Sanskrit name is “all Limbed” or “whole body.” It is named due to the benefits it provides to the entire body. Shoulder stand has many roles...among them—relaxation pose, inversion pose, gentle stretching pose, and revitalizing pose.

How to: Shoulder stand

Laying flat on the floor, with your arms along side your body. Place your palms face down. Exhaling, bend knees into your chest. Keep pressing down through your hands and arms until your toes are as close

to the ground behind your head. You should look as though you are in a seated forward bend only upside down. It is important to position your arms under you and keep them shoulder width apart. Do this by interlacing your fingers together underneath you and squeak the shoulders under you. You should be resting on the shoulder blades. Doing this is important because the cervical vertebrae number 6 sticks out a little further than the rest—when your result is resting on the shoulder blades you avoid #6 grinding into the floor. Now bend your elbows—keep your upper arm (shoulder to elbow) shoulders width apart—and place your hands flat on your back. As you advance in the pose your hands will be closer and closer to your shoulder blades, and your legs will be straighter and straighter, stretching your hamstrings (back of the thigh). This will create an eventual 90-degree angle in your neck. While holding the pose concentrate on your breathing, pressing down through your upper arms and up through your legs and feet. Also gently squeeze your inner thighs together. While holding, check out your leg lengths and look for symmetry. Check the rotation of your legs—looking to see the direction your knee and feet point. Adjust them so they are even and equal. Beginners should bend knees into their foreheads and eventually work to straighten the legs out.

Benefits of Shoulder Stand

The role of the Shoulder stand is important. Done properly and consistently, the most noticeable benefits include:

- Helps with lymph drainage, as an inversion pose.
- Gets the Thyroid gland functioning better, and more efficiently. Thyroid is the gland responsible for managing your metabolism.
- Promotes good circulation to brain.
- Great stretch for the neck and upper back.
- Is beneficial to people with constipation, indigestion, and asthma.
- Great for woman suffering from painful menstruation.
- Increases blood flow to brain therefore helps headaches, congestion, and sore throats
- Stretches the spine keeping it long and strong.
- Tones the legs and abdominals.

Shoulder stand opens and strengthens the upper shoulder girdle, and stretches the back of the neck. Since it is an inversion pose and nourishes the brain, it offers a rich supply of blood therefore a flood of oxygen to the organs and glands of the upper body. Pressure is taken off the lower extremities; this is like super charging sitting with your legs up. You will relieve the pressure and swelling of the feet and legs that result from tough long days at work and play. Just getting extra blood flow to the brain and face and head will give a tired day the boost and glow you need to continue. All this will give you the clearer head you may need to continue with long nights of studying, or intense business meetings.

For the athlete, besides the aforementioned benefits shoulder stand is a great pose of assessment. As I mentioned before while you are holding the pose you are in a perfect position to check the leg length and look for imbalance that may need adjusting. Being aware of your leg length difference will give the athlete the clues you will need to realize possible low back knots or tightness. Shoulder stand is a great stretch for the neck. This is critical for high contact sports such as hockey and football. These athletes often find themselves in twisted predicaments. If the neck is supple enough to have the chin touch the chest, then the risk of injury in a game situation is greatly reduced. The best part of shoulder stand for the athlete is the reverse lymph flow. It heels the swelling of feet and legs and reduces the “heavy” post game leg. I often have my athletes hold this pose for 10 or more minutes, to help them get their quickness back. Beginners should always start with a 30 second to 1 minute hold and work up to a longer time.

Although you should always consult your Physician and research a properly trained teacher before starting a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- * If you have thyroid disease.
- * If you have High Blood pressure.
- * Any disorders or injuries to the neck or cervical spine.
- * If you have Glaucoma or Detached Retina. Shoulder stand could worsen the condition.



Head Stand

Sirshasana

Head Stand is widely considered to be one of the most beneficial yoga postures for the body, mind and spirit. Doctors have touted Head Stand as being one of the best stimulants for the brain and the spine as well as cerebrospinal fluid. According to a certain Yogic tradition, Viniyoga, the poses primary intention is to achieve the active reversal effect. This means toning the vital organs, stimulating the endocrine glands, and promoting the balanced and efficient functioning of our entire physiology. The secondary intention of Head Stand is to strengthen the torso, improve spinal integrity, and deepen respiratory rhythm. It becomes apparent quickly how crucial a pose this is to add to your yoga practice.

How to: Head Stand

Start by kneeling on the floor. Rest on your forearms and wrap your hands around your elbows. This is to ensure that your elbows are shoulders width apart. This positioning is very important to the success

of a long hold in Head Stand. Without moving your elbows from this position, swing your forearms to interlace your fingers. Your palms will be facing you creating a gentle guide for the back of your head as you place the top of your head on the floor. It is very important for the safety of your neck that the TOP of your head is on the floor and not more forehead or more back of the head. This will help to insure that your body weight is supported by the arms and not by the head or neck.

You may want to practice close to a wall until you become confident and skilled. Slowly tuck your toes under and straighten your legs. It should look like you are doing a downward facing dog on your forearms and head. You can stay here for several attempts until the weight on the top of your head becomes second nature. Next, walk your feet in a position as close to your head as possible without bending the knees. At the same time keep your head in a straight line with the spine. Bend your knees into your chest and slowly lift your feet off the floor, you will want to move the hips back slightly to counterbalance your weight until you can straighten your legs completely. Take several breaths in this bent knee position until you have the comfort level to straighten your legs.

Most of the weight should be felt in the arms, not the head. On every exhale, remember to lift your shoulders away from your ears and elongate your neck. Also, keep your legs very active in the pose, constantly pressing your energy up through them to the sky. Finally, keep the legs pressing together and strong.

Benefits of Head Stand

The role of Head Stand is very important to a yoga practice and done properly and consistently the most notable benefits include:

- Improved concentration
- Improved function of internal organs
- Nourish the skin of the face
- Calms the body and mind
- Relieves stress and tension
- Strengthens the shoulders and the upper back muscles
- Strengthens the abdominals
- Brings better circulation to the neck and brain

- Helps varicose veins
- Increases stamina

Aside from the above-mentioned benefits, Head Stand has been studied and proven to be effective in relieving mild depression. Inverted postures like the King posture of headstand; increase the level of blood, oxygen and glucose going to the brain. This helps the brain create more dopamine and serotonin. Depressed people are deficient in both. This is one way to aid the body in producing higher levels naturally. The continued practice of Headstand can alter your brain chemistry. It is a particular pose effective in stimulating the pituitary gland. This releases endorphins and reduces the level of cortisol. Cortisol is a stress hormone.

For the athlete Headstand has many major benefits to improve performance. This pose reverses the effects of gravity on the lungs and diaphragm, strengthening the diaphragm and assisting in more complete exhalation. The more efficient the breathing of a high endurance athlete such as a track star, or a tennis player the better and longer quality play will be. Also, many athletes experience exercise induced asthma. When we take action to assist the breathing mechanisms it increases the athlete's endurance. Another benefit of headstand is that it teaches the player to rest their body while in a state of activity. This translates nicely into finding calm and comfort in an uncomfortable situation, which is something familiar to all athletes. Finally, every inverted pose helps to drain lymph. Many athletes find that after a hard day of competition or training they have the "heavy leg" or "lead leg" feeling. Regular practice of inversions helps to increase the lymph drainage that might be "stuck".

Although you should always consult your physician and research a properly trained teacher before you start a yoga practice, there are a few instances where you should avoid this pose entirely:

- If you have neck injuries
- Extremes of blood pressure
- Ear and eye problems
- Menstruation
- Back and shoulder injuries
- Certain heart disease

- Stroke
- Hiatal hernia
- Reflux