

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a bright orange sports bra and dark blue athletic pants, stands with her hands on her hips against a white brick wall. The image is framed by a blue-to-teal gradient border.

YOGA FOR MOUNTAIN BIKERS

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

**YOGA FOR MOUNTAIN BIKERS:
*An Introductory Guide***

by

Abi Carver, founder of **Yoga 15**

www.yoga15.com



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DISCLAIMER

Engaging in any exercise or fitness program can be physically, mentally and emotionally demanding and therefore involves a certain degree of risk. These risks can include (but are not limited to) accidents, injury or illness, so please ensure that you are in good physical and mental condition before undertaking the poses in this ebook.

Please take care and exercise patience—choose only those poses that are suitable for your level. If you are not currently involved in an exercise program, know of any past or present risk factors or have any doubt about your suitability for an exercise, please check with your medical doctor before proceeding.

Discontinue any exercise that causes you pain or excessive discomfort, pay special attention to your neck, shoulders, hips, knees, ankles and wrists and stop if you feel dizzy or short of breath.

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DEDICATION

To all my mountain biking friends across the world,
I hope this short book gives you an unfair advantage.



CONTENTS

1: Introduction

2: Quick Start Guide

3: Types Of Yoga Training And Poses

4: Timing And Frequency

5: Making Yoga A Habit

6: Breathing

7: Final Tips

8: Get In Touch

Training Objective Chart

15 Poses + Modifications And Variations

Image Credits



1. INTRODUCTION



You're only as good a rider as your body allows you to be

I put together this *Yoga For Mountain Bikers Introductory Guide* to accompany my new 15-video *Yoga for Mountain Bikers* series.

Drop me an email at abi@yoga15.com if you have any questions.

2. QUICK START GUIDE



Equipment

Mat

The only equipment you need to do yoga is a mat, to stop your hands and feet from slipping. Mats vary considerably in quality and type so find one that looks and feels good to you. I have a heavy Manduka mat but if you travel often or plan to do your yoga workouts away from home, you might prefer a lightweight mat that is easier to carry around. Just make sure that it is long enough for you.

Clothing

Wear comfortable, stretchy workout clothes that allow you to move freely.

Footwear

One of the most beneficial and unique aspects of yoga is that you practice barefoot. This strengthens the muscles in your feet, ankles and legs, improves your balance and makes you more resilient to injury.



Create A Routine

"Screw motivation. Cultivate discipline." Steve Kamb

Creating a yoga routine will save you valuable time and energy, and allow you to bypass willpower and motivation, which are both constantly in flux and therefore massively unreliable. (I will cover timing and frequency in more detail in Chapter 4.)

1. Choose a time
2. Pick a place
3. Keep it consistent

Implementation Intentions

One of the most effective strategies for creating a new habit is *Implementation Intention* or "if-then" planning. The idea is that you anchor your new activity to an existing habit. For example:

"When I arrive home from work, I'll do a 15-minute yoga session."

Or,

"After I brush my teeth in the morning, I will do 5 minutes of warm-up exercises followed by 10 minutes of yoga poses."

You are more likely to stick to your commitment to consistently integrate yoga into your training program if you pre-determine specifically how, when and where you are going to do it and tie it to something you already do habitually.

Contraindications

If you are currently injured, it may not be safe for you to practice all of the poses. For each of them, I will let you know the contraindications, or circumstances in which you should avoid them.

3. TYPES OF YOGA TRAINING AND POSES



Goals

There are 5 primary ways that yoga can enhance your mountain bike performance:

1. Increase flexibility
2. Build strength
3. Alleviate pain
4. Train skills
5. Support recovery

Length Of Time In Each Pose

In yoga, there are hundreds of poses that can help with all 5 of these goals. In this guide, I will introduce you to 15 of the most basic of them that help to correct the specific postural misalignments that you encounter as a mountain biker, alongside modifications and variations.

The amount of time you spend in the pose – anywhere from 5 breaths to 5 minutes – will depend on your level of ability and your objective. However, here is a rough guideline for how each of these goals can be achieved. (I will cover the basics of *how to breathe* in Chapter 6.)



1. Increase Flexibility

At some stage, you are likely to suffer from tight hips, quads, hamstrings, calves, IT Bands and shoulders. Increasing flexibility can only be achieved with relatively long static holds. If this is your goal, I recommend that you hold the poses for 5-10 breaths if they are standing poses and 2-5 minutes if they are seated poses that you can relax into for longer.

2. Build Strength

You can support your traditional strength training program (eg. squats, deadlifts, pull-ups etc.) with specific yoga poses. You can also use these postures to build strength if you are recovering from an injury. As these poses require more effort, the hold times are typically no more than 5 breaths, though you can continue to hold them for longer if you are not compromising your form.

3. Alleviate Pain

Pain is caused by muscular imbalances—some muscles are tight and overworked, others are over-stretched and weak. For example, low back pain is caused by tight hips, hamstrings and quads; a weak core; inactive glutes and misalignment of the pelvis. So if your goal for the session is to alleviate pain, you will want to incorporate both flexibility and strength poses.

4. Train Skill

Yoga is great for training balance, agility, kinaesthetic awareness, body control, focus, concentration and breath efficiency. At this level, we will just look at balance, which to a certain extent helps to train all of these related skills. As the poses are typically more challenging, I recommend you hold them for 5 breaths initially, increasing the length of time as you become more competent.

5. Support Recovery

I recommend you hold restorative poses for 2-5 minutes. You may find them uncomfortable at first, but as your body starts to loosen up and become more flexible, you will be able to hold them for several minutes. This is something you will have to gauge for yourself as you become increasingly proficient.

Types Of Poses



Here are some general categorisations so you can see which type of pose best achieves your objective.

1. Backbends

- Stretch the front of the body
- Strengthen the posterior chain
- Increase spinal flexibility
- Alleviate lower back pain
- Poses: Cobra, Locust, Bridge

2. Forward Bends

- Stretch the backs of the legs
- Release compression at the lower back
- Alleviate lower back pain
- Calm the central nervous system
- Poses: Ragdoll, Head To Knee, Downward Dog



3. Sidebends

- Stretch the side of the body
- Increase lung capacity
- Improve breathing efficiency
- Alleviate lower back pain
- Poses: Standing Sidebend, Extended Side Angle

4. Hip Openers

- Increase mobility in the hip joint
- Stretch the hip muscles
- Release tightness in the hips
- Reduce hip pain
- Alleviate lower back and knee pain
- Poses: Folded Butterfly, Lizard, Low Lunge, Pigeon

5. Twists

- Stretch the entire body
- Increase spinal flexibility
- Alleviate lower back pain
- Enhance breathing efficiency
- Poses: Seated Spinal Twist, Reclining Spinal Twist

6. Balancing Poses

- Improve balance
- Build leg and core strength
- Enhance body awareness and proprioception
- Train focus and concentration
- Poses: Eagle, Dancer, Tree

7. Restorative Poses

- Relax the body
- Calm the mind
- Speed up recovery time
- Improve sleep quality
- Poses: Child's Pose, Final Resting Pose, Reclining Butterfly

4. TIMING AND FREQUENCY



Timing

As you know from other aspects of your training program, timing is important. It is also going to differ from person to person, depending on your commitments, level of ability and preferences. Here are some guidelines for you to follow:

1. You don't want to hold long, static stretches – as recommended for flexibility and recovery training – unless your muscles are warmed up. The ideal time for these types of training is after exercising, in the evening or after warming-up, and not first thing in the morning or before a ride.
2. The most important factor when it comes to timing is consistency. So if your only time to do flexibility training is in the morning before work, just make sure you have warmed up with some dynamic stretches – air squats, lunges, push ups etc. – and some mobility drills – shoulder rolls, ankle circles etc.
3. Strength training and skills workouts can be done at any time of the day but are most likely too stimulating to do right before bed.



Frequency

Frequency is also going to be highly individualised as it also depends on your goals, schedule and level of ability. I recommend you do 15 minutes of poses every other day but you may want to increase this to once or even twice a day, and you may find you only need to stretch out 2-3 times a week. You will have to do your own experimentation here.

The beauty of this method, is that if you are pressed for time because you are travelling or have increased work or family commitments, you can just do a short session of one or more high-value poses. More is not necessarily better.

Consistency

“The way physiology works is that it adapts to what you do most frequently, not what you do with the best of intentions.” Katy Bowman, biomechanist

When it comes to exercise, consistency – not intensity or duration – is the key. Both for physiological and psychological reasons.

Practicing yoga is a slow and systematic process of gradually unlocking areas of tightness and tension throughout your body, correcting muscular imbalances and training the mind for greater focus. There is a compound effect. One long session is unlikely to have significant benefits. Little and often is the key.

When you are consistent with your yoga training, you will start to correct muscular imbalances, reduce your recovery time, eliminate aches and pains, release tension in tight muscles, significantly improve your riding performance and generally feel more calm and relaxed.

Mix It Up

One of the reasons that you are suffering from pain and tightness in your body is that you have prioritised a very narrow set of movement patterns because of your sport. Be careful not to make the same mistake with yoga. Your body and mind require movement novelty and variability to function optimally. If you practice just one set of poses over and over again, in exactly the same way, you may leave yourself open to further imbalances.

Don't be tempted just to do the poses that feel easy. Challenge yourself to mix it up if you want to take advantage of the full spectrum of benefits yoga offers.



5. MAKING YOGA A HABIT

If you are struggling to make yoga a habit, I have a useful trick for you. It is based on the work of Japanese psychiatrist Dr Shoma Morita.

Does this sound familiar?

You've just got home from work, you're shattered, all you want to do is switch off your brain and sink down in front of the TV, but you know you need to do some yoga. A few stretches will ease your back and shoulder pain, loosen up your hips for your long ride at the weekend, relax you and help you get a better night's sleep. But you just don't *feel* like doing it.

The first thing to recognise is that your *feelings* are not under your control.

No matter how much you want to be a better rider, put an end to your crippling back pain and have a few minutes of peace in your stressful day, often you just can't motivate yourself. When you have a consistent yoga routine, it will become automatic, a habit. But how do you find the necessary willpower to get started?

The mistake is to wait to *feel* like doing yoga because that is unlikely ever to happen! You do it because you know how great you will feel afterwards, how much faster you will be on the bike, how much fitter, stronger and more agile you will be.

Your emotional state depends on many factors that are outside of your control: what you have eaten, how you were treated at work that day, what the weather is like, how appreciated you feel, how much coffee you've drunk, where your hormones are at, if you have just received good or bad news. If you allowed yourself to be dictated to by your feelings, you would never get anything difficult or worthwhile done. So here's what you do:

You accept reality (including your emotional state) as it is, know your purpose or goal, and just do what needs doing.

You want to start doing yoga? Just do it. Do one pose. Do 5 minutes. No-one said you have to do it well. No-one said you will experience mind-blowing results after your first session. You just do it. Then, when you have done it a few times, you will have established the habit and you do not need to worry about your feelings anymore. It will be automatic and you won't have to go to battle with your mind every time you want to do a little stretching.

Nike put it best: Your body will thank you later #justdoit



6. BREATHING

The Basics

Breathing in yoga is simple but not easy.

Close your mouth and try to breathe in and out your nose throughout the session. Your mind may wander and you may forget, you may also not be able to because you're struggling to hold a challenging pose, but every time you realise you're breathing in and out through your mouth, seal your lips and return to nasal breathing. Eventually it will become subconscious, so don't beat yourself up if you find this difficult in the early days.

Longer Holds

For holds of up to a few minutes – aim for 4 counts in and 4 counts out. As you become more competent, try to increase your exhale to 8 counts as this will turn on your parasympathetic “rest and digest” mode.

Breathing Technique: Box Breathing 4 x 4

I first heard about this technique from retired Navy SEAL, Commander Mark Divine, founder of SEALFIT and creator of *The Unbeatable Mind* program. His recruits are subjected to the most brutal training, culminating in Kokoro Camp, a 3-day challenge modelled after US Navy Seal Hell Week. Alongside the extreme physical training, Divine emphasises the importance of yoga and conscious breathing for developing mental toughness.

Conscious breathing—taking slow, deep, controlled breaths – is the simplest and most accessible way to change your mental and physical state. Whether you need to psych yourself up to perform at your best or calm yourself down, controlling your breath is the key.

This is a breathing technique that you can use to get yourself into the zone before a race, training session, or anything that requires focus, confidence and presence. You can also do a few rounds when you wake up, to start your day with calm and clarity or before bed, to calm yourself down and prepare your mind and body for sleep. I recommend that you practice it for a few minutes every day so that it is immediately available to you when you need it.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Seal your lips and take a deep breath in, completely fill your lungs. Then let all the air out.
- Inhale deeply through your nose for the count of 4, hold for the count of 4, exhale for the count of 4, empty your lungs completely and hold your breath out for the count of 4.
- Continue for 4 rounds.

7. FINAL TIPS



“Recovery will find you. Either you plan for it and schedule it. Or you’ll be forced into it by injury or illness.” Coach Ryan Andrews

Here are a couple of final tips.

1. It is crucial that you bring your full attention to the poses. This is what sets yoga apart from traditional stretching. Slow down and breathe into every stretch.
2. Strive to emulate my alignment in the poses but remember that our bodies are likely to be incredibly different. Adapt the pose to fit your body not the other way around. Make adjustments until you find the position that gives you the most relief and refer to the modifications and variations as you need to.
3. Practicing these poses should not be painful but it may not be all that comfortable at first. If you are new to yoga, be patient as your muscles may be too tight to get into some of the poses. Bear in mind that for a lot of athletes, flexibility is even harder to develop than strength, so go easy on yourself.
4. I cannot tell you how long it will take you to reach your goals but you are likely to experience noticeable results immediately and long-lasting changes after a couple of weeks. Try to be patient and remain consistent. Little and often is the key.



8. GET IN TOUCH



1. Please feel free to give me your feedback, ask questions and tell me what you're struggling with so that I can keep creating content that helps you as much as possible. You can send me an email at: abi@yoga15.com
2. Subscribe on the site to receive articles and advice specific to mountain biking.
3. Follow me on social media for more yoga tips and inspiration:

Instagram: [@yoga15abi](https://www.instagram.com/yoga15abi)
Website: www.yoga15.com

Good luck! I'm here for you!

TRAINING OBJECTIVE CHART

	Pain			Tight/Inflexible					Weak			Skill	Recovery
	Low Back	Upper Back	Knee	Hips	Quads	Shoulders	Hamstrings /Calves	IT Band	Shoulders	Glutes	Core	Balance	Relaxation
Child's Pose	2-5 Minutes	2-5 Minutes				2-5 Minutes							2-5 Minutes
Wide-Knee Child	2-5 Minutes	2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes							2-5 Minutes
Cat Cow	4-8 Reps	4-8 Reps		4-8 Reps		4-8 Reps							4-8 Reps
Bridge	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths		5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths				5-10 Breaths			5-10 Breaths
Locust	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths								5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths		
Snake	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths				5-10 Breaths				5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths		
Head To Knee	2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes	2-5 Minutes			2-5 Minutes						
Rag Doll	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths				5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths						5-10 Breaths
Twisting Forward Bend		5-10 Breaths					5-10 Breaths						
Downward Dog	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths				5 Breaths		5 Breaths	5 Breaths			
Downward Dog Split	5 Breaths	5 Breaths		5 Breaths			5 Breaths		5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	
Dead Pigeon	2-5 Minutes			2-5 Minutes				2-5 Minutes					2-5 Minutes
Folded Butterfly	2-5 Minutes			2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes					2-5 Minutes
Reclining Butterfly	2-5 Minutes	2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes					2-5 Minutes
Low Lunge	5 Breaths			5 Breaths	5 Breaths								
Low Lunge Sidebend	5 Breaths			5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths		5 Breaths				5 Breaths	
High Lunge	5 Breaths		5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths			5 Breaths		5 Breaths	
High Lunge Twist	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths			5 Breaths		5 Breaths	
Reclining Spinal Twist	2-5 Minutes	2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes		2-5 Minutes					2-5 Minutes
Half Reclining Hero	5 Breaths	5 Breaths			5 Breaths	5 Breaths							
Plank	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths					5-10 Breaths		5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths	5-10 Breaths		
Upward Facing Plank	5 Breaths	5 Breaths				5 Breaths			5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths		
Tree				5 Breaths						5 Breaths	5 Breaths	5 Breaths	

A person with long blonde hair, wearing a grey tank top and pink shorts, is performing a deep backbend on a wooden deck. They are lying on their back with their feet pulled up towards their head, and their hands are clasped around their feet. The background features a white wall and a blue sky with scattered clouds. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

**15 POSES
+ MODIFICATIONS AND
VARIATIONS**



1. CHILD'S POSE



Series: Relaxation: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogarelaxationchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156833447

Benefits

- Stretches the upper and lower back, shoulders, glutes, knees and ankles
- Relieves anxiety, stress and fatigue
- Relaxes the body and calms the mind
- Alleviates back, shoulder and neck pain

Instructions

- Come to all fours, touch your big toes together and bring your knees slightly wider than hip-width apart. Sit back on your heels and rest your forehead on the mat.
- Bring your arms by your sides, palms facing up and let go of any tension across your upper back and shoulders.
- Stay in the pose for 2-5 minutes, breathing in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in, bring your palms to the mat and come up to kneeling on an exhalation.

1. CHILD'S POSE MODIFICATIONS



Modifications

- If you have difficulty sitting back on your heels, you can put a cushion between your calves and hamstrings.
- You can rest your head on a cushion.
- If your neck is uncomfortable, you can bring your arms out in front of you.

1. CHILD'S POSE VARIATION



Variation: Wide-Knee Child's Pose

Depending on how open your hips are, you may feel more comfortable in Wide-Knee Child's Pose.

- Come to all fours, touch your big toes together and bring your knees as wide as the mat.
- Sit back on your heels and rest your forehead on the mat. Bring your arms by your sides or out in front of you and sink into the pose.
- Stay in the pose for 2-5 minutes, breathing in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in, bring your palms to the mat and come up to kneeling on an exhalation.

Contraindications

- Knee or ankle injury

2. CAT COW



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/150948479

Benefits

- Increases spinal flexibility
- Loosens up tight hips
- Stretches the abs, back, shoulders and neck
- Improves posture
- Teaches breath awareness
- Relieves stress and tension
- Alleviates back, shoulder and neck pain

Instructions

- Come to all fours. Bring your wrists directly underneath your shoulders and your hips right above your knees.
- Look down at the mat in front of you so that your head, neck and spine are in a neutral position.
- Keep your head, neck and spine in a neutral position and look down at the floor in front of you.
- Inhale, lift your chest, arch your back, drop your belly and look up.
- Exhale, round your back, drop your head, tuck your chin to your chest and draw your abs in.
- Repeat 4-8 times – inhaling slowly into Cow, and exhaling into Cat.
- Come back to centre.

2. CAT COW VARIATION



Variation: Seated Cat Cow

You can do Cat Cow in a seated position—on the floor or on a chair—at work, while you're travelling or in bed first thing in the morning.

- Sit comfortably. Rest your hands on your knees and sit up tall.
- Inhale, lift your chest, arch your back and look up. Exhale, round your spine, drop your head and draw your abs in.
- Repeat 4-8 times—inhaling as you open up your chest, and exhaling as you round your back and draw your abs in.
- Come back to centre.

2. CAT COW VARIATION



Variation: Lateral Cat Cow

In this variation of Cat Cow you alternate between looking over your left and right shoulders to increase lateral mobility of the spine.

- From all fours, take a deep breath in, exhale, bend to the left. Inhale, come back to centre. Exhale, bend to the right. Inhale, come back to centre.
- Repeat this sequence 4-8 times.

Contraindications

- Back, knee or wrist injury

3. BRIDGE



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/145545667

Benefits

- Opens up the front of the body
- Strengthens the posterior chain
- Realigns the shoulders and shoulder blades
- Increases mobility in the spine and hips
- Alleviates knee, upper and lower back pain

Instructions

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the mat, hip-width apart. Check that your toes point straight ahead. Rest your arms by your sides, palms face down. Walk your feet back until your fingertips graze your heels. Press into your feet and lift your hips all the way up. Check that your knees point straight ahead and do not fall out to the sides or in towards each other. Roll your shoulder blades underneath you. Come up to your edge and hold the pose for 5-10 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in, and lower down to the mat on an exhalation. Bring one hand to your belly and one hand to your chest. Walk your feet to the edges of the mat and drop both knees slowly to the right and to the left. Windscreen wiping your knees a few times to release your lower back.

3. BRIDGE VARIATION



Advanced

- If you want to go deeper, roll your shoulder blades underneath you, interlace your fingers, straighten your arms and press your little fingers into the mat. Hold the pose for 5-10 deep breaths, pressing your little fingers into the mat.

Contraindications

- Neck or back injury

4. LOCUST



Series: Strength: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogastrengthchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/151862019

Benefits

- Strengthens the posterior chain
- Opens up the chest
- Realigns the shoulders and shoulder blades
- Alleviates upper and lower back pain

Instructions

- Lie face down on the mat with your feet hip-width apart and your arms resting by your sides, palms facing up.
- Inhale, lift your chest, hands, arms and feet off the mat. Exhale, draw your shoulders back and push through the balls of your feet. Look down at the mat and be careful not to compress the back of your neck.
- Hold the pose for 5-10 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in and come down to the mat on an exhalation.
- Rest your left cheek on the mat and rock your hips from side to side to release your lower back.

4. LOCUST MODIFICATION



Modification: Snake

- Lie face down on the mat with your feet hip-width apart and your arms resting by your sides, palms facing up.
- Interlace your hands behind your back and press the tops of your feet into the mat.
- Inhale, lift your chest. Exhale, draw your shoulders back. Look down at the mat and be careful not to compress the back of your neck.
- Hold the pose for 5-10 deep breaths, in and out through your nose. Keep pressing your feet into the mat.
- To come out of the pose, unclasp your hands, rest your right cheek on the mat and rock your hips from side to side to release your lower back.

Contraindications

- Back, shoulder or wrist injury

5. HEAD TO KNEE



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/152704977

Benefits

- Stretches the calves, hamstrings and spine
- Opens up the hips
- Alleviates lower back pain

Instructions

- From seated, straighten your left leg and place the sole of your right foot against your left inner thigh. Twist your torso to the left so that the centre of your chest is in line with your straight leg. Inhale, sit up tall. Exhale, slide your hands forwards as far as is comfortable, taking hold of your shin, ankle or heel. Stay here for 2-5 minutes. With every inhalation, lengthen your spine and with every exhalation, fold deeper into the pose.
- If your hamstrings are tight, you can sit on the edge of a cushion. You can also bend the knee of your extended leg as much as you need to take pressure off your lower back.
- Carefully come back up and switch sides.

Contraindications

- Hamstring injury



6. RAG DOLL



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156897855

Benefits

- Stretches the calves and hamstrings (when the legs are straight)
- Releases tension in the neck and shoulders
- Relieves compression at the lower back

Instructions

- Stand with your feet hip width apart, toes pointing forward. Inhale, bring your hands to your hips. Exhale, micro-bend your knees and hinge forward from the hips with a flat back. Cross your arms and hold onto opposite elbows.
- Sway gently from side to side and allow your spine to fully release. Stay in the pose for 5-10 deep breaths, in and out through the nose.
- You have 2 options here. 1) Keep your knees bent as this allows you to safely stretch your lower back. 2) Work to straighten your legs to increase the stretch in the backs of your legs.
- To come out of the pose, inhale, bring your hands to your hips, keep the micro-bend in your knees and come up to standing with a flat back. Exhale, release your hands.

6. RAG DOLL VARIATION



Variation: Twisting Standing Forward Bend

This variation also stretches the abs, obliques, chest and shoulders.

- From Rag Doll, release your hands and take hold of your left shin, ankle or heel with your right hand and bend your right knee.
- Inhale, sweep your left hand up to the sky and look up to your thumb. Reach through your fingertips. Exhale, relax into the pose.
- Stay here for 5-10 deep breaths feeling the stretch in your left hamstring and at your waist.
- Release the pose and switch sides.

7. DOWNWARD DOG



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156920838

Benefits

- Strengthens the hands, wrists, arms, shoulders, back, hips, glutes, legs and feet
- Stretches the ankles, calves, hamstrings, spine, intercostals and shoulders

Instructions

- Come to all fours with your knees hip-width apart and your hands a few inches in front of your shoulders. Tuck your toes and lift your hips up—keep your knees bent. Spread your fingers wide and press your palms evenly into the mat—index fingers point straight ahead. **Try to straighten your elbows, rotate your arms outward to feel a broadening across your upper back and press firmly into your hands.**
- Tilt your pelvis up and fully lengthen your spine. Check that both knees point forward and do not fall in towards each other—feet are shoulder-width apart. Allow your head to hang naturally between your arms. Press your heels gently back towards the mat. You can check the distance between your hands and feet by coming forward into plank pose—your shoulders should come directly above your wrists. Hold the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.

7. DOWNWARD DOG MODIFICATION



Modification

The key with this pose is to fully lengthen your spine. Aim for a straight line all the way from your wrists up to your sacrum. **Keep your knees bent if straightening your legs causes you to round your lower back.** And walk out your feet to stretch the backs of your legs.

7. DOWNWARD DOG VARIATION



Variation: Downward Dog Split

This variation of Downward Dog is a great hip opener. It also challenges your balance and builds core strength.

- From Downward Dog, step your feet together.
- Inhale, sweep your left leg up to the sky. Exhale, relax into the pose.
- You can bend your supporting leg as much as you need to.
- To deepen the intensity of the pose, open up your hips to the left, bend your left knee and let your foot drop back behind you. If you can, press your right heel into the mat and relax into the pose.
- Stay here for 5 deep breaths, feeling the stretch in your left outer hip.

Contraindications

- Shoulder or wrist injury

8. DEAD PIGEON



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156922587

Benefits

- Stretches the outer hip, piriformis, glutes and hamstrings
- Alleviates lower back pain

Instructions

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Rest your left ankle on your right knee, making sure that your anklebone clears your thigh. Flex your left foot. Thread your hands through the triangle between your legs and hold the back of your right thigh with both hands. Gently pull your leg towards your chest. Relax your neck and shoulders and press your lower back into the mat. Press your left elbow against your inner thigh to increase the stretch in your outer hip. Hold the pose for 2-5 minutes, breathing in and out through your nose. Repeat on the other side.

Contraindications

- Knee or hip injury

9. FOLDED BUTTERFLY



Series: Relaxation: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogarelaxationchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/154254439

Benefits

- Stretches the glutes, inner thighs, groin, hamstrings, knees and lower back
- Opens up the hips
- Releases tension in the neck and shoulders
- Alleviates back pain
- Relaxes the body and calms the mind

Instructions

- From a seated position, bring the soles of your feet together in the shape of a diamond and let your knees relax down towards the mat.
- Inhale, sit up tall. Exhale, fold forward and completely relax your upper body, arms, neck and head.
- Stay in the pose for 2-5 minutes.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in. Exhale, gently come back up. Bring your legs out in front of you and give them a shake.

9. FOLDED BUTTERFLY MODIFICATIONS



Modifications

There are a few ways to modify this pose if you have tight hips.

- The further your feet are from your hips, the gentler the stretch.
- You can sit on the edge of a cushion to raise your hips up. This makes it easier for your hips to rotate forward.
- You can put cushions on your feet for your head to rest on.
- If you have knee pain, you can put cushions under your knees for support.

9. FOLDED BUTTERFLY VARIATION



Variation: Reclining Butterfly

You can do this pose lying on your back. Bring both arms up overhead and take hold of opposite elbows if that feels comfortable.

Contraindications

- Knee or hip injury

10. LOW LUNGE



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156924407

Benefits

- Stretches the hip flexors and quads
- Opens up the hips
- Strengthens the knees and thighs
- Alleviates lower back pain

Instructions

- From Downward Dog, step your right foot in between your hands. Drop your left knee to the mat and release your back foot. Check that your right knee is directly above your right ankle.
- Bring both hands to your right knee and press them away from you. Draw your shoulders away from your ears and sink into the stretch in the front of your left hip.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in. Exhale, bring your hands to the mat and step back to Downward Dog for the other side.

10. LOW LUNGE VARIATION



Variation: Crescent Lunge

Crescent Lunge challenges your balance, deepens the stretch in the hip flexors and opens up the chest and shoulders.

- From Low Lunge, inhale, sweep your arms out and up. Exhale, sink into the pose.
- You can bring your palms together or keep them shoulder-width apart—palms face each other.

10. LOW LUNGE VARIATION



Variation: Low Lunge With Sidebend

This variation of Low Lunge deepens the stretch in the hip flexors, stretches the obliques, intercostals, anterior serratus and shoulders, increases spinal flexibility, releases tension in the neck and shoulders and improves breath efficiency.

- From Crescent Lunge with your left foot forward, drop your left fingertips to the mat and bend to the left. Keep your chest open and reach through your fingertips.
- If your left fingertips don't reach the mat, you can rest them on a block or book.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, feeling the stretch in the front of your right hip and down the right-hand side of your body.
- To come out of the pose, bring your right hand down to the mat, tuck your back toes under and step back to Downward Dog for the other side.

10. LOW LUNGE VARIATION



Variation: Low Lunge With Quad Stretch

This variation of Low Lunge deepens the stretch in the hip flexors and quads, opens up the chest and shoulders, and strengthens the hands, wrists, arms and shoulders.

Instructions

- From Crescent Lunge, pick up your right foot, take hold of your right ankle with your left hand and walk your left foot out to the edge of your mat. Drop your left shoulder back and look up to the sky.
- Gently pull your right foot in towards you, sink your hips and let your left knee fall open. Keep pressing into your right palm.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, release your ankle, walk your left foot in, bring your left hand back to the mat and step back to Downward Dog for the other side.

Contraindications

- Knee or ankle injury

11. HIGH LUNGE



Series: Strength: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogastrengthchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156923582

Benefits

- Stretches the hamstrings and hip flexors
- Opens up the hips
- Strengthens the feet, ankles, legs, glutes, back, shoulders and arms
- Improves balance, focus and concentration
- Alleviates lower back and knee pain

Instructions

- Standing in Mountain pose, step your left foot towards the back of your mat. Drop your hips and try to bring your front thigh parallel to the mat.
- Inhale, bring your arms up by your ears, reach up through your fingertips. Exhale, relax your shoulders and press back through your left heel to straighten your back leg. **Check that your front knee is directly above your ankle and in line with your second toe and that your shin is vertical.**
- Try to hold the pose still for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, take a deep breath in, reach up. Exhale, bring your hands down to the mat and step back to Downward Dog for the other side.

11. HIGH LUNGE VARIATION



Variation One: Eagle Lunge

This variation stretches your upper back, shoulders and wrists, and challenges your balance even more.

- When your right foot is forward, stretch your arms out to the sides, cross your right arm over the left, bend your elbows, wrap your forearms and try to bring your palms together.
- Lift your elbows, and look straight ahead.
- Switch your arms so that your left arm comes over the right when your left foot is forward.

11. HIGH LUNGE VARIATION



Variation Two: High Lunge Twist

This version of High Lunge helps to unlock the hips and pelvis.

- From High Lunge, take a deep breath in, reach up. Exhale, twist your torso to the left and reach through your fingertips.
- Try to hold the pose for 5 deep breaths.
- Inhale, bring your arms up by your ears. Exhale bring your hands down to the mat and step back to Downward Dog for the other side.

Contraindications

- Knee injury

12. RECLINING SPINAL TWIST



Series: Relaxation: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogarelaxationchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/147067840

Benefits

- Increases spinal mobility
- Stretches the IT Band, hips, glutes, lower back, abs, obliques, chest, shoulders and neck
- Alleviates lower back, neck and shoulder pain

Instructions

- Lie on your back and hug your knees into your chest. Lower your left leg to the mat and squeeze your right knee into your chest.
- Stretch your right arm out to the side, palm facing down.
- Hook your right foot behind your left inner thigh and gently guide your right knee across your body and down towards the mat as far as is comfortable. If your knee does not come all the way down, you can rest it on a cushion so that you can fully relax into the pose.
- Look to the right and try to keep both shoulders flat to the mat.
- Stay in the pose for 2-5 minutes, breathing in and out through your nose.
- Come back to centre and switch sides.

12. RECLINING SPINAL TWIST VARIATION



Variation: 2-Knee Reclining Spinal Twist

This is a more gentle and accessible variation of Reclining Spinal Twist.

12. RECLINING SPINAL TWIST VARIATION



Advanced: Reclining Knee-Down Twist

Reclining Knee-Down Twist intensifies the stretch in the outer hip and IT Band.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the mat.
- Straighten your right leg up to the sky and press through your heel. Bring your right ankle to your left knee and drop the inside of your left ankle to the mat. Gently lower your left knee down with the right foot still in place.
- Look to the left and stay here for 2-5 minutes.
- Come back to centre and switch sides.

12. RECLINING SPINAL TWIST VARIATION



Advanced: Reclining Spinal Twist Eagle Legs

This variation deepens the twist at the lower back.

- Lie on your back with both feet in the air. Cross your left knee in front of your right knee and if you can, wrap your left toes around the back of your right ankle as you would in Eagle pose.
- Gently lower both knees to the left and turn your head to the right.
- Hold the pose for 2-5 minutes, and switch sides.

Contraindications

- Knee or hip injury

13. HALF RECLINING HERO



Series: Flexibility: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogaflexibilitychallenge

Video: vimeo.com/155619161

Benefits

- Stretches the ankles, knees, quads, hip flexors and triceps
- Relaxes the body and calms the mind
- Alleviates lower back pain

Instructions

- From kneeling, bring your right foot flat to the mat, drop down inside your left foot and walk your front foot out as far as you need to to bring both sitting bones flat to the mat.
- Place your hands behind you, fingertips facing forward and lean back as far as is comfortable.
- If you can lower your head all the way down to the mat, bring your arms up overhead and hold onto opposite elbows.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose.
- To come out of the pose, release your arms, bring your hands to the mat and carefully lift yourself back up for the other side.

13. HALF RECLINING HERO MODIFICATIONS



Modifications

- If you have tight quads, you can support yourself on your hands or elbows.
- You can also put a cushion under your raised hip.
- Aim to keep your bent knee pointing forward.

Contraindications

- Knee injury

14. PLANK



Series: Strength: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogastrengthchallenge

Video: vimeo.com/156923088

Benefits

- Strengthens the hands, wrists, arms, shoulders, chest, back, core, hips, glutes and legs
- Stretches the hamstrings and calves
- Alleviates lower back pain
- Improves posture

Instructions

- From all fours, walk your hands forward, tuck your toes and come up into Plank.
- Spread your fingers wide and press your hands evenly into the mat. Check that your shoulders are directly over your wrists and your feet are hip-width apart.
- Try to create a straight line all the way from your heels, to your hips, to the back of your head. Engage your core and press back through your heels to straighten your legs.
- Look a few inches in front of you on the mat to complete the alignment.
- Hold the pose still for 5-10 breaths, or as long as you can without compromising your form.

14. PLANK MODIFICATION



Modification

- If full plank is too intense, you can drop your knees to the mat. Draw your abs in.

14. PLANK VARIATION



Variation One: One-Legged Plank

- To increase the intensity, you can lift one leg at a time and hold still for 5-10 breaths.



Variation Two: Forearm Plank

- You can drop down onto your forearms if your wrists are painful. You will find it more challenging for the core and less so for the shoulders and triceps.

14. PLANK VARIATION



Variation Three: Spider Planks

Spider Planks are a dynamic sequence with a number of additional benefits.

- Strengthen the core - the abs, obliques and lower back
- Strengthen the legs, arms and shoulders
- Increase flexibility in the hamstrings and calves
- Improve mobility in the wrists, shoulders and hips

Instructions

- In Downward Dog, bring your feet together.
- Inhale, lift your right leg up to the sky. Exhale, bring your knee to touch your nose - lift your hips up.
- Inhale, sweep your leg back up. Exhale, bring your knee to your right triceps.
- Inhale, sweep your leg back up. Exhale, bring your knee to your left triceps.
- Repeat 2-3 times on each side.

14. PLANK VARIATION



Variation Four: Upward-Facing Plank

This version of Plank is great for opening up the chest, stretching the inner arm muscles and strengthening the triceps and shoulders.

- Sit on the mat with your legs straight out in front of you. Slide your hands 6-12 inches behind you. Try to point your fingertips forward.
- Lift your hips all the way up. Tuck your chin to your chest or look up at the ceiling without letting your head drop right back. Keep pressing into your palms and be careful not to let your hips drop.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose. Come down carefully on your last exhalation.

14. PLANK VARIATION



Modified Upward-Facing Plank: Crab

If you find this pose challenging, you can start with the modified version.

- Sit on your mat with your knees bent, feet flat on the mat. Slide your hands 6-12 inches behind you. Try to point your fingertips forward.
- Inhale, lift your chest and draw your shoulders back. Exhale, press into your feet and lift your hips all the way up. Your knees should be directly above your ankles, toes point straight ahead.
- Be careful not to let your hips drop. Look to your knees or up at the ceiling.
- Stay in the pose for 5 deep breaths, in and out through your nose. Come down carefully on your last exhalation.

Contraindications

- Wrist or shoulder injury

15

15. TREE



Series: Balance: vimeo.com/ondemand/yogabalancechallenge

Video: vimeo.com/149712194

Benefits

- Improves balance and kinaesthetic awareness
- Strengthens the feet, ankles, legs, hips, core and arms
- Stretches the hips and shoulders
- Trains focus and concentration

Instructions

- Standing in Mountain pose, shift your weight into your left foot and bring your right foot to your ankle, lower leg or inner thigh. It is crucial that your foot rests either above or below your knee as your knee is not designed to bend laterally.
- On an inhalation, sweep your arms out and up overhead and reach up through your fingertips. Exhale, relax your shoulders away from your ears. You can bring the palms of your hands together or keep them shoulder-width apart.
- Look straight ahead at a point that isn't moving to help with your balance. Press your left foot firmly into the mat, engage your core and relax the muscles in your face.
- Hold for 5 deep breaths, in and out through the nose, before switching sides.

15. TREE VARIATION



Variation: Eagle Tree

- Shift your weight into your left foot and bring your right foot to your ankle, lower leg or inner thigh.
- Inhale, sweep your arms out and up. Exhale, circle your hands down and cross your right arm under the left. Bend your elbows, wrap your forearms and try to bring your palms together.
- Hold for 5 deep breaths, in and out through the nose, before switching sides.

Contraindications

- Knee injury



IMAGE CREDITS

Charley Smith, *Charley Smith Photography*: p. 1, 7, 8, 19, 22-62

Graham Mattock, *Mattock Imagery*: p. 10, 12, 14, 18, 21

