

Yoga

Spirit & Strength



Beginners Worksheets



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Yoga, Spirit & Strength - Beginners Worksheets

To Begin: Centering the self using the breath (5 - 10 mins)

- Check you are sitting comfortably with good posture.
- To work good posture check you are lifting through your spine & through the crown of your head - feel yourself growing taller.
- Check your chin is in a fraction and your shoulders are low and wide & relaxed.
- Have your arms & hands in a comfortable & relaxed position so perhaps resting in your lap with your fingers interlaced or with your palms down on your thighs. *(See sheet on different hand madras and try them out to see what you like)*
- Then try and close your eyes & imagine you are shutting out the daily world and all its concerns - you are dedicating this time just to yourself.
- Now begin to breathe slowly, smoothly and deeply. Try to breath through your nose if you comfortably can for this warms and filters the air. Perhaps you can bring your awareness to the tip of your nose and focus your mind on your breath. Notice the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils and the warmth of the air as it leaves. *When we concentrate on our breathing it helps to calm and centre the mind and emotions and helps to relax both body and mind.*
- Now as you continue to breathe slowly and deeply begin to draw you awareness inwards, so it feels as though there is just you in the room and imagine you are safe and secure with no worries or concerns. However if worries should enter your mind try and breath them away with each exhalation....imagine you are letting go of them with each out breath.
- If you find it hard to switch your mind off and relax into your breathing then try and count the breath, so as you inhale count to 2 or 3 in your mind and as you exhale count to 2 or 3 again. *This really helps to focus a wondering mind for it's almost near impossible to count the breath and worry or think about other things at the same time.*
- Now move your awareness further in and all the way down to your abdomen - the centre of your being known as the Hara. Now as you inhale filling your lungs with healing, vibrant energy feel your abdomen - your Hara expand, then as you exhale emptying your lungs of stale air feel your abdomen - your Hara sinking back. So keep breathing in this way now focusing on the rise and fall of your abdomen - working abdominal breaths in your own time.
- Now as you continue working your abdominal breaths try and visualise or imagine drawing in that positive, healing, vibrant energy known as Prana with each inhalation and visualise it spreading through body and mind. Then with each exhalation visualise or feel any tension, tiredness or negativity just draining away. So continue breathing this way working this visualisation in your own time.
- When you feel ready let go of your breath meditation and return to natural breathing which you should now find to be slower and deeper than before.

Note

You can do this from lying in Savasana - Relaxation Pose *(see worksheet on how to practice)*

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Hand Positions - Mudras

Meanings

These hand positions are used during meditation to help focus the mind. Each one is slightly different and said to subtly affect the patterns of the conscience mind if practiced. Obviously they have not been proven to work, but through practising them you will end up focusing your mind on their meaning which could prove to be very helpful in your meditation. Have fun and see what happens!

Positive Mind Mudra

Right hand on top of the left, palms up, resting in your lap. This symbolises the power of positive energy in thought form. So as you practise this mudra focus on nurturing a positive frame of mind.

Empty Mind Mudra

Left hand on top of the right, palms up, resting in your lap. This symbolises the empty mind so when practising focus on being free of thoughts.

Mudra of Self Acceptance

Fingers interlaced, palms up, resting in your lap. This symbolises the joining of the sun and moon energies and the acceptance of positive and negative. As you work this mudra focus on accepting your whole self - both your male and female, positive and negative qualities.

Healing Hands Mudra

Hands palm down resting on each thigh or knee. This symbolises the energy of the physical being, so as you practise this mudra visualise your body healthy and energised.

Jhana Mudra

Backs of the hands resting on the legs with the thumb and first finger meeting with the other three fingers extended. This symbolises the unity of the universal energy (thumb) with the individual energy (first finger). The other three fingers represent the qualities of the material world (Sattvic - balanced, Raja sic - fast/speedy and Tamasic - slow & depressive). As you practise this mudra focus your awareness on the unity of yourself with the universe and separate yourself from the everyday world.

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Neck & Shoulder Routine (10 mins)

Benefits

These exercises are very good at easing out tension and stiffness from the neck and shoulders. If practiced daily they can help to ease and even prevent headaches as well as neck and shoulder pain. They are particularly good for those who suffer with arthritic necks and/or shoulders and those who are hunched over a desk all day.

To Begin

Check you are sitting comfortably and that you are lifting through your spine with your shoulders low and wide. Remember to breathe deeply throughout your practice and move slowly, focusing on releasing tension and tiredness from your neck and shoulders.

Neck Exercises

Stage 1 - Rotation

- Draw your chin in a fraction so you feel the back of your neck straighten and slowly and smoothly turn your face towards the right, so your chin is directly over your right shoulder. Then carefully bring your head back to centre. Now slowly and smoothly turn your face to the left so your chin is over your left shoulder and then carefully bring your head back to centre.
- Repeat twice more focusing on the stretch the second time and then holding the pose as you breathe deeply softening in to the stretch on the third time.

Stage 2 - Lateral Stretch

- Keeping your shoulders low and wide, slowly drop your right ear to right shoulder and then bring your head back to centre. Now drop your left ear to left shoulder and back to centre.
- Repeat twice more feeling and focusing on the stretch the second time and then holding the pose as you breathe deeply, softening in to the stretch on the third time.

Stage 3 - Extension

- Carefully drop your head back towards your back as far as you can. Feel the stretch in your throat and the massage of the back of the neck. If this is too much for you and hurts or makes you cough, then work the following neck rolls with your chin on chest.
- Roll your head just a little way about half an inch to the right and then back to centre. Now roll your head the same amount to the left and return to centre.
- Repeat twice more. Keep dropping back and feel the squeeze at the back of the neck as you breathe deeply but do not hold.
- When finished carefully lift your head back up to centre and take a deep breath.

Stage 4 - Flexion

- Check you are lifting through your spine and keeping your spine straight slowly lower your chin to chest, so you are just moving your neck, and breathe into the stretch across the back of your neck.
- Now if you can interlace your fingers and stretch your arms forward and up and rest your palms on the back of your head and allow the weight of your hands to draw your chin further down onto chest as you breathe deeply. .
- With your hands behind your head try and draw your elbows in so they come around your head and feel that extra weight draw your chin further down. Check you are still lifting through your spine and breathe deeply as you soften and loosen in to the stretch. .
- Now release your elbows from around your head but keep your hands on the back of your head as you now slowly lift your head back to centre. Then as you exhale slowly lower your arms back down alongside your body.

Shoulder Routine

1st Round - Single Lifts

- Check you are sitting comfortably, lifting through your spine, shoulders low and wide, arms relaxed and breathing deeply.
- Now as you inhale raise your right shoulder to your right ear - make sure you keep your head and neck still and just work the shoulder. Then as you exhale slowly lower your right shoulder back down. Now repeat on the left side....so inhaling raise left shoulder to left ear and then exhaling lower your left shoulder down.
- So inhaling raising your right shoulder to right ear - checking your arm is floppy and relaxed and exhaling lowering your right shoulder down. Now repeat with your left shoulder....inhaling to lift & exhaling to lower.
- So inhaling raising your right shoulder to right ear and really squeeze there gathering any tension and as you exhale slowly lower your right shoulder down allowing any tension to drain down through your arm, through your hand and way down in to the earth. Now repeat with your left shoulder again really gathering any tension there as you inhale and then letting it go as you exhale.

2nd Round - Double lifts

- As you inhale raise both shoulders up to both ears and exhaling lowering both shoulders down.
- So inhaling raising both shoulders up and in checking arms are floppy and relaxed and exhaling lowering both shoulders down.
- Last time...so inhaling raising both shoulders up and in really squeezing there gathering any last remaining tension and exhaling slowly lowering your shoulders down feeling any tension just drain down through your arms, through your hands and down in to the earth.
- Now allow you hands to rest gently back in your lap and take a few deep breaths feeling all the good work that's gone on in your head, neck and shoulders.

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Mountain Pose - Tadasana

Benefits

This pose helps with correcting your overall posture. It helps to prevent backache as it strengthens the back and abdominal muscles as well as the legs and feet. It helps with grounding (connecting to the earth), helps lift depression improving confidence and increases energy levels.

This pose is the foundation for most standing asanas - postures and is therefore worked quite a lot.

To work the pose

Come to stand nice and tall with your feet together and big toes touching or with your feet hip width apart.

Check that your body weight is even on both feet and then plant your feet firmly in to the floor.

Lift up through your legs (checking that you're not locking your knees).

Draw your navel to spine to support your back and check your hips are level and facing forwards.

Lift up through your spine, lifting from your waist and up through your rib cage.

Expand your chest and check your shoulders are low and wide with your arms down alongside your body but a little way away from it.

Draw your chin in a fraction and lift through the crown of your head - imagining that you are growing taller.

Breathe deeply here as you stand in Tadasana - Mountain Pose.

If you can close your eyes and feel yourself in the pose - grounded and strong, connected to the earth, taking up space with a right to be here.

Staff Pose - Dandasana

Benefits

This pose helps to improve your sitting posture. It helps to strengthen the back and stretches the hamstrings, feet and toes.

This pose is the foundation for most sitting asanas - postures and is again practiced quite a lot.

To work the pose

Stretch your legs out and walk your sit bones back a pace or two drawing your toes to face. Check your ankles are together and the backs of your heels are still resting on the floor.

Have your arms down alongside your body with your palms pushed in to the floor. If you have long arms then walk them back a pace or two but check you are not leaning back on them.

Lift up through your spine and up through the crown of your head.

Draw your chin in a fraction and check your shoulders are low and wide.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply as you work the stretch up through your body.

Feel the stretch down the backs of your feet, up through the backs of your legs, up

through your spine, through the crown of your head, across your shoulders and down through your arms and hands.

Child's Pose - Balasana

Benefits

This pose gives the spine a gentle stretch and massages the abdominal organs helping with digestive complaints. It is used to ease the back out and rest in after a lot of asanas - postures.

To work the pose

From kneeling - Rajasana. Check your bottom is resting on your heels and your navel is drawn back towards your spine.

With a flat back stretch your chest along your thighs and allow your chest to rest on your thighs. Check your bottom is still touching your heels.

Bring the top of your head to the floor with your chin tucked in.

Allow your arms to rest alongside your body with your palms up. Check your shoulders are low and wide and elbows are towards the floor.

Breathe deeply as you sink in to the pose feeling the stretch up and across your back.

To come out lift your head and come up slowly with a flat back keeping your bottom on your heels.

Note

If you suffer with varicose veins or knee problems then only hold for 3 breaths.

Relaxation Pose - Savasana

Benefits

This pose allows all the muscles of the body to totally relax and in turn helps the rest of the body and mind to relax. It is therefore used in relaxation and in between asanas.

To work the pose

Come to lie on your back on the floor.

Have your feet at least hip width apart if not a little more and allow your feet to drop out to the sides and allow them to soften and relax along with your legs.

If this is too uncomfortable then rest with your knees bent & feet flat on the floor.

Mould your back and spine in to the floor pushing the small of your back towards the floor.

Have your shoulders low and wide and your arms alongside your body but away from it with your palms up in the mudra of receiving.

Check that you have your head in line with your spine and your chin is tucked in a fraction.

Close your eyes, relax the muscles of your face and breathe slowly and deeply.

Allow your body to soften and relax as it surrenders to the earth.

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The Cat Routine - Marjariasana

Benefits

An excellent warm up routine helping to stretch and strengthen the back and spine. It is very good for relieving back ache, menstrual disorders and improving circulation and digestion. It also helps to strengthen the muscles in the abdomen, legs, waist, arms and hands.

To Begin

Come on to all fours and check that your knees are hip width apart and directly below your hips. Then check that your hands are pushed firmly in to the floor and that your hands are shoulder width apart and directly below your shoulders. Check you are breathing deeply and remember to move slowly and smoothly as you focus on stretching out your back and spine.

1st Movement

Arch your spine up towards the ceiling drawing your stomach muscles in and your chin in. Dip down your spine raising your hips high and your head up and back getting a good stretch down the front of the body.

2nd Movement

Arch your spine up again drawing stomach muscles in and chin in and bring your right knee in and up to touch your nose. Slowly lower your knee back down to the floor. Now dip down your spine raising your hips high and your head up and back. Repeat again working the left knee.

3rd Movement

Arch your spine up towards the ceiling drawing stomach muscles in and chin in and bring your right knee in to touch your nose or maybe even your forehead. Now stretch your right leg out behind you and push away the heel, checking it's in line with your spine. Then bring your head back to centre looking up and back feeling the work going on in your back. Then slowly lower your right leg down bringing right knee to floor.

Repeat again working the left knee and leg.

4th Movement

Slowly turn your face towards the right so you're looking round over your right shoulder. You should feel the squeeze of your right waist muscles and the stretch of the left. Slowly return to centre.

Repeat on the left side.

5th Movement

Keeping your right leg bent slowly raise it up to right side of you, trying to keep right ankle, knee and hip in line (like it's resting on an imaginary shelf). Remember to keep breathing deeply. Then slowly lower your right knee back down.

Repeat with the left leg.

6th Movement

Arch your spine up towards the ceiling drawing stomach muscles in and chin in and bring your right knee in to touch your nose or maybe even your forehead. Now stretch your right leg out behind you and push away the heel, checking it's in line with your spine. Then bring your head back to centre looking up and back feeling the work going on in your back.

Now relax your left foot and bend your left leg so your foot comes over towards your head. Then raise your right knee up a little way and a bit higher. Now raise your right hip up and a bit higher and higher.

Then slowly lower your right leg down bringing right knee to floor.

Repeat again working the left knee and leg.

Dog Pose - Swanasana

Benefits

This pose stretches the whole of the back of the body and strengthens hands, wrists, shoulders, neck, hips, legs and feet. It is a semi - inverted pose and helps rest the heart and nourishes the brain, scalp and facial tissues with extra blood. This pose is said to help remove fatigue and rejuvenate body and mind.

Coming into the pose

From all fours, spread your fingers wide pressing your hands firmly in to the floor. Tuck under your chin and curl your toes under. Then as you inhale push up and back straightening your legs.

Holding the pose

Breathe deeply as you work on trying to draw your heels towards the floor and your face and chest towards your legs. Don't walk hands or feet in keep them where they are. Feel the stretch in the back of your body from your feet, up your legs, down your back, to your head and down through your arms and hands. Keep breathing deeply as you try and soften in to the stretch.

Coming out of the pose

As you exhale slowly draw your knees together as you return them back to the floor. Sit your bottom on your heels, stretch your chest along your thighs bringing your forehead to the floor. Then allow your arms to rest alongside your body with your palms up. Check shoulders are low and wide and elbows are towards the floor. Breathe deeply as you rest in **Child's Pose - Balasana**.

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The Spirit Salute

Benefits

This gentle warm up routine works on stretching the whole of the body as it manipulates the spine in all the four ways possible. It consists of a series of forward bends, backward bends, side stretches and twists. It works on strengthening and stretching both the lower and upper body and is suitable for all. If worked with the correct breathing it also becomes a beautiful moving meditation.

To Begin

Come to stand in Tadasana - Mountain Pose with your feet hip width apart breathing deeply, feeling your connection to the earth.

1st Movement

Exhaling: Bring your hands together in front of your heart in Prayer Mudra. Check your shoulders and elbows are low and wide.

2nd Movement

Inhaling: Stretch your arms forward at shoulder height, pushing your palms away.

3rd Movement

Exhaling: Cup your hands and come down to squatting, sinking your hips trying to have your heels on the floor. Bring your arms between your legs with the back of your hands resting on the floor. Check your spine is straight and shoulders low and wide as you look to floor in front of you.

4th Movement

Inhaling: Slowly stand back up raising your arms up above your head with your palms facing the ceiling. Check your arms are straight and close to your ears and then look up to the backs of your hands.

5th Movement

Exhaling: Bring your head back to centre, interlace your thumbs, lift up through the spine and stretch up and over to the right working a side bend. Check your left hip and shoulder are back with your arms nice and straight.

6th Movement

Inhaling: Come back up and stretch up through your spine and arms with your thumbs still interlaced.

7th Movement

Exhaling: Repeat Movement 5 but on the left side.

8th Movement

Inhaling: Repeat Movement 6 but on the left side.

9th Movement

Exhaling: Drop your head and spine back a little way and separate your hands stretching your arms out and down to each side bringing your hands together in front of your body.

10th Movement

Inhaling: Bring your hands up through the centre line of your body, raising your arms high above your head. Make strong fists with your hands and check your arms are nice and straight and alongside your ears.

11th Movement

Exhaling: Twist round to the right and come forward and down on the right side drawing your face and chest in trying to get your fists to floor.

12th Movement

Inhaling: Staying to the right and keeping your arms alongside your ears, slowly come back up and twist back to face forwards.

13th Movement

Exhaling: Repeat Movement 11 but on the left side.

14th Movement

Inhaling: Repeat Movement 12 but on the left side.

15th Movement

Exhaling: Bring your palms together and down through the centre line of your body, turning them at your heart. If you've had a slipped disc then bend your knees as you come forward and down with a flat back. Draw your face and chest in and cross your left wrist over your right to represent your Lotus Flower (your spirit).

16th Movement

Inhaling: Keeping your arms alongside your ears stretch forwards as you come up with a flat back. Stand with your arms high above your head looking up to your wrists (your Lotus Flower), stretching your eyes.

17th Movement

Exhaling: Bring your wrists (your Lotus Flower) to your forehead (your Mind Centre)

18th Movement

Inhaling: Bring your hands together and back down in front of your heart in Prayer Mudra

19th Movement

Exhaling: Cup your hand and stretch your arms forwards and down & return to Tadasana - Mountain Pose breathing deeply.

Note:

Try and work 5 rounds in total unless that's too much for you in which case work as many as you feel able to.

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Flowing Strength – Shakti Shanka (New Version)

Benefits

This is a female energy routine which consists of a series of forward and backward bends, twists and side stretches. It is a lovely way to stretch the body, particularly the spine, in preparation for holding postures. This routine is said to help increase energy and make you feel more positive on all levels. Therefore it is a good routine to practice if you are feeling a little negative or sluggish physically, mentally or emotionally.

1st Movement

From Balasana (Childs' Pose) – keeping your head on the floor, stretch your arms forward so your palms are on the floor and your arms are nice and straight into Swan Pose.

2nd Movement

Lift your head and look to the space between your hands and come up onto all fours.

3rd Movement

Step your right foot forward to the space between your hands, sinking your hips, looking up and back.

4th Movement

Stretch your arms forward raising them high up above your head, checking they are close in to your ears, fingertips pointing to the ceiling. If you have a strong back see if you can drop your chest and head back a little way coming in to Half Crescent Moon Pose.

5th Movement

Slowly lift your head back up and stretch your left arm out and down to the side so it's at 90 degrees. Then keeping your right arm straight and in contact with your right ear stretch up and over to the left trying to bring your left hand to the floor. Come back up and bring your left arm back up alongside your left ear, finger tips pointing to the ceiling.

6th Movement

Stretch your right arm out and down to the side so it's at 90 degrees. Then keeping your left arm straight and in contact with your left ear stretch up and over to the right trying to bring your right hand to the floor. Come back up and bring your right arm back up alongside your right ear, finger tips pointing to the ceiling.

7th Movement

Stretch your arms forward and down so your hands are back on the floor either side of your right foot.

8th Movement

Straighten your right leg and getting your balance nice and steady on your right foot, slowly raise your left leg high up behind you, drawing your face and chest in. Then slowly lower your left leg down and draw your face and chest in working a standing forward bend.

9th Movement

Twist round to the right placing your hands on the back of your right leg looking up and over your right shoulder. Come back to centre and stretch further into your forward bend before twisting round to the left placing your hands on the back of your left leg looking up and over your left shoulder. Come back to centre.

10th Movement

With both hands flat on the floor either side of your feet, raise your right leg high up behind you drawing your face and chest in. Slowly lower the right leg down and as you do step back on the right foot as far as you can, lowering your right knee to floor, sinking your hips looking up and back. (Just like movement 3 only working the other side)

11th Movement

Stretch your arms forward raising them high up above your head, dropping back in to Half Crescent Moon Pose, just like in movement 4.

12th Movement

Slowly lift your head back up and stretch your arms forward and down so your hands are back on the floor either side of your left foot.

13th Movement

Bring your left knee along side your right and sit your bottom back on your heels, stretching your chest along your thighs, bringing forehead to floor with your arms still stretched out in front of you – coming back in to Swan Pose.

14th Movement

Release your arms bringing them back down along side your body, so hands by feet, with shoulders low and wide and elbows to floor – back in to Balasana (Childs' Pose). Breathe deeply here as you relax in to the pose & rest a moment.

Note

Now work the left side so stepping the left foot through first to complete 1 full round. Then work 2 more full rounds so working the right and left side twice more. As you warm up you can work the stretches a bit deeper and faster if you like, but remember to breathe deeply through out.

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Moon Salutations – Chandra Namaskara

Benefits

This is another female energy routine but unlike Flowing Strength it works the spine in all 4 directions making it a very balanced routine. This routine is particularly good for strengthening and stretching the hips and knees & for toning the waist. Due to its series of twists and turns it also works on balance and co-ordination.

1st Movement

From Rajasana (Kneeling) – bring your hands together in front of your heart in to Prayer Mudra. Kneel up and step your right foot forwards as far as you can, sinking your hips.

2nd Movement

Keeping palms together, stretch your arms forward to shoulder height and then raise your arms up alongside your ears, palms above your head, arms nice and straight. If you have a strong back you can drop your chest and then your head back coming in to Half Crescent Moon Pose.

3rd Movement

Lift your head back up and lower your arms back down to shoulder height, opening your arms wide apart.

4th Movement

Now twist round to the left looking over your left shoulder and back to centre. Then twist round to the right looking over your right shoulder and back to centre.

5th Movement

Now raise your right arm up alongside your right ear and keeping your arm straight and in contact with your ear, stretch up and over to the left trying to get your left palm to the floor. Slowly come back up and lower your right arm back down to shoulder height so both arms are stretched wide apart. Then repeat on the left side, so bringing left arm to left ear and stretching up and over to the right – working Half Moon Pose.

6th Movement

Stretch your right arm in front of you, left arm behind and lunge forward, resting your chest on thigh.

7th Movement

Bring both hands to the floor and right knee to floor, so you are on all fours ready for a cat stretch. Arch your spine up towards the ceiling, drawing your chin and stomach muscles in. Then dip down your spine raising your hips high, head up and back.

8th Movement

Tuck under your chin and curl under the toes of the right foot and push up and back on the right foot raising your left leg high up behind - working Alternate Leg Dog Pose. Bring your left leg down and raise your right leg up drawing your face and chest in to your leg. Then bring your right leg back down alongside your left.

9th Movement

Bring your knees to the floor. Sit your bottom on your heels, stretch your chest along your thighs and bring your head to the floor with your arms stretched out in front of you – working Swan Pose.

10th Movement

Come back up on to all fours and lower your chest to the floor between your hands and lower your chin to the floor. Check your elbows are close in to the body (not sticking out) and your hips are off the floor - working Caterpillar Pose.

11th Movement

Flatten your body out by sliding your chest forwards and arch your head and shoulders up and back, keeping your hips on the floor as you work Cobra Pose. Again check your elbows are close in to the body and your legs are straight and together.

12th Movement

From Cobra push up and back in to Kneeling – Rajasana and breathe deeply. The when ready repeat on the left side, so step the left foot forward etc.

Note

Work this routine 3 times on each side

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Sun Salutations – Surya Namaskara

Benefits

This is a male energy routine and consists of a series of 12 forward and backward bends. This routine works on strengthening the whole body and is a bit more challenging than the others. Traditionally this was practiced in the morning facing the rising sun as a celebration of life.

To Begin

Come to stand in Tadasana - Mountain Pose with your feet together breathing deeply, feeling your connection to the earth.

1st Movement

Exhaling: Bring your hands together in front of your heart in Prayer Mudra. Check your shoulders and elbows are low and wide.

2nd Movement

Inhaling: Stretch your arms forward and raise your arms up alongside your ears dropping your head and chest back a little way.

3rd Movement

Exhaling: Lift your head up and with your arms alongside your ears stretch forward and down with a flat back, bending from the hips. Bring your hands to the floor either side of your feet drawing your face and chest in. If your hands do not reach the floor then bend your knees so they do.

4th Movement

Inhaling: Step back on your right foot as far as you can, drop to your right knee, sinking your hips as you look up and back.

5th Movement

Hold the breath in: Curl under the toes of your right foot and bring your left leg alongside your right so your body is in a straight line looking to the floor in front of you – working Plank Pose.

6th Movement

Exhaling: Bring your knees to the floor, chest to floor between your hands and chin to floor – working Caterpillar Pose. Check elbows are in and hips are off the floor.

7th Movement

Inhaling: Slide your chest forwards flattening your body out and arch your head and chest up and back – working Cobra Pose. Hips should still be on the floor and elbows close in to the body.

8th Movement

Exhaling: Push up and back in to Dog Pose, with hips high and head down towards the floor.

9th Movement

Inhaling: Bring your right foot forward between your hands and drop your left knee to the floor, sinking your hips looking up and back.

10th Movement

Exhaling: Bring your left leg alongside your right, drawing your face and chest in – working a Standing Forward Bend.

11th Movement

Inhaling: Bring your hands together and with your arms alongside your ears stretch forwards coming up with a flat back. Stretch your arms up to the ceiling and then arch your head and chest back a little way.

12th Movement

Exhaling: Lift your head up and slowly bring your hands back down in front of your heart in to Prayer Pose.

Note

When ready repeat on the left side so stepping left leg back etc and work 3 times on each side.

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Dolphin Pose (Upper Body Strengthening)

Benefits

This exercise is brilliant for toning and strengthening the arms, shoulders and chest muscles. It is used as a preparation for holding asanas such as headstand which require lots of upper body strength, but is good to practice on its own too.

Half Dolphin

- From Child's pose and lift your head & bring your right forearm to the floor in front of your knees & the left forearm in front of the right.
- Slide your arms as far away as possible & come up on to your knees.
- Release your hands and interlace your fingers so you make a nice v shape with your forearms.
- As you exhale bring your chin to the floor in front of your hands and as you inhale lift back up (repeat 5 times).
- Come back in to Child's pose & rest.

Full Dolphin

- Prepare yourself for the half position as explained above (stages 1-3)
- Now straighten your legs so you are in an upside down v shape
- As you exhale bring your chin to floor in front of your hands & as you inhale lift back up (repeat 5 times).
- Exhaling bring your knees back to the floor, release your hands and return to Child's pose to rest.

Single & Double Leg Raises (Lower Body Strengthening)

Benefits

These exercises are excellent for strengthening and toning the legs, abdominal, waist and back muscles. The joints of the legs are also strengthened and made more flexible. These exercises are used in preparation for lots of different asanas but are great to work in their own right due to their benefits.

Single Leg Raises

To Begin

Come to lie on the floor on your back with legs straight and toes to face. Place your hands underneath your buttocks, palms down, to support your back. Check back and spine is molded in to the floor with your chin in.

This is the same for when you come to work the double leg raises too.

Note: If you have a weak back then work with the supporting leg bent

Stage 1 - Toe Pointing

- Inhale & as you exhale raise your right leg up slowly keeping toes to face & then rest with your right leg at a right angle to the floor breathing deeply.
- Point your toes to the ceiling and back to your face (repeat 3 times)
- With toes to face, exhale slowly lowering your right leg back down to the floor.
- Repeat with the left leg

Stage 2 – Ankle Rotation

- Inhale & as you exhale raise your right leg up slowly keeping toes to face & then rest with your right leg at a right angle to the floor breathing deeply.
- Relax your right foot and keeping right leg still, make slow circles with just your foot & ankle in one direction.
- Then make the circles in the other direction focusing on the good work going on in your foot & leg.
- Draw toes back to face & exhaling slowly lower your right leg back to the floor
- Repeat with the left leg.

Stage 3 – Leg Stretch

- Inhale & as you exhale raise your right leg up slowly keeping toes to face & then rest with your right leg at a right angle to the floor breathing deeply.
- Release your hands and clasp them round the back of your right knee, calf or ankle. Where ever feels comfortable but creates a stretch. Try and keep shoulders and head on the floor at this stage.
- Using the breath, as you exhale slowly draw your right leg down towards your face & keep gently drawing it down further and further on each exhalation.
- Raise your head to your leg & hold for a breath before lowering your head back to the floor.
- Bend your right leg & clasp your hands around the front of your right knee hugging it down towards your right shoulder, massaging your abdomen.
- Lift your head bringing nose to knee, take a breath and slowly lower your head back to the floor.
- Straighten your right leg, drawing toes to face & exhaling slowly lower your leg back to the floor.
- Repeat with the left leg.

Double Leg Raises

Note: If you have a weak back only practice stages 1-3

Stage 1 – Bent Knees

- Bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.
- Bring knees to chest
- Straighten your legs bringing toes to face
- Bring your knees back to your chest & feet back to the floor

Stage 2 – Bent/Straight

- Straighten your legs & with toes to face, raise both legs straight, so at right angle again.
- Slowly lower both legs straight back to the floor

Stage 3 – Straight Legs

- Slowly raise both legs up keeping toes to face.
- Slowly lower both legs straight keeping toes to face

Stage 4 – Straight Leg Hold

- Slowly raise both legs straight keeping toes to face
- Then slowly lower both legs down keeping your heels just off the floor.

Stage 5 – Straight Leg Hold & Chin to Chest

- Slowly raise both legs straight keeping toes to face
- Lift your head bringing chin to chest
- As you lower your head, lower your legs straight keeping your heels just off the floor

Relax back in Savasana working a few abdominal breaths before bringing your knees to chest working a back massage or spinal rock to ease your back out.

Note

Work 3 of each stage or choose a stage that's right for you & repeat 15 times.

Yoga, Spirit & Strength - Beginners Worksheets

Breathing - Pranayama (5 - 10 mins)

Benefits

Working with the breath is one of the most important things in Hatha Yoga practice, but it can take a while to get used to. They say “the secret is in the breath” and that “those who half breathe only half live” and when you learn to work with the breath you will see and feel what they mean.

Obviously we are breathing all the time and it requires no thought at all, but when we do this we often only shallow breath so only use a fraction of our lungs. This means we do not work our lungs fully, we do not release all the stale air gathered in the lungs and we deny our bodies of lots of oxygen or healing energy known as Prana. Our body's organs, muscles and brain need lots of oxygen in order to function properly and by learning to work abdominal and full lung breaths we help to achieve this. We also help to improve our lung capacity and strengthen our lungs and intercostal muscles. It's therefore very beneficial for those who suffer with respiratory complaints like asthma.

When you learn to breathe fully and bring more oxygen and Prana in to the body you'll find you'll feel more energised and strong. Often when you begin to work with the breath you can feel a little dizzy as the body is not used to that extra oxygen so it's important to go with care. Often you can only work a small count of the breath anyway as the lungs are not used to being used so fully. However with time and practice you will find you can work a longer, deeper breath and you will wonder how you ever managed breathing so little before.

The other benefits of working with the breath are that it helps to slow the body and mind down and in turn helps to calm any highly charged emotions. In Yoga they say that if you can learn to control the breath you can control your thoughts, emotions and actions and to a certain extent it's true. One of the best ways of calming the mind and emotions is to count the inhalation and exhalation as this helps to focus the mind and stop it wandering or getting bored. However if you find this is not a problem for you then you may like to work some of the other breathing exercises, which have added benefits and visualisations to help with healing both body and mind.

It is advised that you only work one of these exercises at a time as Pranayama is very powerful and may make you feel ill if you practice it for too long. If you come over dizzy whilst practicing then stop and rest just as you would with your asana - posture practice and return to natural breathing again.

Yoga, Spirit & Strength - Beginners Worksheets

Full Lung Breathing

This is one of the best Pranayama techniques for it teaches you how to use your lungs properly and is therefore a good one to learn first. In this exercise you learn how to fill your lungs from bottom to top working up in stages. To begin with you may find you cannot inhale for very long and may find it difficult to work a full lung breath. However with time and practice you're lungs will strengthen & you'll soon be able to, so don't give up!

This exercise is best practiced from lying in Savasana - Relaxation Pose as it enables you to work your lungs more easily, but if that is not suitable for you then you can practice from sitting. Try and breathe through your nose and make your breath as slow and controlled as possible. So exhale emptying your lungs ready to begin.

- Inhale all the way down to your lower lungs, feeling your abdomen expand & then slowly exhale from your lower lungs feeling your abdomen sinking back (practice 5 times).
- Inhale all the way down to your lower lungs, feeling your abdomen expand and then up in to your middle lungs feeling your rib cage expand. Then slowly exhale from your lower lungs first, feeling your abdomen relax and then from your middle lungs feeling your rib cage relax (practice 5 times).
- Inhale down to your lower lungs, feeling abdomen expand, then up in to your middle lungs feeling your rib cage expand and then up in to your upper lungs feeling your collar bone lift. Then exhale from the lower lungs, then the middle lungs and then the upper lungs (practice 5 times).
- Now if you can work a full lung breath so filling your lungs from bottom to top and then hold the breath in for a slow count of 3. Then slowly exhale emptying your lungs from bottom to top (practice 5 times).

Return to natural breathing when finished and feel how much deeper and steadier your natural breathing is. Feel your body and mind filled with Prana - life force, healing energy.

Rhythmic Breathing

This can be worked from sitting or lying down on your back which ever works best for you. Either way get yourself comfy and try and breathe deeply through your nose if you can with your eyes closed. So exhale emptying your lungs ready to begin.

- Inhale for a slow count of 3 and exhale to a slow count of 3 (practice 5 times).
- Inhale for a slow count of 3, hold the breath in for a slow count of 3 and then exhale for a slow count of 3 (practice 5 times).
- Inhale for a slow count of 3, hold the breath in for a slow count of 3, exhale for a slow count of 3 and then hold the breath out for a slow count of 3 (practice x5).

Yoga, Spirit & Strength - Beginners Worksheets

Energising Breaths

This needs to be worked from sitting, so check you are comfortable and are lifting through your spine with your shoulders low and wide and head centred. Try and have your eyes closed to aid with concentration and to help focus within.

- Bring your hands in to your lap on level with your navel with your palms up, and have the fingertips pointing towards each other but not quite touching.
- As you slowly inhale raise your hands up to chest or shoulder height.
- Hold the breath in to turn your hands so your palms face down.
- Then as you slowly exhale lower your hands back down on level with your navel.
- Hold the breath out to turn your hands back up to face you.
- Continue for 10 breaths trying to keep the movement of your hands in time with your breath
- Perhaps you can visualise filling your lungs with healing, vibrant energy as you inhale and as you exhale imagine you are directing that energy through body and mind.

Giving and Receiving Breaths

This also needs to be worked from sitting due to the arm movements. So check your sitting position, try and have eyes closed and breathe through the nose if you can.

- Bring your arms alongside your body and check shoulders are relaxed as you lift through your spine.
- As you inhale slowly raise your arms out and up to the side of you until your palms meet above your head.
- As you exhale bring your hands down in front of you into Prayer Mudra in front of your heart.
- As you inhale slowly raise your arms back up nice and straight so your hands are above your head.
- Then as you exhale turn your hands so the backs of them meet and slowly lower your arms out and down alongside you.
- Continue for 10 breaths trying to keep the movement of the arms in time with the breath.
- As you inhale raising your arms up imagine you are drawing in lots of healing energy - Prana, from the universe. Then as you exhale bringing your hands in to Prayer Mudra, imagine you are directing that healing energy down in to your entire being.
- Now as you inhale raising your hands up above your head gather any loving energy that you have to offer, and as you exhale lowering your arms imagine you send that loving energy back out in to the universe.

Yoga, Spirit & Strength - Beginners Worksheets

Yoga Nidra - Relaxation (15 - 20 mins)

Benefits

This is worked at the end of a class but is ideal to practise on it's own if you ever feel stressed or tired and feel the need to relax. It's ideal to practise before going off to sleep especially if you find it hard to get off to sleep at night. It helps to relax the body all over and calm the mind and in turn the emotions. It helps to reduce headaches, fatigue, anxiety and nervousness. It also helps to alleviate constipation, indigestion, asthma and to lower blood pressure as well as aiding with mental concentration.

It's best to practise in a warm, calm environment where you will not be disturbed. It's best to practise with shoes off and to have a jumper or blanket nearby as your body temperature tends to drop as it relaxes.

To Begin

Come down to lie on the floor in Savasana - Relaxation pose (see sheet on how to work properly)

Stretching and Tensing

Inhaling push away your heels and spread your toes.....Exhaling release and relax.

Inhaling lift your hips & squeeze your buttocks.....Exhaling release and relax.

Inhaling push the small of your back to the floor or chair... Exhaling release and relax

Inhaling push your chest upwards/outwards.....Exhaling release and relax

Inhaling make fists, tense your arms and then spread your fingers wide.... ..
Exhaling release and relax

Inhaling shrug your shoulders up and in.....Exhaling release and relax

Inhaling draw your chin down to your throat.....Exhaling release and relax

Inhaling screw all your face muscles towards your nose.....

Exhaling stretch your face wide, so stretching your eyes and mouth and release and relax.

Progressive Relaxation

Take three deep breaths and as you do visualise or feel any tension draining away with each exhalation.

Feel your body now beginning to..... relax. Feel it softening and loosening with each deep breath you take.

Now feel your body becoming heavier and heavier and allow your body to surrender to the floor - to the earth, knowing you are safe and secure.

Now bring your awareness to your feet and repeat silently in your mind as follows.....

I relax my feet.....I relax my feet.....My feet are relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my legs.....I relax my legs.....My legs are relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my pelvis.....I relax my pelvis.....My pelvis is relaxing, relaxing

I relax my back.....I relax my back.....My back is softening, loosening,
relaxing.

I relax my chest.....I relax my chest.....My chest is relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my hands.....I relax my hands.....My hands are relaxing,
relaxing.

I relax my arms..... ..I relax my arms.....My arms are relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my shoulders... I relax my shoulders....My shoulders are softening, loosening,
relaxing.

I relax my neck.....I relax my neck.....My neck is relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my face.....I relax my face.....My face is relaxing, relaxing.

I relax my head.....I relax my head.....My head is relaxing, relaxing.

Now take three more deep breaths and as you exhale feel yourself relaxing more and more.

Now rest your mind for a while in a beautiful scene - real or imaginary. Somewhere where you feel at happy and content and at peace with yourself and the world.

Now take 3 more deep breaths as you begin to let go of your beautiful scene. Then slowly become aware of your body lying on the floor and slowly begin to wriggle fingers and toes. Then when you feel ready have a good stretch and open your eyes and come back up in to a comfortable meditation pose. Then pause for thought as you draw your awareness inwards one more time scanning body and mind, taking note of your energy.