



INTRODUCTION TO YOGA

A GUIDE TO IMPROVE YOUR
MOBILITY AND OVERALL HEALTH

YOGA FUNDAMENTALS

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga, as a definition, is a physical activity consisting largely of postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama) often connected by flowing sequences (vinyasas). Derived from India, Yoga incorporates periods of relaxation or meditation with the purpose of promoting physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Western Yoga, more often than not, stems from the Hatha Yoga traditional teachings. Hatha refers to the physical practice of yoga, contributing to greater strength, flexibility, endurance and balance. There are many other different types of Yoga practices. Yoga classes are adaptable and can encompass more of the physical, mental and/or spiritual health, depending on your preferences and goals.

BENEFITS OF YOGA

The goal of Hatha Yoga is generally to renew and invigorate the body by stretching and strengthening the muscles, improving joint health and stability, as well as improving oxygen delivery to the internal organs. When practiced regularly, Hatha Yoga can aid in reducing stress, improving weight management and thus reduce the risk of many health related illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Certain vinyasas can improve muscular strength and endurance (isometric contractions during held postures), improve cardio respiratory fitness (increased heart rate during challenging sequences) and improved balance and mobility (from the muscle contractions used when moving the joints through full range of motion). Learning to control the breath can improve oxygen delivery as well as an individual's ability to relax. This can lead to further benefits inflexibility, stress reduction and mindfulness (meditation).

THE BREATH (PRANAYAMA)

Typically, the breath in Yoga focuses on full, nasal breathing (inhale and exhale through the nose). Deep, diaphragmatic breathing involves bringing breath into the lungs from the bottom up. With each inhale, you expand your belly (drawing the diaphragm down), then the ribs, and finally the chest. On the exhale, you let it all go, focusing on emptying the lungs completely.

Most of us breathe incorrectly, using only half our lung capacity. By turning our attention to the breath in our yoga practice, we can re-educate the body as well as gain the benefits of increased oxygenation to the body and mind such as improved mental clarity, alertness and physical well-being.

During a yoga flow, you would typically inhale as you open your body (open chest) and exhale as you close (fold).



POPULAR YOGA POSES AND THEIR BENEFITS

Mountain Pose

- Standing at the front of the mat with feet together or hip distance apart, we press our feet into the mat.
- We relax the shoulders and reach our fingers down towards the feet while keeping arms extended at our sides.
- Focus on lengthening the spine while stacking ears over shoulder, shoulders over hips, hips over knees and knees over ankles.



Forward Fold/Halfway Lift (Flat Back)

- Starting from standing (mountain), as we inhale, we sweep our arms up overhead. During the exhale, we bend at the hips and knees, bringing our hands to the floor or shins/calves. Option to straighten the legs for Forward Fold.
- For halfway lift, we extend our back straight by reaching our chest forward coming up half way (option for hands to stay on the floor or come up to the shins as pictured).
- This pose strengthens the lower back and abs while stretching our glutes, hamstrings and low back (fold).



Low Plank

- From a Forward Fold position, hands find the floor as we step both feet to the back of the mat to find a plank position (hands under the shoulders, arms extended with along, neutral spine, not pictured).
- From plank, as we exhale, we lower our bodies down until our shoulders, elbows, hips and heels align (body hovers over the mat, option to lower the knees to the mat, as pictured). Using our triceps to hover above the floor, we keep our elbows tight to our ribcage.
- This pose strengthens our abs, low back, chest, shoulders and triceps.



Upward Dog

- From a low plank position, we pull our chest forward through the arms while extending our elbows and coming to the tops of our feet with our knees off the floor (option to place pelvis, knees and thighs to the floor while lifting chest off the ground with elbows slightly bent as pictured).
- We push the ground away and draw our shoulders down away from the ears.
- This pose strengthens our glutes, upper back, lower back and triceps while stretching our chest and hip flexors.



Downward Facing Dog

- From a low plank position, we raise our hips towards the sky, pushing through the hands and balls of the feet by extending our elbows and knees into an inverted V position.
- We focus on lengthening the spine by reaching the top of the head towards the mat and the tailbone towards the sky.
- Keeping our shoulders away from the ears and ears between the biceps we press our heels towards the floor (can bend the knees if hamstrings are tight).
- This pose strengthens our shoulders, upper back, abs and low back while stretching our glutes, hamstrings, shoulders and calves.



Warrior 1

- From standing (Mountain), we step one foot back, turning the back foot out to around a 45 degree angle while squaring the hips with the front of the mat.
- While we press the back edge of the back foot into the mat, we bend the front knee in line over the ankle keeping the back leg extended.
- We then sweep the arms up overhead, lengthening the spine while keeping shoulders down.
- This pose strengthens our quads, hamstrings, upper back and shoulders while stretching our hip flexors, hip adductors and calves.



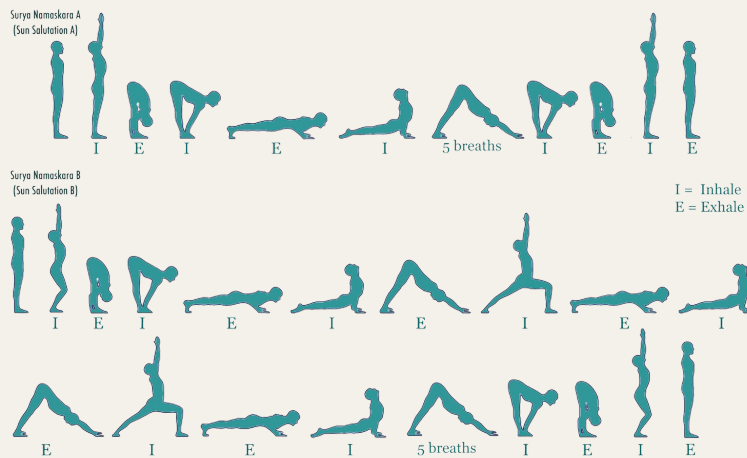
Chair

- From mountain, we sit our hips back as if to sit in a chair.
- We keep our spine neutral while engaging our abdominals to support our low back.
- We reach our arms up over our head while keeping our shoulders down.
- This pose strengthens our quads, lower back, shoulders, abs and calves.



Sun Salutations (Vinyasa sequence)

- Sun Salutations are a great sequence often used as part of a warm up during a Hatha class. However, they can be used as a general mobility flow at anytime, anywhere.
- There are typically 2 flows: A and B.
- You can perform one or both sequences 3-5 times in a row to warm the body, prepare it for movement or to just center yourself after sitting for long periods of time.



Credit: Lia Foa, 2010

Sun Salutation A: Start - Mountain, Inhale-Sweep Arms Up, Exhale-Forward Fold, Inhale-Halfway Lift, Exhale-Low Plank, Inhale-Upward Dog, Exhale-Downward Dog (hold for 5 breaths), Inhale-Halfway Lift, Exhale-Forward Fold, Inhale-Sweep Arms Up, Exhale-Mountain. End.

Sun Salutation B: Start - Mountain, Inhale-Chair, Exhale-Forward Fold, Inhale-Halfway Lift, Exhale-Low Plank, Inhale-Upward Dog, Exhale-Downward Dog, Inhale-Warrior I, Exhale-Low Plank, Inhale-Upward Dog, Exhale-Downward Dog, Inhale-Warrior I (other side), Exhale-Low Plank, Inhale-Upward Dog, Exhale-Downward Dog (hold for 5 breaths), Inhale-Halfway Lift, Exhale-Forward Fold, Inhale-Chair, Exhale-Mountain. End.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Everyone should participate in some type of mobility work within their exercise programming in order to maintain and improve their overall health. Yoga is a great option!

You don't have to be flexible to participate in Yoga. Anyone can participate regardless of their current fitness level or ability. Adjustments can always be made so you get to make the Yoga class yours. Everyone is unique and what works for one, may not work for another. The focus is on your feeling, your body and your time for yourself.

There is no judgment, expectations or competition.

Your focus is on YOU!



ABOUT US

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The physical fitness of all CAF personnel is essential and critical components of operational readiness. It is the responsibility, in part, of the PSP Fitness team to develop and sustain a strong, healthy and fit CAF. This includes providing high-quality physical training that is delivered in a professional, effective, and safe manner.

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