The foundations of yoga (and hence Sport Yoga) go back thousands of years (some theorize as much as 5000 years). When done properly, Sport Yoga will bring together the mind and body, bringing oneself to new levels of body awareness. Put in more scientific terms, yoga has both psychological and physiological benefits. One of Sport Yoga’s most important physiological benefits (and the initial goal for many new to Sport Yoga) is an increase in musculoskeletal flexibility and range of motion. However, when done wrong, with improper instruction, yoga can do damage to joints and connective tissues. That’s why it’s vital that a Sport Yoga Instructor have a fundamental understanding of musculoskeletal anatomy and physiology. That’s what this section of your program is all about.

Health Benefits of Yoga
by Trisha Lamb

Two of the most common inquiries we receive from professional members preparing presentations on Yoga and from journalists and students writing about Yoga are:

1. What are the health benefits of Yoga?

2. How does Yoga differ from conventional exercise?

Following are answers drawn from various sources and provided in a succinct format. I wish to especially thank the following three individuals: First, A. Malathi, M.D. (amalathi@vsnl.net), for her presentation in November 2000 on the benefits of Yoga at Sutter Medical Center in Santa Rosa, California. Her paper “Promotive, Prophylactic Benefits of Yogic Practice in Middle Aged Women” furnishes research results and explanations for many of the benefits noted below. Thanks also to IAYT member Matra Majmundar (matra@post.com) for her presentation on Yoga physiology at the Integrating Yoga Therapeutics into Rehabilitation seminar at San Francisco Memorial Hospital in April 2000. Her book, tentatively titled Physiology of Yoga Therapeutics, is in preparation. I also would like to thank Arpita for her article “The Physical and Psychological Benefits of Yoga,” which appeared in the 1991 issue of The Journal of The International Association of Yoga Therapists. Bibliographic details for these and other references are provided at the end of this article.

Health Benefits
This information is grouped into three categories—physiological benefits, psychological benefits, biochemical effects—and is based on the regular practice of traditional āsana, prānāyāma, and meditation. Please note that while pulse rate, etc., may increase during the practice of various āsanas, some forms of prānāyāma, and some stages of meditation, but overall benefits to general health are as listed below. For information on the physiological changes that occur during the practice of specific āsanas, etc., please see James Funderburk’s Science Studies Yoga and other resources cited at the end of this article.

Physiological Benefits

- Stable autonomic nervous system equilibrium, with a tendency toward parasympathetic nervous system dominance rather than the usual stress-induced sympathetic nervous system dominance
- Pulse rate decreases
- Respiratory rate decreases
- Blood pressure decreases (of special significance for hyporeactors)
- Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) increases
- EEG - alpha waves increase (theta, delta, and beta waves also increase during various stages of meditation)
- EMG activity decreases
- Cardiovascular efficiency increases
- Respiratory efficiency increases (respiratory amplitude and smoothness increase, tidal volume increases, vital capacity increases, breath-holding time increases)
- Gastrointestinal function normalizes
- Endocrine function normalizes
- Excretory functions improve
- Musculoskeletal flexibility and joint range of motion increase
- Posture improves
- Strength and resiliency increase
- Endurance increases
- Energy level increases
- Weight normalizes
- Sleep improves
- Immunity increases
- Pain decreases

Psychological Benefits

- Somatic and kinesthetic awareness increase
- Mood improves and subjective well-being increases
• Self-acceptance and self-actualization increase
• Social adjustment increases
• Anxiety and depression decrease
• Hostility decreases

**Psychomotor functions improve:**
• Grip strength
• Dexterity and fine skills
• Eye-hand coordination
• Choice reaction time
• Steadiness
• Depth perception
• Balance
• Integrated functioning of body parts

**Cognitive Function improves:**
• Attention
• Concentration
• Memory
• Learning efficiency
• Symbol coding
• Depth perception
• Flicker fusion frequency

**Biochemical Effects**
The biochemical profile improves, indicating an antistress and antioxidant effect, important in the prevention of degenerative diseases.
• Glucose decreases
• Sodium decreases
• Total cholesterol decreases
• Triglycerides decrease
• HDL cholesterol increases
• LDL cholesterol decreases
• VLDL cholesterol decreases
• Cholinesterase increases
• Catecholamines decrease
• ATPase increases
• Hematocrit increases
• Hemoglobin increases
• Lymphocyte count increases
• Total white blood cell count decreases
• Thyroxin increases
• Vitamin C increases
• Total serum protein increases
• Oxytocin increases
• Prolactin increases
• Oxygen levels in the brain increase

**Yoga Compared to Conventional Exercise**

**Yoga Exercise**
• Parasympathetic nervous system dominates
• Subcortical regions of brain dominate
• Slow dynamic and static movements
• Normalization of muscle tone
• Low risk of injuring muscles and ligaments
• Low caloric consumption
• Effort is minimized, relaxed
• Energizing (breathing is natural or controlled)
• Balanced activity of opposing muscle groups
• Noncompetitive, process-oriented
• Awareness is internal
  (focus is on breath and the infinite)
• Limitless possibilities for growth in self-awareness
  • Sympathetic nervous system dominates
• Cortical regions of brain dominate
• Rapid forceful movements
• Increased muscle tension
• Higher risk of injury
• Moderate to high caloric consumption
• Effort is maximized
• Fatiguing (breathing is taxed)
• Imbalanced activity of opposing groups
• Competitive, goal-oriented
• Awareness is external
  (focus is on reaching the toes, reaching the finish line, etc.)
• Boredom factor

Select General References

What exactly is Sport Yoga?

Sport Yoga is a unique blend of ancient, modern, and experimental exercises designed to promote wellness and strength on a mental, physical, and spiritual level. The formatting, movements, and theories are taken and adapted from a variety of sources including: Hatha (physical) yoga, martial arts warm-up routines (specifically Chinese Kung-fu), tai chi, Pilates mat exercises, postural analysis, European cycling coaching techniques, as well as traditional sport stretches and warm-ups.

Key Points to Remember:
§ A Sport Yoga instructor understands individual client needs and limitations and is able to customize the class to meet those needs. Options and modifications are a key aspect of Sport Yoga instruction. You should strive to make each and every class meaningful for each and every student.
§ A Sport Yoga instructor understands body alignment and how to combine poses into a flow pattern in a safe and effective manner.
§ A Sport Yoga instructor emphasizes the breath is the most important tool that we have in yoga and is directly linked to the quality of the practice. The breath carries us in and out of poses and enables us to move deeper into them.
§ A Sport Yoga instructor reminds their students that yoga is an endless, individual, inner journey. There is no competition, goal, or judgment in yoga. Everyone moves at his or her own pace.
§ A Sport Yoga instructor is able to effectively communicate with their students using verbal as well as nonverbal cues. We communicate with body language, voice, diction, and tone. A Sport Yoga instructor should project confidence, sensitivity, and humility.
§ A Sport Yoga instructor should always maintain a standard of professionalism when teaching.

“To do what you ought to do, when you ought to do it and be guided by your wisdom is the only real freedom.”
- Paramahansa Yogananda

“Affluence, unaboundedness, and abundance are our natural state. We just need to restore the memory of what we already know.”
- Deepak Chopra

The Role of a Sport Yoga Instructor

Your role as a Sport Yoga instructor is to teach, guide, and lead by example. It is important to use and maintain a standard of professionalism when working with clients.
• Be punctual. It is recommended that you arrive at least 5 or 10 minutes early before the session begins so that you have time to prepare the room (and yourself) for the session.
• Try to make each yoga session meaningful and positive for the client. Teach with sincerity, compassion, and humility.
• Never make an example of a person in a group setting
when they are doing something incorrectly if you feel it may embarrass them. The best teachers are sensitive, understanding, as well as augment growth in the clients’ yoga practice.

• Remember that sometimes, fewer words can actually say more. Too much detail for a beginner is likely to add to their confusion, when you explain a pose, explain one aspect at a time.

“Live like a mudfish, whose stain is bright and silvery even though it dwells in the mud.”
-Ramakrishana

“The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.”
-Chinese Proverb

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

How long should a pose be held?

This should vary based upon your goals and ability level. More time should be spent on the warm-up segment (at least fifteen minutes) if the goal is to prepare for physical activity following the Sport Yoga session. When Sport Yoga is being used for sport preparation, the postures can be held for a shorter periods of time with more emphasis on general warm-up and injury prevention. When Sport Yoga is practiced for relaxation, revitalization, or as a moving meditation, the poses move much slower, they are held for longer periods of time, they are deeper, and facilitate a greater degree of mindful attention to the fine details.

What is the recommended way to count breaths?

You can do either. It is especially relaxing and enables one to be more conscious of the practice when the focal point is on counting the breaths and awareness of each inhalation and exhalation. This technique allows you to rhythmically move in and out of each pose with precision and mindfulness. When you are initially instructing a student in a pose, it may be helpful to simply count until they become more at ease with the process. Even when counting, the emphasis continues to be relaxed, smooth, rhythmic breath and awareness.

What does the word “yoga” mean?

Yoga means to yoke, to unite with the source of our being. It is to bring together body, mind, and spirit.

How should poses be sequenced?

You have a great deal of creative freedom. However, there is a logical progression that needs to be followed. For example, if you are teaching an hour long class, the warm-up or heat building segment should typically last approximately 15-30 minutes. Once sufficiently warm, the student may move deeper into poses with longer holds, approximately 15-20 minutes. Gradually, the class cools down with gentle relaxation poses, approximately 15-30 minutes. These times vary according to individual needs and limitations.

What is the difference between a pose, posture, and movement?

In Sport Yoga, they are interchangeable. Sometimes a movement can describe the transition involved when moving in and out of a particular pose. The original name for these words known as “asana” is thousands of years old and comes from the Indian language, Sanskrit.

What is done when a student feels pain?

This depends on numerous factors including: age, prior training, injuries, motivation, and objective. (i.e., a tennis player would benefit more from the lunging pose flow than he/she would from the bound angle even though both are great for flexibility) You will want to include many different poses but the emphasis can be on certain ones. For instance, the lunging poses more closely mimic the tennis player’s movements as they reach for a ball. These considerations should be made when developing an individualized program for a client. There must be balance in the practice, such as folding, extending, twisting, strengthening, stretching, and final relaxation. As the instructor, you should decide which of these are best for the individual.

Which poses should a new student be taught?

This depends on numerous factors including: age, prior training, injuries, motivation, and objective. (i.e., a tennis player would benefit more from the lunging pose flow than he/she would from the bound angle even though both are great for flexibility) You will want to include many different poses but the emphasis can be on certain ones. For instance, the lunging poses more closely mimic the tennis player’s movements as they reach for a ball. These considerations should be made when developing an individualized program for a client. There must be balance in the practice, such as folding, extending, twisting, strengthening, stretching, and final relaxation. As the instructor, you should decide which of these are best for the individual.
Stop! Nothing done in Sport Yoga should be painful. If something hurts, we must listen to and honor what the body is communicating. Have the student carefully transition out of the pose and rest. Recognize that yoga should be practiced at the edge of one’s comfort zone without experiencing pain. Your student’s well-being is most important to you as an instructor.

**Does a Sport Yoga Instructor offer hands on support?**

There are times during a session when gentle hands on support is appropriate. It is important to ask your client prior to touching them if they would be comfortable with this. If the client is especially sensitive to such and prefers that you do not adjust them, verbal cues and demonstration are fine. If your client is open and comfortable with hands on support, it is crucial to offer support which facilitates individual growth, body awareness, lines of energy, and correct alignment. Hands on support is not used to manipulate or force the client into any pose. Strong pressure is not recommended by Sport Yoga.

“The Universe is made of stories, not of atoms.”
- Muriel Rukeyser

**Principles of Yoga Breathing Basics**

Relaxed breath is the open door to yoga. Proper breathing depends on our elimination of tension, as well as a foundation of good habits such as proper mental and physical attitudes. The moment that we let go of obstacles breath will come into its own and bring restored vitality and tranquility.

Yoga maintains that the most productive breath begins with a slow and complete exhalation. That perfect exhalation is an absolute prerequisite of correct and complete inhalation. Unless we exhale completely, it is impossible for our inhalations to be most productive, and soothing.

Normal respiration, therefore, begins with a slow calm exhalation carried out by relaxing the aspiratory muscles. The chest is depressed by its own weight, expelling the stale air. At the end of the exhalation, the abdominal muscles help the lungs to empty to their fullest extent, by means of a contraction which expels the last traces of tainted air.

The spongy make-up of the lungs does not allow them to be emptied completely—there is always a residue of impure air in the lungs. We must attempt to minimize this “residue” because with the fresh air provided by inhalation it makes up the actual air we breath. The more complete the exhalation, the greater the quality of fresh air to enter the lungs, and so the purer the air in contact with the alveolar surfaces.

The total volume of air which the lungs are able to contain is known as “the vital capacity.” A more apt term cannot be imagined, and innumerable techniques have been practiced and aimed at increasing this capacity.

Yoga recognizes three separate forms of breathing—diaphragmatic, intercostals, and clavicular. Complete yoga breathing combines all three, and constitutes the ideal technique.

**Diaphragmatic Breathing**

The diaphragm subsides while the breath is drawn in, and the abdominal region swells. The base of the lungs fills with air, and the rhythmic lowering of the diaphragm produces a constant, gentle massage of the entire abdominal content, and helps these organs to function correctly.

**Intercostal Breathing**

Intercostal breathing is achieved by raising the ribs through dilating the thoracic cage or chest wall like a pair of bellows. It is a form of breathing which fills the middle section of the lungs, allowing less air to enter than the abdominal respiration, and involving a significantly greater amount of effort. This is “athletic” respiration. When combined with abdominal breathing, it ventilates the lungs satisfactorily.

**Clavicular Breathing**

Air is introduced by raising the collar-bone and shoulders. In this manner, only the upper portion of the lungs receives fresh air. It is the least satisfactory method of breathing.

**Three Part Complete Breath**

Complete yoga respiration incorporates all three methods, integrated in one single full and rhythmic movement.

Description of Three Part Complete Breath

1. Empty the lungs entirely.
2. Slowly lower the diaphragm allowing air to enter the lungs. Air is brought to the bottom of the lungs causing the abdomen to swell.
3. Expand the lungs without straining
4. Allow the lungs to completely fill by raising the collarbones.

Throughout this procedure, the air should enter in a continuous flow, without gasping or straining. As you breathe, be aware of the momentary pause prior to taking the next inhalation. Yoga breath is typically done in and out of the nose.

When practicing yoga and meditation, one should breathe with ease and mindfulness. When the lungs are completely filled, exhale in the same sequence as when inhaling. Exhale the breath fully and completely, so the next breath enters the body almost as a breath of surprise. Breathe consciously and completely. Breathe easily without straining.

Ujjayi Breath

Ujjayi breath is a type of three-part, complete breath which is commonly used when practicing the physical yoga poses. Ujjayi breath retains heat in the body which is essential when moving in to advanced versions of poses. It allows the student to move deeper into the poses by way of the breath.

Ujjayi breath is practiced by constricting the muscle at the back of the throat to stretch and control the breath. It should sound like the ocean waves rolling in and out or like a gentle wind.

Ujjayi breath is beneficial in yoga in that it serves as a focal point for the mind, enabling the student to meditate while moving through poses. The Ujjayi breath carries the student in and out of poses and can be a direct indication of the quality of student’s practice. As a general rule, with each inhalation, we lengthen, expand, and extend. With each exhalation we release, surrender, and let go when in the poses. Inhale lengthen, exhale release.

“The wave lives the life of the wave and, at the same time, the life of water.”
- Thich Nhat Hanh

Meditation and Relaxation

How does one meditate?
The answer is surprisingly simplistic in nature. Stop. Just be. Just breathe. Simply relax and be aware. Meditation is about being present in the moment. Meditation does not expect or demand anything. It is surrendering to the present and being satisfied in the moment. Meditation is directly linked to having gratitude in one’s own heart and sending compassion into the world.

The society in which we live is extremely fast-paced, high stress, and demanding. We can often become consumed with life’s obligations so that we can lose track of the most important aspects of life. Usually, people are not fully aware of all of the mental thought activity that we are constantly engaged in. Meditation allows this clutter and chatter of the mind to settle down. The benefits of meditations are extensive and include: sense of renewal, peace, lower blood pressure, lower pulse rate, decreased metabolic rate, changes in the concentration of serum levels of various substances, mental clarity, and greater awareness. Meditation replenishes the mind, body, and spirit. By meditating, we can remain grounded, peaceful, and centered in this uncertain world which we live.

Meditation can be considered a technique or a practice. Meditation methods commonly used can involve concentrating on a sound, such as the universal sound of all life, OMMMM…; and/or an object, such as a candle, or by visualizing the breath and the journey that it takes through the body.

Experiences during meditation vary significantly from one individual to another, and according to the meditation technique practiced.

Meditation is a spiritual practice and is a recognized universally in every religion and every culture. Meditation transcends any particular dogma. As with yoga, it is not a religion. Although meditation is commonly associated with the eastern religions and their sects: Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc. It is also a major principle of Christianity," meditating on God and the Word."

How is meditation different from relaxation, thinking, concentration or self-hypnosis?
Relaxation is a common by-product of meditation. Relaxation itself can assume many forms, such as taking a walk, a warm bath, swimming, reading, etc. Meditation is an active process where the mediator remains fully aware. Meditation transcends the thought process whereas many other forms of relaxation still engage the thought process. Meditation allows the body to relax and can offset the effects of stress both mentally and physically to a potentially greater degree than can passive relaxation. Meditation is practiced by remaining present and satisfied in the moment.
Thinking: Thoughts generally consume energy in the process of their formation. Constant thought activity, especially of the random nature, often tires the mind. Through regular meditation practice, one becomes aware that they are not their thoughts but that there is an awareness that exists independent of thought.

Concentration: Meditation begins with concentration. However, after an initial period of concentration, thought activity decreases and a focused awareness becomes more spontaneous.

Self-hypnosis: Self-hypnosis, like meditation, involves at least an initial period of concentration on an object. Hypnosis does not try to maintain an awareness of the here and now, or to remain conscious of the process. Instead, one essentially enters a semi-conscious trance-like state where the practitioner can guide or be guided to a state of calm.

How long should a person meditate?
When first learning meditation it is usually not possible to meditate for more than 10-15 minutes. After regular practice, one becomes able to meditate for longer periods of time.

There are a few recommended guidelines for meditation:
- Meditation should be done every day, preferably at the same time.
- Meditation should preferably be done before a meal rather than after. This is to avoid robbing the stomach of needed blood for digestion.
- Set aside a quiet place in the home where meditation is done. Many people create a peaceful environment using fountains, a garden, flowers, candles, etc.
- Often it is recommended to meditate sitting with the spine straight and vertical (a chair is okay to use.)

“How most of the time, we think too much, and mindful breathing helps us to be calm, relaxed, and peaceful. It helps us stop thinking so much and stop being possessed by sorrows of the past and worries about the future. It enables us to be in touch with life, which is wonderful in the present moment.”
- Thich Nhat Hanh,
  Peace is Every Step
“Speak or act with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable.”
-The Buddha

**Lines of Energy**

A line of energy is simply the emphasis (both mentally and physically) placed on a part of the body. Lines of energy frequently originate from your core or deep abdominal region. At the left, there are four lines of energy originating from the core. There will always be more than one line of energy because we are pulling and/or moving in two different directions with each pose, movement, and breath.

**STRONG LINES OF ENERGY**

**MOUNTAIN POSE**

**TRIANGLE POSE**

**BROKEN LINES OF ENERGY**

**SIDE ANGLE (EXTENDED ANGLE)**

**TREE POSE**
Proper Body Alignment

Maintaining proper body alignment in yoga poses and as we go about our daily lives as well has numerous worthwhile benefits. These include improved posture, spine suppleness, physical bodily stress prevention, and combating the undesirable effects that gravity has over time upon the body. Proper body alignment begins with awareness. Maintaining proper body alignment can make you look several inches taller, ten pounds thinner, and much more confident.

Correct standing alignment is achieved by:

§ Engaging the deep abdominal, core muscles of the body (pulling the navel in towards the back of the spine)
§ Maintaining neutral pelvic alignment, tailbone downward
§ Maintaining neutral spinal alignment from the neck - Long spine.
§ Shoulder blades are gently back and down.
§ Head is held high, eyes in line with the shoulders.
§ Feet are at a comfortable hip-distance apart.
§ Toes are pointing in the same direction as the knees.

Mountain is an ideal pose to use when reinforcing proper standing alignment with students.

The alignment principles of mountain apply to other yoga poses as well.

Proper Hand and Foot Placement

Hand Placement

For all poses requiring your hand placement on the ground, your hands must remain equally balanced and fanned. The middle finger of each hand will point straight ahead. When body weight is placed on the hands, it is important to avoid applying direct pressure to the wrist joint. Instead, place the pressure evenly across the area of the knuckles.

IMPROPER FOOT ALIGNMENT

The toes should be fanned for the greater balance and stability. Bring out the arch of the foot enabling it to be even more prominent. This is done by pressing on the outside edge of your feet. Adjusting your feet in this manner is called rooting your feet into the mat.
Warm-Up and Heat Building Pose
Flow

The purpose of warm-up movements is to increase the body’s core temperature. This facilitates smooth joint articulation through the release of synovial fluid from the synovial membrane in the joint. This fluid has the consistency of egg whites and is secreted as physical activity increases. This synovial fluid has the ability to change its viscosity, as movement increases it thins, as movement slows, it thickens.

Students often ask if yoga in itself is a warm-up. The answer is “yes, it can be a highly effective preparation for virtually any other athletic activity.” Proper warm-up makes any exercise more enjoyable, less fatiguing, prevents injury and soreness, and increases desired benefits.

Yoga in itself often produces a tremendous amount of heat in the body. This produced and retained heat enables advanced yogis to bend and move into advanced yoga poses with the greatest of ease and often times, to the astonishment of others.

**Cat and Dog Tilt**

Begin on hands and knees. Shoulders should be directly over the wrists and the knees should be in alignment under the hips. Inhale as you allow your belly to drop downward, send your gaze upward, and lift the tailbone upward. Exhale as you gently round the spine, pulling the navel in towards the spine. Use your breath to smoothly transition from Dog Tilt to Cat several times.

**Health Benefits:** Stretches and tones the abdominals. Facilitates spinal flexibility and aids in digestion.

**Avoid Souching of the Shoulders**

**Alternating Hip Flexion and Leg Extension**

Begin by lengthening in the spine and pulling your navel in toward your spine. Exhale as the knee is drawn into the chest and up towards the head. The legs and feet should never touch the ground during this exercise. The abdominals are always engaged and lifting the upper body. There should be no tension in the neck. Complete up to 5-20 repetitions on each side. Breathing is quick, relaxed and rhythmic. Both legs will finish as opposing movement simultaneously. This Core strengthening exercise has a Pilates base.

**Health Benefits:** Strengthens abdominals. Build heat in the body.
Single Leg Thrust

This movement has a Pilates origin. In the starting position at the left, please note that the left leg is pointed straight upward, the toes are pointed, and the hands are down low at the side for stability. As you exhale, roll the shoulders back to assist with lifting the chest as well as the buttocks off the mat. The majority of the power comes from your hamstrings, quadriceps, buttocks, and abdominals. You will exhale as you lift and inhale as you lower your body.

This exercise has two options. You can complete slow repetition (10-30) on one side, or hold the pose for up to thirty seconds prior to switching to the other leg.

NOTE: The bent knee needs to remain in line with your body. DO NOT allow the knee to stray to the side.

The Sun Salutation

The Salute to the sun is a traditional yoga pose flow which significantly increases the heat within the body. The Sun Salutation is traditionally practiced by yogis at sunrise, (facing east) to honor the rising sun. It must be practiced with awareness and control. There are hundreds of variations of the sun salute. Below you will find two common versions. The advanced pose flow video also offers variants to these versions as well. These pose flows may be done continually as many times as you wish (typically 3-9 times in a one hour class)

Modified Sun Salutation

2. Inhale, Reach
1. Exhale, Mountain
4. Inhale, Half Fold
3. Exhale, Dive Forward
6. Inhale, Reach
5. Exhale, Forward Fold
7. Close in Prayer
Sun Salutation
3. Exhale, Dive Forward
2. Inhale, Reach
1. Exhale, Mountain
4. Inhale, Half Fold
5. Inhale, Step Back Into Push up Position
6. Exhale, Lower & Hover
7. Inhale Cobra
8. Exhale, Down-dog
10. Exhale, Full Forward Fold
9. Inhale, Step Up to Half
11. Inhale, Arms Reach

“Take a breath of the new dawn and make it part of you. It will give you strength.”
-Hopi saying

Basic Pose Breakdown

Mountain Pose
Mountain pose is considered to be the most basic of poses. It is the foundation from which other poses come from. Virtually, all other yoga poses have some element of mountain in them.

Health Benefits: Increased Body awareness, Elongates spine, strengthens feet, ankles, quadriceps, glutes, and core. Builds balance, strength, and stability, soothing to the mind.

Tree Pose

Tree pose is a standing posture which enhances balance and focus. Begin by focusing on a fixed point in front of you. Slowly lift the opposite foot to the ankle, calf, or inner thigh. Avoid resting the foot at the knee of the supporting leg. Press foot into the supporting leg with the lifted foot. Hips are open and square. Spine is elongated, abdominals are engaged. For an added challenge, carefully close the eyes and focus inward.

Health Benefits: Opens hips, improves balance and concentration, Strengthens Quads, glutes, hamstrings, calves, knees, ankles, and feet.

Standing Forward Fold

Use your breath to release into this calming restorative pose. Inhale as you lift the rib cage moving into the fold and exhale as you reach the bottom of the fold. Once in the forward fold relax the head and neck completely. Allow the crown of the head to be parallel with the floor. Engage the quadriceps or bend the knees. The back must remain as flat as possible as you shift the hips backward. Visualize the quadriceps moving downward as the hamstrings move upward as the hips roll back and upward. Be sure to hinge from the hips as opposed to the waist. Spine is elongated. Abdominals are engaged.

Health Benefits: Stretches the hamstrings, stretches and strengthens the low back. Releases tension in the head and neck. Relaxes the facial muscles, reverses the flow of gravity to the head.
Important aspects to remember in this pose are to keep the back flat by pulling the navel into the spine utilizing the core as well as to keep the hips moving back so that they are in alignment over the ankles. Be aware of the strong lines of energy in the arms and legs. The breathing technique in these pose variations is the same as in standing forward fold.

This pose contains the basic elements of the Beginning version. However, it also utilizes the chest, shoulders, and upper back. Slowly wiggle the shoulders as you descend to find the individual groove which allows for deeper release into the pose. The hands can be clasped in the opposite (and perhaps unnatural) position and then the fold can be repeated. You may be surprised at how when your hand clasping grip is changed, flexibility is altered in a positive manner. At the bottom of the pose, allow the head to slowly, gently drop into a completely relaxed position.

Health Benefits: Stretches the hamstrings, hip adductors and groin. Elongates the spine and soothes the mind. The advanced pose option releases tension in the shoulders and upper back and opens up the chest.
ADVANCED Pyramid

Warrior Poses
The warrior poses represent inner strength, and individual determination. The feet should be well rooted. The heel in the rear foot is firmly planted into the ground. The forward foot is pointing forward and the rear foot is angled at 45 degrees. The forward foot should be supported directly above the ankle joint. The knee of the forward foot is protected by remaining in direct alignment above the ankle. In warrior 1 and 4 the hips are square and in Warrior 2 and 3 the hips are open to the side.

Health Benefits: Increases body awareness, balance, strengthens glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, calves, ankles, feet, abdominals, arms, and shoulders. When done in a pose flow, Warrior 1 to 2 to 3, the internal organs are gently massaged and the mind is soothed.
Side Angle Posture (Extended Angle)

Note the foot positioning and the lines of energy. The forward knee is above the ankle joint. The hips drop downward and the chest is open. Be aware of the diagonal created down the side of the body, from the extended fingertips leading down to the heel.

Health Benefits: Stretches the waist, opens the pelvic floor and groin. Strengthens the quads, glutes, hamstrings, knees, and ankles.

Triangle Pose

In triangle pose, the big toe is in alignment with the arch of the back foot. The back foot should be turned in slightly so that the heel is stable and grounded. The hips are hinged and moving in the direction of the back foot. Inhale through the nose, exhale as you lean forward. Inhale through the nose... When you cannot stretch any farther, exhale as you lower the hand to the thigh, calf, (avoid resting the hand on the knee) ankle, foot, or floor. Roll the top shoulder back as you reach the bottom ribs around. Breath is smooth, body is not straining.

Health Benefits: Triangle Pose stretches the waist and the low back. It strengthens the quadriceps, calves, ankles, and feet. This pose brings awareness to the lines of energy as well as increasing balance.

Revolved or Reverse Triangle(Advanced Version)

Once you have mastered the triangle pose, another option is to revolve the triangle pose. It is important to note that the elements of the basic triangle pose remain the same. The difference is that a twist is added from the hips by changing the direction of the torso to posterior. The hand rests on the small of the back, the thigh, ankle, or front or back of the foot. When attempting this pose it is necessary to move gradually and with out straining.
Lunging Pose Flow

Start in Mountain Pose (STAGE 1). Step back with your left foot and keep your hands on your hips (STAGE 2). The back is slightly arched with shoulders back. After three breaths, move to the next stage (STAGE 3). The abdomen is lowered to the thigh while the chest remains tall and the lower back flat. It’s fine to balance on your fingertips.

After three breaths, move to the next stage (STAGE 4), the top foot of the extended leg turns over and is slide backwards. The knee is kept about 8-10 inches off the mat. After three breaths, bring your feet back together and move to Mountain Pose once again. At this point, you may wait three breaths and complete the right side of the body, or do a forward fold first and then complete the right side. This pose flow can be repeated as many times as desired. Once or twice through is sufficient for a beginner.
The Boat Pose

The Boat pose is a core stabilizing balance. Begin by focusing on a fixed point in front of you. Balance on your sits bones, engage the core. When ready, float the knees up. Feel the abdominals working as you balance. Roll the shoulders back and down and open the chest. Breathe.

Health Benefits: Strengthens the deep abdominal muscles, back, and quadriceps. Improves balance and concentration.

Seated Forward Fold
Inhale, lift the rib cage, and elongate the spine. Utilize your core by pulling the navel in toward the spine. Exhale as you release slowly and carefully forward from the hips. The hips should be shifting back as far as possible. Feel free to bend the knees as needed which facilitates elongation of the spine.

Health Benefits: Stretches the hamstrings, and low back. Calms the mind and helps to maintain a supple spine

**Modification Seated Forward Fold**

In bound angle pose, the soles of the feet are together and the feet are pulled in towards the hips. The focus is on a flat back, elongated spine, stable core, and on keeping the shoulders back and down. The Bound Angle Pose emphasizes the adductor muscles and the hip joint region.

**The Bound Angle**

Advanced Version of the pose Seated Forward Fold

This pose is simply an alternative to a regular seated forward fold. It allows the student to increase their reach and slowly test their limits. The breathing and body alignment is the same as the regular seated forward fold. You can take this pose into as many stages as needed.

NOTE: Think about moving your chest towards your feet, rather than moving your nose down to your knees.

Health Benefits of Bound Angle Pose: Stretches the hips, glutes, lower back, and groin (adductors).
The Seated One Leg Forward Fold

In this pose, a short staff may also be used as a prop to help increase the intensity of the pose. The short staff also aids in preventing “rounding” of the spine.

Seated Spread Forward Fold - Begin by pulling the navel in toward the spine, abdominals engaged, elongate the spine. Exhale as you release forward hinging from the hips into the straddle. Use your thigh muscles and press outward through the heels to prevent the inward rotation of the knees. Use the breath to help you move deeper into the stretch without straining. Allow the ribs to be free and the torso long as you continue to relax in this pose.

Health Benefits: The Seated Spread Leg Forward Fold stretches the lower back, hamstrings, and adductors.

Seated Spread and Fold

Seated Spread and Fold Variations
Supine Fold

This is similar to the seated and standing forward fold poses. In this pose, the shoulders must be pressed to the mat. Students will have a tendency to raise the shoulders up to reach the ankles because of their lumbar inflexibility. The hips must stay pressed down at all times. The focus should be on getting the lumbar spine as flat as possible. If a student needs to hold on to the back of the knees while the legs are straight, this is acceptable as well.

Cobra Pose

Begin by lying in the prone position. Place the hands to the sides of the shoulders, palms down. First, really lengthen the spine, then slowly, with control peel your torso off of the mat. The legs should be fully extended to the rear. Chest should be open and lifted, roll the shoulders back and down away from the ears. Neck is long. There should be no tension in the lower back in this pose.

Health Benefits: Promotes suppleness in the spine, stretches the abdominals, opens the chest and releases tension in the neck, shoulders, and upper back.

MODIFIED COBRA

Begin Dog
Although the elements of up dog are the same as cobra, note that in Up Dog, the pelvis and knees are lifted off of the mat. The shoulders are down and back. The heart is lifted high as the chest is opened and relaxed. The head may also be tipped back in this advanced pose if there is no discomfort in the neck.

**Pigeon Pose**

![Image of Pigeon Pose]

Begin in Down Face Dog. Mindfully float one leg up then sweep that leg down and through into pigeon pose. The front knee is bent at a 45 to 90 degree angle. Try to keep the hips square and extend the back leg behind long. Keep the pelvis as flat as possible. Focus on total relaxation of the glottal muscles. Pigeon pose is an intense hip opener.

Health Benefits: Stretches the hip flexors and abductors.

**Pigeon Variations**

![Image of Pigeon Variations]

**Down Dog**

This pose will be a challenge for the majority of students; however, with time and patience it will become a resting pose. From hands and knees, exhale into an upside down “v”. The spine is elongated and the abdominals are engaged. The feet should be about 18 to 20 inches apart. The tailbone should be tipped up to encourage the lower spine and musculature to flatten out. The hands are 18 to 20 inches apart, fingers spread wide. The arms are pressed straight, the shoulders should not sag. There should be no tension in the wrists. Lower the chest downward only after the lower back is as flat as possible. Getting the heels flat on the ground without compromising alignment will require a great deal of patience.

Health Benefits: Down Dog is a wonderful weight-bearing resting pose. Down Dog stretches the entire back of the body as well as the hamstrings, calves, and Achilles tendons.

**Modified Down Dog (With Bent Knees)**

This stretch works well from a standing position as well. Grip the staff near the ends and straighten the arms. The top left photo show the starting position.

And the photo at the top right demonstrates the finish of the left-sided stretch. An equal amount of time will be spent on both sides.

Inhale as you begin the stretch and exhale as you near the maximum range of motion.
Steal Stance

This movement is taken from Chinese kung-fu. It is used to side-step or move to the back of an opponent. It is also an excellent standing spinal twist. The rear heel is elevated. The forward knee is over the ankle. The forward foot is turned out to the side 45 degrees. The hands are on the hips. The shoulders and head are facing the same direction the forward foot is pointing. The shoulders are down and back. Once you have completed one side, simply rotate on the balls of your feet and complete the pose on the other side. Moving back and forth every twenty seconds in a great pose flow.

Make sure you lift and free the ribs as you move into the twist.

Side Bend (stage 1 – feet apart)

Having your feet apart will give you much greater stability and reach. It is vital as the instructor that you help your students avoid rotation during this pose. The top shoulder should not come forward.

Side Bend (stage 2 – feet together)

Having the fees together will add a measurable amount of difficulty to this pose. The foundation for balance is diminished considerably. Having the feet closer together also places the body in a position in which it won’t bend as far to the side.

Blown Palm Pose

To move into the Blown Palm Pose begin in mountain. Really ground the feet into the earth, then stretch the arms up out of the ribs. As you exhale, release over to one side without twisting. Try to keep the right shoulder from rolling in and you reach the underside of the ribs around.

Wide Leg Blown Palm

This variation has many elements of the original Blown Palm pose but includes a standing straddle leg variation. Begin in a firmly rooted wide leg stance by engaging the core and pressing onto the outer edges of the feet. Stretch the arms up out of the ribs. Exhale as you release over to one side. Hold for several breaths, and then switch sides.

Bent Knee Morning Star - Begin on your back, legs extended, spine elongated. As you inhale, bring one bent knee into the chest. As you exhale, send your arms out to the side in a “t” (palms down for greater stability); fold that knee over to one side and send your gaze out and over the fingertips in the opposite direction. Hold for several breaths, switch sides.

You may also chose to keep your hands palm up.

Health Benefits: The Morning Star Poses pose helps to maintain a strong supple, flexible spine. It also massages the internal organs and stretches the abdominal muscles.

Child’s Pose

Child’s pose is a beautiful resting pose that is appropriate for the beginner as well as the advanced practitioner. Elongate the spine, relax the head and neck completely. Allow the glutes to release back into the heels. Visualize your back expanding slowly with each breath. Allow the portion of the ribs on your back to expand with each breath.

Health Benefits: stretches the back muscles and releases tension in the spine, calms the mind.

Child’s Pose Variations

This is a more advanced spinal twist. Both legs must be completely straight in this pose. The spine is elongated. Breathe deeply and fully in this pose for several breaths. Notice the straight line of energy from the crown of the head to the heel on the extended leg. Lines of energy are evident across the arms as well. Energy is also sent from the left hip outward to the left heel.

Health Benefits: stretches the back muscles and releases tension in the spine, calms the mind.
Tranquil Pose (Corpse Pose)

This pose should be included at the end of each Sport Yoga class. Begin by Lying on your back and closing the eyes. Allow the feet to fall open from the hips. Arms should be slightly open to the side, palms are lifted, shoulders are relaxed and down. Allow yourself to completely relax and absorb all of the work that was done in class. You may want to focus on relaxing the body, one body part at a time. Breath should be gentle and relaxed. Your students will enjoy remaining in this pose for at least ten minutes. Include visualization if you would like.

Health Benefits: Rests the mind and body, increases awareness. Rejuvenates, restores.

“Only when you can be extremely pliable and soft, can you be extremely hard and strong.”
- Zen Proverb

Integrating Sports Specific Training

To properly design a Sport Yoga program for an athlete, you must first ask yourself, “what are the primary physical demands that are required by this sport?” Therefore, it is your job as the instructor to analyze what is necessary to become successful in this particular sport and then choose which Sport Yoga movements would be most beneficial for this athlete. Below are two examples to show you this thought process. We have chosen golf and tennis (two one-side dominant sports). These are only BASIC examples. More extensive programs are definitely possible.

*We are only examining the physical demands of the sport, however we mustn’t forget that the mental control develop in Sport Yoga will be a benefit in any sport.

EXAMPLE 1: GOLF

Requirements for Sport

- Strong, stable stance
- Balance
- Core Strength
- Rotational Strength
- Flexibility (esp. core and shoulders)

Sport Yoga Recommendations

-Warrior I Pose
  • Increases body awareness, balance, strengthens glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, claves, ankles, feet, abdominals, arms, and shoulders.
  • Important for solid stance

-Extended Side Angle
  • Stretches the waist, opens the pelvic floor and groin. Strengthens the quads, glutes, hamstrings, knees, and ankles.
  • Important for good rotation and power in backswing

-Triangle Pose
  • Triangle Pose stretches the waist and the low back. It strengthens the quadriceps, calves, ankles, and feet.
  • Important for solid stance

-Tree Pose
  • Opens hips, improves balance and concentration, Strengthens Quads, glutes, hamstrings, calves, knees, ankles, and feet.
  • Important for balance and flexibility in ankle-foot complex

-Arm Circles
  • This warm-up helps to release synovial fluid in the shoulder joint
  • Allows for good range or motion in shoulder joint for swing

-Waist Twisting
  • Warms-up rotational core muscles
  • Allows for good rotation in swing

-Spread-leg Forward Fold with Twist
  • Stretches the hamstrings, hip adductors and groin. Elongates the spine and soothes the mind. Also releases tension in the shoulders and upper back, opens up the chest and the core rotators.
  • Allows for good range of motion in swing

-Posterior Hand Clasp Shoulder Stretch
  • Opens chest and helps bring those who are flexed forward (kyphotic posture) into neutral.
  • Helps maintain proper posture when addressing the ball and throughout swing. Greater power and range of motion.
EXAMPLE 2: TENNIS

Requirements for Sport
- Strength and quickness
- Balance (ankle stability)
- Strong Lateral Movement
- Flexible and strong shoulders

Sport Yoga Recommendations

- Tree Pose
  - Triangle Pose stretches the waist and the low back. It strengthens the quadriceps, calves, ankles, and feet.
  - Important for stability in ankle-foot complex and injury prevention.
  - Also important for power in lateral movement.

- Triangle Pose
  - Triangle Pose stretches the waist and the low back. It strengthens the quadriceps, calves, ankles, and feet.
  - Important for range of motion in swing (serve, forehand and backswing).

- Warrior II Pose
  - Increases body awareness, balance, strengthens glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, calves, ankles, feet, abdominals, arms, and shoulders.
  - Important for power and strength.

- Spinal Twist Pose
  - Spinal rotation while standing.
  - Important for power and range of motion in swing.

- Side Bend
  - Creates a strong foundation while stretching lateral flexors.
  - Important for power in serve.

- Alternating Hip Flexion and Leg Extension
  - Strengthens abdominals. Build heat in the body.
  - Good warm-up for lower extremity and for speed in court movement.

- Single-leg Thrust
  - Strengthens glutes and low back unilaterally
  - Allows for good warm-up in hips for power in court movement.

For more information on the NESTA Sport Yoga Program, please visit http://www.nestacertified.com/sportyoga.html