



Yoga is a wonderful way to balance the mind and body as well as work with the 7 main energy centers called "Chakras."



by Sarah Starr



Experience the Chakras Through Yoga



One of the main problems with really enjoying our practice centers around quieting the mind. Most of us get stuck in our heads when we practice Yoga, trying to figure out where our feet should be or caught in endless thinking, "Who is this person next to me? Does this shirt show my rolls? I thought this class was supposed to be easy!"

Using attention and intention is a great tool to bring you into your body, quieting the mind and becoming fully present. As you perform the poses,

pretend you can take your mind's eye into each specific chakra and hold your attention there. From your attention you can then add your intention, your purpose or your reason for putting your focus there. For example... Put your attention on the root chakra and allow your intention to be, "I feel balanced, centered and empowered." Breathe and allow the thinking mind to rest, letting your focus just be your intention and then simply feel whatever you feel. The mind will try to figure it out, just smile

and let the thoughts be. You may notice a sense of calm or stillness envelope you. That's using attention and intention as a tool to be fully present. You are now accessing a higher energy than just the mind, awakening the connection of the body, mind and spirit through each chakra. If your mind wanders back to, "Wow, I shouldn't have eaten that last cupcake! I wish I had time for a pedicure or Not another warrior lunge!" Simply breathe, smile and a thousand times over, come back to feeling.

Utkatasana (Chair Pose)

1. Stand with your feet and legs together. Pick up your toes and feel your inner arches lift. Gently spread the toes back into the earth.

2. Inhale, stretch your arms overhead, hands face one another. Energetically reach through the fingertips as you keep your shoulders relaxed.

3. On the exhale, bend your knees as much as you can, keeping your heels grounded, legs and knees together. Tail is under slightly. Breathe and relax around the mouth and jaw.

4. Keep your spine, chest and arms lifted, extending diagonally upward. Allow your torso to naturally bend forward slightly.

5. Hold your abdomen in toward your spine while still breathing deeply.

6. Inhale, straighten your legs and return to upright.

Repeat 4 to 8 times.



Photos by David F. Starr

- Good for the health of the knee joints and ankle joints.
- Very good for toning and healing the elimination system of the body.
- Tones and strengthens the back and core muscles.

*Be careful with your knees and only go as far down as comfortable.

CHAKRA ONE | Muladhara...meaning "root" and support. This chakra is about survival, cultivating a sense of strength, security and connecting us to earth energies.



Chair pose is a wonderful way to bring you back into your body, feel powerful and create a sense of renewed confidence. From the side this pose resembles a lightening bolt. When performed it looks as if you were taking a seat on an imaginary chair. It strengthens the muscles of the abdomen and thighs. As you practice chair pose, set your attention on the root area and then allow your intention be to feel balanced, centered and grounded.

Through the first chakra, we can listen and understand our bodies and move

into our natural state of well being.

As we become still, we move past the challenge of accepting our body and tune into loving it with appreciation. A well functioning root chakra also enhances our ability to function effectively on a day to day basis.

Supta Baddha Konasana (Cobbler's Pose)

1. Sit tall, with feet together, knees wide. Press the soles of the feet into one another, drawing your heels in close towards the body. The position of the legs looks like butterfly wings. * If you feel tension in the knees, set the feet further away from the hips.

2. As you clasp your ankles, allow the knees to stay level. Gently press the feet together

and feel the knees relax towards the earth.

3. Inhale, grow taller through the back of the head. As you exhale, lean forward from the hips, elbows move out to the sides. Keep the space from the navel to the heart open and allow the spine to stay long rather than rounding, shoulders relaxed.

4. Use the clasp of the feet to bring your torso forward, folding from the hips.

5. Relax your jaw, breathe deeply as you gaze softly off the cheeks. Breathe, as you use this time to receive the benefits of letting go.

- Hold for a count of 6 to 8 breaths

- To recover, inhale slowly come up and gently release your hands and legs.

Benefits

- Improves mobility in the hip joints
- Relieves tension in the sacrum, thighs, knees and ankles
- Tones the reproductive organs and the bladder
- Relieves any premenstrual tension and other menstrual problems
- Nourishes the lowest energy center or base chakra (reproductive organs)

Options

- *If you struggle to keep your back straight, sit on a cushion.
- *Contract the pelvic floor muscles lightly to enhance effectiveness

Cautions

- *If you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, remain in an upright position.
- *If you are menstruating, do not contract the pelvic floor muscles.



The task of the **SECOND CHAKRA** | or Svadhisthana... helps to move the energy out of the head, down into the core, cultivating our ability to flow in the qualities of sensuality, creativity and pleasure.

Hip and groin openers such as Supta Baddha Konasana or Cobbler Pose provides freedom of movement in the pelvis, helping us to let go and flow with change, developing our capability to receive. This forward bend in a sitting position also relaxes and soothes the nervous system, creating a calm, quiet mind. As you put your attention on the second chakra, allow your intention to be on the feelings of nourishment, warmth and touch.





Bidalasana (Cat Stretch)

1. Start on hands and knees. Hands shoulder and knees hip width apart.

2. Inhale, hollow your back so that your navel lowers toward the earth. Feel your chest expand as your back arches. Head and chin are lifted so that the front of the neck feels a stretch. Your tailbone is raised to

increase the arch in your lower back. Keep your shoulders pressing down so that your neck feels long.

3. Exhale, round your spine, initiating the movement from your navel, chin to chest. Repeat, alternating between the hollowing and rounding of your spine 3 to 6 times.

Shorter Version of Cat Stretch

1. Start on your hands and knees. First round your back up to the sky, tail under, then arch your back with your head and chin up.

2. Add the movement to your breath. As you inhale, look up, drop the navel towards the earth. As you exhale, tuck the chin, round the back.

*Use caution if you have knee problems.

**If you have neck problems, use it as little as possible while hollowing and rounding.

Benefits

- Relaxes the back, helps to relieve backache and fatigue
- Opens the chest area
- Strengthens, tones and stretches the abdominal and back muscles, massaging the internal organs.
- Helpful for constipation and diabetes
- Very beneficial during pregnancy



The THIRD CHAKRA | is the Manipura chakra and is the center of personal power, involved in self-confidence, action and self transformation; it also effects digestion and metabolism.

When you feel dis-empowered, third chakra poses reignite a sense of warrior energy allowing you to move from the strength of your core. The yoga posture that helps to open and focus the energy of the third chakra is Bidalasana or Cat Stretch. This pose offers a gentle and effective way to warm and stretch your back and abdominal muscles. As you place your attention on your solar plexus, breathe and allow your intention to be on feeling a sense of belonging and on purpose.

Anahata (Dynamic Twist)

1. Lie on your back, arms reach out like a "T"

2. Legs and feet rest hip distance apart.

3. Press your navel down towards the ground, feel your low back resting on the earth. Allow your head and spine to stay in a straight line.

4. Inhale feel the length of your spine. Exhale, lower your knees to the right. Keep hips in line with shoulders.

5. Inhale, return to center.

Repeat, lowering knees to left. Wrap this "windshield wiper" movement around your breath. Allow your shoulders stay grounded and feel your heart open as you twist and massage your internal organs.





Benefits

- Helps relieve backache
- Aligns the spinal vertebrae
- Gives a gentle squeeze, massaging the abdominal organs
- Increased vitality while calming nervous system

*Take care if you have a spinal injury.

*Twisting not recommended during pregnancy



The FOURTH CHAKRA | Anahata, is located at the heart. It's function is love and the inner state is compassion. Through the heart chakra, we connect to inner harmony and peace.

As you put your attention on the fourth chakra, breathe and allow your intention to feel joyous acceptance of yourself, radiating a deep peace that comes from feeling thankfulness in the moment.

When you find your self sitting hunched, shoulders rounded and difficulty breathing, try doing heart chakra poses. Twists are a wonderful way to open the heart and chest area, encouraging fuller breathing,

especially into the rib cage.

Visuddha (Rock Pose)

1. Find a comfortable seated position

2. As you inhale sit tall, allow the space from the navel to the heart to open.

3. Bring your arms out to the sides, palms face up.

4. Turn the head to the left and inhale, Turn the head to the right and exhale. 1 minute

5. Come back to center. Inhale lift the chin, look up, exhale lower chin to chest, look down. (1 minute)

6. Bring your hands to your knees, palms

down. Do alternate shoulder shrugs. Inhale lift a shoulder, exhale relax. Keep alternating from right to left as you focus on breathing deeply. (1 minute)

7. Lift and drop both shoulder simultaneously. (1 minute) Inhale both shoulders up. Relax.

Rock Pose is good for opening the throat area and calling attention to the neck, shoulders, arms and hands.



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The FIFTH CHAKRA | Visuddha, means purification. Located in the neck, throat, jaw, and mouth, the Visuddha chakra resonates with expression and communicating our inner truth to the world.

Chanting, singing, speaking, reading aloud are all good for the 5th chakra. The glands/organs/body parts associated with the 5th chakra are the thyroid, parathyroid, jaw, neck, mouth, throat, tongue and larynx. Yoga poses that are good for the 5th chakra are neck and shoulder stretches. As you place your attention on the fifth chakra, breathe and allow your intention to be on awakening to your inner truth, cultivating creative and loving communication.

Vrikshasana (Tree Pose)

1. Balance on one leg.

2. Place the opposite foot on the inner thigh of the standing leg in this pose. (start at ankle or calf if more appropriate)

3. The action of pressing the foot into the thigh and the thigh into the foot allows the upper body to lengthen thru the spine and neck for a greater feeling of stability.
4. Bent knee and thigh open out from the hip as you square your hips, torso and shoulders to the front.

5. Bringing the hands into prayer at the heart center turns the mind inward, fostering calm and clarity in the mind. Hold for 8 breaths and repeat on opposite side.
- A relaxed smile will boost your ability to ease into balance postures.

Use a chair or wall for added support in finding your balance.

Benefits

- Tree pose tones and strengthens the muscles of the legs, knees, ankles and feet.
- Balance postures help you to feel centered and infused with energy.
- Helps to cultivate a state of inner stillness and serenity.



*When you are first learning the art of balance, tree pose is a good place to start.

Anja, the Sanskrit word for the SIXTH CHAKRA | means to know, to perceive or to command.

It is located in the head at or just above the 3rd eye level. Balancing poses are a wonderful yogic approach to supporting the health of the 6th chakra. Stimulating this chakra will ultimately center and empower you, creating calm and mental clarity.

When the third eye is over excited we may get headaches, nightmares or have a hard time focusing. If the sixth chakra is weak, we experience a poor memory, eye problems and difficulty visualizing.

As you practice balancing poses, such as tree pose, allow you attention to be at the third eye. Breathe and allow your intention to be on opening and enhancing your inner vision, trust and knowing.



Shashankasana (Hare Pose)

1. Start from your hands and knees, push back, placing your palms and forearms down on the ground. Allow your forehead to rest on the earth and your hands to line up with your ears.

2. Using your hands for support and without feeling any pressure on your neck, roll from your forehead up onto the top of your head.

3. Support this position by contracting your abs and rounding your spine.

Hold for 3 - 6 breaths.

To release from the posture, roll back to the forehead and come back to sitting on your heels. Let your arms come down and rest. Gently, roll up, with your head coming up slowly. It's been down for a while, so you

don't want to bring it up too quickly. Allow yourself to come back to balance.

Sit comfortably. Breathe effortlessly. Close your eyes. Allow your hands to rest on your knees or in your lap. Feel the tension leave your body as you experience a deep calm.

- Sasamgasana or Hare pose nourishes the brain with an increased blood supply, enhancing all mental faculties including memory and motor skills.

- Helps to alleviate tension

- The increased blood supply helps to reduce or even prevent wrinkles.

- * Do not attempt inverted postures if you have an eye problem or heart condition

- * Do not practice if you have any pain or discomfort in your neck



The Sahasrara, or **SEVENTH CHAKRA** | is at the top of the head and serves as the crown of the chakra system. The element of the seventh chakra is connected to seeing our higher purpose and direction in our lives, expressing the highest state of enlightenment and assisting in our spiritual growth.

When this area is over stimulated it manifests as believing you are spiritually elite or more advanced intellectually. An under nourished crown chakra appears as an inability to think for yourself, low enthusiasm and lack of passion. As you focus your attention on the crown chakra, breathe and allow your intention to remember that you are part of the whole, connecting the mind, body and spirit.

As we allow our self to enjoy and use the practice of Yoga to enrich our

lives, we can gain insight into where we may be physically, emotionally or spiritually in need of healing. All of our chakras affect one another and work together. If we focus on only attaining spiritual enlightenment, we forget how important the lower chakras are. The lower chakras support us in the areas of family, home life and emotions that make up who we are on this journey. The upper chakras cultivate insight and wisdom, allowing us to see the big picture and how we are part of the collective

consciousness of the universe. As we open to a new perspective and cultivate thankfulness for all aspects of our self, we can allow the yoga practice and understanding of the chakras to be seen as a map, charting our spiritual and physical journey. It is in this self awareness of our inner and outer landscape that we can empower ourselves, creating harmony in our lives on all levels. +

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