



Yoga Teacher Training

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

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The Importance of Doing Warm-Ups or Sun Salutations

You want to get right into your yoga practice, but wait, before you jump right into practicing your yoga postures, make sure to spend some time warming up your muscles through warm-ups and sun salutations.

Warm-ups get the muscles ready for the action by increasing the speed at which they contract and relax and by mobilizing a greater number of motor units within the muscles. Warming up the body raises the body temperature which improves the oxygen supply to the muscles, making muscles more elastic and flexible.

Warm-ups are low level dynamic exercises, which should be completed prior to stretching and more strenuous exercise. The objective of the warm-up is to raise total body temperature and muscle temperature to prepare the entire body for more strenuous activity. The warm-up period prepares the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, nervous system and the musculoskeletal system by gradually increasing the demand on those systems so that they are able to accommodate the demands of more strenuous activity.

Experts agree that the main purpose of a warm-up is to increase the blood circulation in order to raise both the general body and the deep muscle temperatures. This in turn helps to heat up the muscles, ligaments and tendons in preparation for more vigorous activity. A proper warm-up provides many benefits due to the elevated temperatures associated with it. After warming up, the likelihood of injury is reduced, muscle efficiency is increased, the potential for muscle pulls is reduced and ease of movement improves. Proper warm-ups can also help reduce the severity of post-exercise muscle soreness. The higher temperatures and increased blood flow resulting from warm-up are important for delivery of oxygen to the muscles and for prevention of build-up of unwanted waste products which can lead to muscle soreness.

Warm ups and sun salutations are valuable because they reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during a yoga practice by increasing circulation and loosening up the major muscle groups. Warm-ups prepare our bodies for the stress of activity. They help prevent or reduce muscle soreness, muscle strains, and the tearing of muscle fibers or tendons. It's important to warm up each major muscle group before beginning a yoga practice, since you use all your major muscle groups in a well-conceived yoga program. Sun Salutations can provide the bulk of an excellent warm-up for most yoga practices. However, for a restorative practice, beginning hatha yoga class, or prenatal yoga class, sun salutations may not be appropriate. In this case, it's important to utilize other warm-ups in place of sun salutations to ensure that students properly warm-up their muscles before practicing any deeper postures or stretches.

Besides preparing you physically for yoga, warm-ups can also help you prepare mentally for your yoga practice. To get the mental benefits of warm-ups, first start by taking a few moments to focus on your breath, breathing slowly and deeply through your nose. Then, begin your warm-up exercises, focusing on your breath and on your movements and connecting the two together. Done with mindful awareness, warm-up exercises provide you with rhythmic movements that helps to focus your attention on

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your body and your breath, letting go of the thoughts or concerns from your daily life. It helps you shift gears and bring your thoughts more fully to your yoga practice. The illustrated warm-up exercises in this section explain in detail how to breathe with your movements.

Warm-ups and sun salutations improve range of motion, so you can more easily move your arms and legs into proper position for yoga postures. If muscles are cold, they won't work as efficiently and move into place as easily, as they will if they are warm. Warm joints are more mobile and have greater range of motion. Joints are held together by ligaments and tendons. Ligaments in particular have very poor blood supply compared to muscles, so they are difficult to warm up. Muscles can help take the strain off the ligaments and tendons - but only if they are warmed up sufficiently.

In yoga, since we want to work and stretch all major muscle groups, it is important to include specific warm-up exercises that involve each part of the body – Sun Salutations do this. Also, once you are warmed up, it is important to begin a major activity while still warmed-up, so you reap the benefits of warm muscles.

To review, some of the benefits of warm-ups and sun salutations include:

- 1) decreasing the risk of injury (pulling a muscle or injuring a joint)
- 2) prepare the body for the stress of physical activity
- 3) prevent or reduce muscle soreness after physical activity
- 4) improve range of motion
- 5) provide a mental warm-up, allowing the mind to shift gears to yoga practice

The Difference Between Warm-Ups and Stretching

There is an important difference between warm-up and stretching. Many people stretch and call it warm-up. This is incorrect. Unlike stretching, in warm-ups the position is not held. Students flow from one gentle movement to the next in order to increase circulation and gently warm the muscles. It is important to warm-up before beginning a yoga practice and to practice most of the deep stretching positions towards the middle or end of the practice when your body is most warm. Stretching (in yoga and otherwise) is a static activity in which the position is held for a period of time. In yoga, stretching also involves focusing on the breath and using the breath to help you go more deeply into the stretch. If you stretch your muscles without prior warm-up, the muscles are cold and are more prone to injury, such as muscle tear or strain. Before yoga, begin with a warm-up period to raise the body temperature and loosen muscles in every major muscle group.

Warm-ups are valuable in two important ways. First, postures are more easily attained when the joints have been loosened and the muscles warmed by stretching and by the increased circulation of blood. Secondly, warm-ups reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during the main practice. They also reduce the likelihood of stiffness in the muscles and joints following a yoga session.

In the next sections, we will go through the details of teaching and practicing specific warm-ups and sun salutations.

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Warm-Up Exercises

Try all of the warm-ups listed in the following pages. Then determine your own head-to-toe warm up plan.

Stretching Breaths



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Ankles
- Torso

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position) with legs extended
- Place hands on floor next to sides with palms down
- Inhale, reach arms overhead (palms up) and flex feet
- Exhale, press hands back down next to sides (palms down) and point toes
- Continue moving arms and feet back and forth, moving with your breath
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their abdominal muscles engaged, so the back doesn't become overly arched as the arms are stretched overhead. Encourage students to focus on stretching long, stretching as far as they can in two opposite directions. Have students flex their feet as their arms come overhead, then point their toes as their arms come back to their sides. This helps to warm-up the ankles and legs as well as the arms and shoulders.

Instruct students to connect their breath with their movement by inhaling until their arms are all the way overhead and exhaling until their arms are at their sides. Encourage them to focus completely on their breath and the movement, letting go of any other thoughts.

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Bridge Flow



Warms Up:

- Thighs
- Hips
- Back
- Shoulders

Steps:

- Begin lying on back with hands at sides, palms down, and knees bent, feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel.
- Inhale, press down with arms and feet and lift hips up towards the ceiling
- Exhale, slowly roll back down, bringing hips back to the floor.
- Repeat 5-8 times, moving with the breath

Variation:

As you inhale, raise your arms overhead as you lift your hips up

Exhale, bring your arms back to your sides as you roll your hips back to the floor

Teaching Points:

Have students to slightly tuck their tailbone as they lift their hips, so they can better feel each vertebrae press down and lift up from the floor as they roll up and down. Remind students to connect their breath with the movement (inhaling on lift and exhaling as they roll down). This helps to slow down the movement and helps students to move with more body awareness, bringing their focus to what they are doing.

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Windshield Wipers



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Quadriceps
- Low back

Steps:

- Start lying on back with knees bent and feet on floor, a little wider than hip width apart.
- Place arms out in T position with palms down
- Drop knees to the right, back to center, then to the left and back to center
- Repeat 8-10 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their feet a little wider than hip width apart. This helps to better warm up the hip flexor muscles as well as the low back. Check that students are keeping their back flat on the floor, so that spinal rotation is achieved, rather than simply leaning onto one side of the body and then the other.

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Knees to Chest



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Low Back

Steps:

- From supine (back lying) position, bring knees to chest
- Place hands just below knees and hug knees into chest
- Rock side to side, catching self with elbows
- Feel massage across sacrum

Knee Circles

Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs, Knees
- Low Back

Steps:

- From knees to chest, place hands on knee caps (right hand on right knee cap and left hand on left knee cap)
- Begin making opposing circles with knees by drawing knees to chest, then apart, then pressing knees away and back together.
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way
- Then, make opposing knee circles in the opposite direction (starting with knees together at chest, then pressing knees away, then apart, then back towards chest and together)
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way

Variation:

Knee Circles with Knees Together:

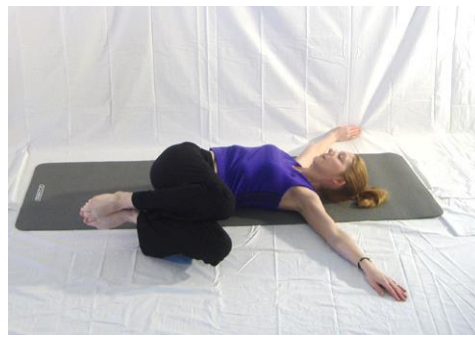
Knee circles can also be practiced by keeping knees together. First create circles with knees in a clockwise direction, then in a counter clockwise direction.

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep the movement smooth and easy (not going to fast or jerky). Remind students to focus on their breath, keeping it long and relaxed.

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Knees side to side



Warms Up:

- Spine
- Back
- Hips
- Abdomen

Steps:

- Start lying on back
- Bring knees to chest
- Place arms out in T position with palms down
- Drop knees to right, back to center, then to the left and back to center

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to keep both shoulder blades on the floor, rather than rolling onto their side as they drop their knees to the side. This helps to warm up many of the deep spinal muscles and some of the anterior torso muscles (especially obliques).

Variation:



Feet can be lifted higher and knees pressed slightly away from chest before dropping knees side to side. This will place more demand on obliques and abdominal muscles, so make sure that this variation is not the first warm-up of the set.

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Leg Pumps



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Hamstring Muscles
- Abdominal Muscles

Steps:

- Lie on back
- Bring right knee to chest and extend left leg on floor (head is relaxed on the floor)
- Switch legs, bringing left knee to chest and extending right leg on floor
- Repeat 6-10 times
- Students can keep head and shoulders on floor, or lift head and shoulders to engage abdominal muscles

Variation:

Students can also do this warm-up with their head and neck lifted. This places more work on the abdominal muscles, so it's best to start with the head and neck relaxed.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to start with head and neck relaxed and to raise the head only when they are ready. Remind students to connect their breath with their movement (inhale, right knee in to chest, exhale, switching sides). This helps students move with more awareness, as they must focus on what they are doing to connect breath with movement.

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Opposite Hand to Foot Stretch



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Shoulders
- Hamstrings

Steps:

- Start lying on your back with your legs extended on the floor and your arms overhead or at your sides
- As you exhale, bring your right hand and left foot up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, bring your hand and foot back to the floor
- On your next exhale, bring your left hand and right foot up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, bring your hand and foot back to the floor.
- Continue alternating, bringing the opposite hand and foot up towards the sky and then as you inhale, bringing your hand and foot back to the floor
- Repeat 8-10 times

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Rock and Roll



Warms Up:

- Back
- Neck
- Spine
- Legs

Steps:

- Begin lying on back
- Bring knees to chest with hands under thighs and tuck chin to chest
- Begin rocking back and forth, bending knees as you come forward and straightening legs as you roll back
- Exhale as you rock back and inhale as you come forward
- Continue rolling back and forth for 6-10 times
- Come all the way up to sitting

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students may find this exercise uncomfortable on their back, especially if they are only using a thin mat a hard wood floor. Encourage students to go slow, only rocking a few inches back and forth to start and to pay close attention to the feeling of the exercise, so they can rock a little further, as they become more comfortable with the exercise. As they go further, they can begin connecting their breath with their movement, exhaling as they rock back and inhaling as they come forward.

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Neck Stretch Warm-Ups



Warms Up:

- Neck
- Upper Back

Steps:

- Start in seated position (cross legged)
- Sit up tall, reaching up through the top of the head
- Draw shoulders back
- Exhale, drop chin towards chest, keeping elbows and shoulders pulled back
- Inhale, raise the head back to center
- Do this five times, then on the last exhale, drop the chin and stay in this position for three breaths, breathing through the nose
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Exhale, slowly drop right ear towards right shoulder
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Do this five times, then on the last exhale, drop the ear towards the right shoulder and stay in this position for 3 breaths
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Repeat on left side

Teaching Points:

Never have students do neck circles (neck rolls). The neck is not a ball and socket joint and is not meant to move around in circles. Movements to the front and each side can be done instead. To do this, drop the chin to the chest then move the chin towards the right shoulder, then back to the chest, then move the chin towards the left shoulder and back towards the chest. Repeat this movement three to five times.

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Seated flowing twist



Warms Up:

- Muscles that rotate the spine
- Abdominals and muscles of low back
- Shoulders and upper back
- Neck

Steps:

- Start sitting in a cross legged position with hands on knees
- Exhale, turn looking over right shoulder, bringing left hand to right knee
- Inhale back to center
- Exhale, turn looking over left shoulder, bringing right hand to left knee
- Continue turning from side to side, moving with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep their arms and shoulders relaxed and loose, so they can more easily flow from side to side. Remind students to rotate through their entire spine by not just turning their back, but also looking over the shoulder, stretching through the neck.

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Seated arms side to side



Warms Up:

- Sides of body/torso
- Shoulders and upper back
- Arms

Steps:

- Start sitting in a cross legged position with hands on knees
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop your left hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the left with right hand
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop right hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the right with your left hand
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching both arms overhead
- Continue moving from the center to one side then back to center and to the other side
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to stretch both arms up overhead as they inhale before dropping to the other side and not to simply move back and forth from one side to the other.

Some students with limited hip flexibility may find it uncomfortable sitting in a cross legged position. Have these students sit on a block or rolled blanket, with their sitting bones on the block/rolled blanket and their legs on the floor. Raising the hips while the legs remain crossed on the floor requires less hip flexibility than sitting on the floor with legs crossed. Eventually students can reduce the height of the prop (block/rolled blanket) and then eliminate it completely.

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Chest and Shoulder Stretch



Warms Up:

- Muscles of the shoulder girdle (shoulder joints, shoulder blades)
- Chest
- Upper back
- Arms
- Neck

Steps:

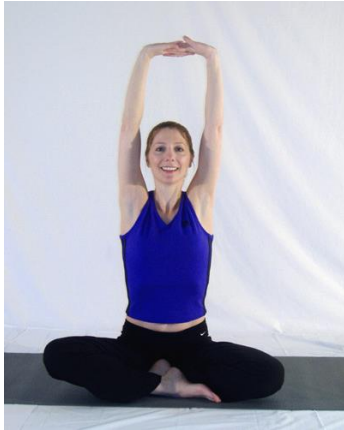
- Start sitting cross legged or with legs out in front of you
- Inhale, bring arms back, keeping arms lower than shoulder height and look up
- Exhale, clasp hands in front of chest at shoulder height and tuck chin to chest
- Continue bringing arms forward and back (horizontal adduction and horizontal abduction)
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to drop their head and round their back as much as possible as they clasp their hands in front of their chest, and to look up, letting their head fall back, as they bring their arms back. This helps to warm up the neck and upper back.

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Seated Swaying Palm Tree



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Wrists
- Sides of the body

Steps:

- Start sitting in cross legged position
- Inhale, reach arms overhead and interlace fingers
- Turn palms away and up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, stretch up through your palms, keeping your shoulders relaxed
- Exhale, reach your palms to the side
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching straight up
- Exhale, reach your palms to the other side
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching straight up
- Continue this pattern of movement, moving to the side and back to center
- Repeat 5-8 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Students often have a tendency to hunch their shoulders in this warm-up. Instruct students to press down through their shoulder blades as they reach up through the palms of their hands.

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Sun Worshipper



Warms Up:

- Breathing (lungs)
- Shoulders
- Upper Back
- Neck
- Chest
- Wrists

Steps:

- From chest and shoulder stretch exercise, bring hands behind back with fingers pointing back
- Inhale, lift up through chest and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Exhale, allow head to fall back
- Continue breathing deeply through nose and squeezing shoulder blades together for 4-5 breaths

Variation:

From Sun Worshipper, on inhale, lift hips up to open chest more, on exhale lower hips back to floor. Continue lifting hips with each inhale and lowering with each exhale. Repeat 5-6 times.

Teaching Points:

For people who have trouble with their neck, instruct them to look forward, but to keep lifting up through their chest and squeeze their shoulder blades together.

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Spinal Flexes



Warms Up:

- Back
- Abdomen
- Entire Spinal Column

Steps:

- Start on all fours with knees about hip width apart and hands about shoulder width apart
- Check that wrists are placed directly under shoulders and knees are directly under hips
- On exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen and tuck chin to chest
- Inhale, drop belly, look up and draw shoulders back
- Repeat 6-8 times

Variation:

Students can also do this warm-up by creating the movement from the head to the tail and then from the tail to the head. To do this, as students exhale, have them first drop their head, then round the upper back, then bring that rounding motion through the entire back, and finally tuck and squeeze in their tailbone. As they inhale, have them first release their tailbone and drop their hips, then drop their belly, lift their chest, draw their shoulders back and finally raise their head. This creates a wave of motion and a flow to the warm-up.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to really stretch through their back by having them imagine they are trying to reach the ceiling with their back as they round it. As students look up and arch their backs, remind them to draw their shoulders back and squeeze their shoulder blades together, so they can better warm up the muscles of their chest and upper back.

Students should do their best to slow down their breath and move with their breath. This helps to bring their focus to the movement and to bring the movement to every part of their back.

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Spinal Balance Flow



Warms Up:

- Back and Spine
- Hips and Legs
- Arms and Shoulders

Steps:

- Start on all fours with wrists directly under shoulders and knees about hip width apart
- Look towards floor, keeping neck long
- Inhale, extend right arm and left leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Inhale, extend left arm and right leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Continue extending opposite arm and leg, 4-7 times on each side
- Keep extended arm and leg parallel to the floor, lengthening through the spine (not arching)
- After completing the flowing spinal balance, students can also hold the pose, breathing softly for 3-4 breaths while extending opposite arm and leg.

Variation:

- Inhale, extend right arm and left leg out
- Exhale, bring the right elbow and left knee together under your belly
- Continue this movement on the right side 4-6 times
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Students often raise their leg too high when extending it and arch their back. Remind students to stretch long and lengthen the spine, rather than kicking up. Also encourage students to breathe slowly and really move with their breath, so they can fully feel the extension of their spine and notice if they begin to arch through their back.

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Cross Foot Behind



Warms Up:

- Low Back
- Hips
- Legs
- Sides of the body

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Inhale, extend right leg back (parallel to the floor)
- Exhale, cross right leg over left leg and look over left shoulder towards right foot
- Inhale, extend right leg straight back again (parallel over the floor)
- Exhale, cross right leg over left leg and look over left shoulder towards right foot
- Repeat 4-6 times
- Change sides and repeat with left leg 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

When students cross their foot over the other leg, encourage them to press their hips to the other side. This helps to increase the stretch along the sides of the body.

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Extended Child's Pose



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Hips
- Back
- Knees

Steps:

- From all fours, sit back on heels, drop belly towards thighs and head towards mat
- Place forehead on floor
- Keep arms extended, stretching hands forward
- Breathe into back, feeling back stretch and expand on inhale and relax on exhale

Teaching Points:

Some students, especially heavier students, may find it becomes more difficult to breathe with their belly pressed against their thighs. Have these students spread their knees apart, making more room for their belly.

Variation:

Tuck chin to chest more, bringing top of head towards floor. This will help to better stretch the neck and upper back.

Instead of breathing into the back, breathe into your belly, feeling it press against your thighs as you inhale, and relax on exhale. This helps to exercise the diaphragm and gently massage the internal organs.

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Hip Hinges



Warms Up:

- Back
- Hips
- Shoulders
- Knees
- Wrists

Steps:

- From extended child's pose, lift head looking forward
- Inhale, bring hips forward, then drop them down as you bring chest forward and shoulders back
- Exhale, press hips back, as you bend knees, coming back into extended child's pose
- Continue moving back and forth, flowing with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their elbows straight throughout the movement. This will help to better warm up their shoulders. Also, many students may find it difficult to drop their hips to the floor, while keeping their arms straight. Encourage them to drop their hips only as much as is comfortable, while keeping their arms straight.

Students should move slowly, connecting their movement with their slow, deep breath. This helps students become more mindful of their movement and notice when they may feel some tension. Paying attention to the signals of their body helps students avoid injury.

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Serpent Stretch

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Back
- Hips
- Knees
- Wrists

Steps:

- From extended child's pose, lift head and turn hands inward, so finger tips point towards each other
- Inhale, bend elbows out to the sides, as you bring hips forward, keeping chest as close to the floor as possible, while hips are raised
- Continue pressing chest forward and up as you drop hips to the floor and straighten arms
- Exhale, press hips back, as you bend knees, coming back into extended child's pose
- Repeat 4-6 times

Teaching Points

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There are many students for whom this warm up is not appropriate. If a student has problems with their shoulders, have them practice hip hinges instead. Hip hinges provide a more gentle warm-up to the shoulder joints.

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Yogi Grind



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Lower Back
- Knees
- Arms

Steps:

- From all fours, walk hands forward into a modified plank position
- Begin to circle your hips around, dropping your hips towards the floor and then circling back up to all fours.
- Circle in a counter clockwise direction for about 4-5 circles and then change directions and circle your hips in a clockwise direction.
- When you are done, come into cobra, or come into extended child's pose.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to be loose and to bend their elbows as they come forward and to move their spine in different directions as they circle around.

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Down Dog (Warm Up Version)



Warms up:

- Legs
- Ankles
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Back

Steps:

- Start in all fours (on hands and knees with hands directly under shoulders and knees directly under hips)
- Spread fingers wide, curl toes under and press hips up and back
- Press hips up and back and begin straightening knees (knees don't need to be fully extended – good to have some bend to the knees in the warm-up)
- Relax head and neck, looking back towards feet
- Pump heels one at a time towards the floor
- Shift hips from side to side

Variation:

Have students lift one leg up at a time (inhaling as they raise their right leg, exhaling as their foot comes back to the floor, then inhaling as they raise their left leg and exhaling as their left foot comes back to the floor). Repeat 4-6 times on each side.

Teaching Points:

Many students keep their head lifted, remind them to look towards their feet and shake their head from side to side. This will help loosen the muscles of the neck and upper back. Many students are not able to straighten their knees much at all. Encourage them to keep their knees bent, as they work on pressing their chest towards their feet. It's better to have bent knees than a rounded back. As students press down through one heel at a time, encourage them to slowly pump their heels. Moving more slowly will help students focus on the feel of the warm-up and on loosening the muscles in their calves. Finally, bend and straighten knees together. As students bend their knees, have them press their chest towards their feet, and relax their chest as they straighten their knees. This will help warm-up the back, shoulders and chest, along with the legs.

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Up Dog/Down Dog



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Back
- Shoulders
- Wrists

Steps:

- Start in down dog
- Inhale, bring chest forward and drop hips, drawing shoulders back (Up Dog with toes curled under)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog
- Continue moving back and forth, moving with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to move slowly and mindfully, moving with their breath and engaging the abdominal muscles. Encourage students to move with control rather than swinging back and forth. This will help students tune into their bodies more and more fully engage their core muscles.

Instruct students to pull their shoulders back and open through their chest as they come into up dog. This will help warm-up their shoulders and chest a little more.

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Lunge/Runner's Stretch



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs (Hamstrings and Quadriceps)

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees - shoulders over wrists and hips over knees) or start in down dog
- Bring right foot forward, placing right foot between your hands
- Check that right knee is directly over right ankle
- Scoot left foot back until gentle stretch is felt
- Inhale, straighten right leg as you bring hips back towards back foot (keeping hips raised)
- Exhale, come forward again, bending front knee and dropping down into lunge
- Continue moving back and forth 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

Have students move slowly and only drop hips or press back until they feel a gentle stretch. This exercise is to warm up the muscles in the legs, not stretch them too deeply, so it's important that students move slowly and simply focus on maintaining the back and forth movement, only going to the point where they feel a very gentle stretch. This warm-up is best used towards the end of the warm-up sequence, once students have already been moving their bodies through a few warm-ups.

Make sure that while in the lunge position, students keep their knee over their ankle or slightly behind (not in front). Bringing the knee in front of (or past the point of) the ankle can strain the ligaments in the ankle.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Easy Forward Fold



Warms Up:

- Legs
- Back
- Shoulders
- Neck

Steps:

- From down dog, walk feet forward, placing feet between hands (about hip width apart and parallel)
- Keep knees slightly bent
- Drop head down, looking towards knees behind you
- Hold onto opposite elbows
- Shake head from side to side to loosen neck and upper back
- Stay in this position for 4-5 long breaths (breathing through the nose)
- On next inhale, bend knees more and lift head and chest, using the strength of the legs to come back to standing

Teaching Points:

Many students keep their head and neck slightly lifted during the forward fold. Remind them to look back towards their knees and shake their head from side to side. This helps to relax and warm up the muscles in the neck and upper back.

Encourage students to keep their knees slightly bent in this first forward fold to get their legs ready for this stretch and to prevent any strain in their low back.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Straddle – Lunge side to side



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Arms

Steps:

- From easy forward fold, step left foot back and turn to the left, coming into a straddle position
- Walk hands to the middle of the straddle, keeping hands about hip width apart
- Look at a point on the floor a few feet in front of you (this will keep the head raised, but not over extended)
- Turn feet out so that the knee can bend over the ankle as you move from side to side
- Exhale, bend your right knee, bringing your hips to the right
- Inhale, straighten your knee, coming back to center
- Exhale, bend your left knee, bringing your hips to the left
- Inhale, straighten your knee, coming back to center

Teaching Points:

Remind students to turn their feet out. This will allow the knee to bend directly over the ankle as they move from side to side. Instruct students to press back through their hips and reach forward with their head to lengthen through the spine and keep the back from rounding. If students have difficulty keeping their backs flat as they straighten their knees coming back to center, encourage them to keep their knees a little bent when in the center position. This will help them keep their back from rounding.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Straddle – Windmill arms



Warms Up:

- Arms
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Back
- Hips
- Legs

Steps:

- Start in straddle forward fold (standing straddle with hands on floor)
- Bring feet into a forward/parallel position (not turned out)
- Place right hand in the middle of the straddle
- Inhale, sweep left hand up
- Exhale, lower left hand to floor (next to right hand)
- Inhale, sweep right hand up
- Exhale, lower right hand to floor
- Continue moving arms one at a time up and down, moving with breath
- Repeat 4-6 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to turn feet in, so they are parallel (not turned out). This helps engage and warm up the muscles in the fronts of the thighs. Instruct students to press back through their hips and reach forward with their head to help lengthen the spine and keep the back from rounding. If students have a difficult time reaching the floor with their hands, encourage them to bend their knees, rather than round their back.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Flower



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Arms
- Shoulders

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping hands towards the floor then crossing arms
- Inhale, come back up, stretching arms out
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping arms down and across
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Many students bend forward as they squat down. Remind them to keep their head and chest lifted, so they are using their leg muscles and not placing any strain on their back.

Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Star/Moon God



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Upper Back
- Legs
- Hips

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, drawing elbows down and back (towards bottom ribs)
- Inhale, stand up, stretching arms up
- Exhale, squat down, bringing elbows down and back
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint. Remind students to squeeze their shoulder blades together as they bring their elbows down and back. This will help to better warm up their shoulders and upper back.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Swaying Palm Tree (Standing)



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Sides of Body
- Wrists/Hands

Steps:

- Start standing
- Place feet a few inches apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Inhale, reach arms overhead, interlacing fingers and turning palms up towards the ceiling
- Exhale, reach to the right
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching up through the palms of the hands
- Exhale, reach to the left
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching up
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep their shoulders relaxed as they stretch up through their hands. This will help keep the shoulders from hunching and becoming tense. Remind students to keep their arms next to their ears and to keep their chest open to the front. This will help warm up the shoulders and keep the chest from dropping towards the floor.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Flowing Crescent Stretch



Warms Up:

- Back
- Sides of body
- Belly
- Shoulders
- Arms

Steps:

- Start in standing position (feet hip width apart and parallel)
- Inhale, reach arms overhead, interlacing fingers
- Exhale, reach arms to the right, while pressing hips to the left
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching arms straight up
- Exhale, reach arms to the left, pressing hips to the right
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching arms straight up
- Repeat 3-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep arms next to ears and to keep chest open to the front, not dropped towards the floor. This will help to warm up the shoulders and chest.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Shoulder Stretch



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Upper Back

Steps:

- Start standing with feet about hip width apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Bring arms up to shoulder height
- Bend elbows, holding onto opposite elbows, so forearms are directly in front of chest
- Exhale, pull elbows to the left
- Inhale, bring elbows back to center
- Exhale, pull elbows to the right
- Inhale, bring elbows back to center
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep elbows raised to shoulder height. This will help to better warm up the arms.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Mountain Pose (Tadasana)



Warms Up:

- Breathing
- Focus and concentration (brings attention to the body before beginning the practice)

Steps:

- Start standing
- Bring feet a few inches apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Evenly distribute weight on feet (not having more weight on toes, heels or edges of feet)
- Lift up through the top of the head
- Draw shoulders back and down
- Engage abdominal muscles and drop tailbone down (brings pelvis into neutral position)
- Bring chin parallel to the floor

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students may have poor posture and not even realize it due to years of standing in a particular way. Tadasana helps students become aware of their posture and to self correct any problems they may have with posture. It's also a useful exercise to help students become more focused on what they are doing and more focused on their yoga practice before they begin the actual practice.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Example Warm-Up Routines

The following warm-up routines take 5-10 minutes and will warm up the major muscle groups for your students. Below is a summary of the sample warm-up routines using the warm-ups previously discussed.

Warm Up Routine #1 (good for basic/beginning class):

Seated arms side to side
Sun Worshipper
Down Dog (warm up version)
(Step one foot forward, turn to side)
Straddle Windmill Arms
Sun Flower
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #2

Bridge Flow
Windshield Wipers
Knees side to side
Leg Pumps
Rock and Roll
Down Dog (warm-up version)
Easy Forward Fold
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #3

Seated Flowing Twist
Spinal Flexes
Spinal Balance Flow
Child's Pose
Hip Hinges
Flowing Lunge (lunge/runner's stretch flow)
Down Dog
Up Dog/Down Dog flow (or vinyasa)
Easy Forward Fold
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #4

Chest and shoulder stretch
Spinal Flexes
Cross Foot Behind
Child's Pose – walk hands side to side
Down Dog – (warm up version)
Easy Forward Fold
Flowing Crescent Stretch
Tadasana

Practice teaching any one of the warm up routines listed above, focusing on flowing one warm-up into the next or create your own warm-up sequence.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Create Your Own Warm-Up Routine

Write 6-8 warm-ups you could use together in a warm-up routine. Make sure you test how the warm-ups will flow together.

Warm Up Routine #1

Warm Up Routine #2

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar)

A sun salutation is a graceful sequence of positions performed as one continuous exercise. Sun Salutations (or Surya Namaskar) limber up the whole body in preparation for the asanas (yoga postures). Surya means the sun and Namaskar is a greeting of honor and respect. Sun Salutations are traditionally practiced at sunrise, when yogis believed the air to be rich in prana (cosmic energy). All the Sun Salutations are helpful in warming up muscles throughout the body before practicing and holding standing poses. Sun Salutations are an effective way to increase the suppleness of the spine and tone the entire body. Each position counteracts the one before it, stretching the body in a different way and alternatively expanding and contracting the chest to regulate the breathing. Eventually, as students become well-practiced in Sun Salutations, breath and movement become more and more connected, making this a breathing exercise as well as a set of physical postures. Practiced daily, it brings great flexibility to the spine and joints. Students should begin with two or three rounds and work up to twelve rounds.

Even for more experienced classes, it is important to begin to move the body and do parts of a sun salutation before doing an entire sun salutation series.

Preparation for Sun Salutations

To prepare for Sun Salutations, have students do specific warm-ups or have them do the following preparation for Sun Salutations:

- Start on all fours
- Curl toes under and press back into Down Dog (warm-up version)
- Come forward into Plank (top of push up)
- Lower down (Chaturanga)
- Inhale, lift head and chest to Cobra (keeping low belly and thighs on floor)
- Curl toes under, exhale, press back to down dog
- Repeat steps from first down dog once more
- From down dog, walk feet forward into an easy forward fold
- Come up to standing and begin Sun salutations.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Traditional Sun Salutations

In this course, we will discuss the three most common forms of the Sun Salutation: Sun Salutation A, B and C. While there are many other variations, these three are the most traditional forms of sun salutations. You should experiment and discover the forms of sun salutations that work best for you and your students.

Sun Salutation A

Steps:

- Start standing with hands together at heart
- Inhale, sweeping arms overhead, bringing palms towards each other
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips, keeping the chest open, spine long, bringing nose towards knees
- Inhale, hands to shins, look up slightly to lengthen through spine
- Place hands on floor, fingers spread wide and step back (or jump back) to plank (top of a push up)
- Exhale, lower chest towards floor, keeping elbows in and bringing chest down before stomach reaches the floor
- Inhale, lift head and chest, press down with hands until only hands and tops of feet are on floor – shoulders back (Up Dog)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog. Take 3-4 long breaths through the nose
- Inhale, walk or jump feet forward
- Exhale, fold forward, nose toward knees
- Inhale, bend knees, sweep arms out and up, standing up
- Exhale, bring hands to heart, still standing

Variation for Flow Class:

Start with hands at heart and, keeping hands together, reach hands straight up. Follow the rest of the steps through Down Dog to the last forward fold. Then keep palms together as you come back to standing, reach arms overhead, then fold forward again as you exhale, going right into the next sun salutation.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Salutation A

Step 1



Step 2-inhale



Step 3-exhale



Step 4-inhale



Step 5-hold breath



Step 6-exhale



Step 7-inhale



Step 8-take 3 breaths



Step 9-inhale



Step 10-exhale



Step 11-inhale



Step 12-inhale



Step 13-exhale



Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Salutation B

Similar to Sun Salutation A, but with additional emphasis on developing strength and endurance, it is most appropriate for more advanced students. In addition to the steps in Sun Salutation A, it includes additional movements, such as coming into Warrior 1 from Down Dog on each side.

Steps:

- Inhale, bend knees as you sweep arms up (Chair)
- Exhale, straight legs and fold forward, folding from the hips, keeping the chest open, spine long, bringing nose towards knees
- Inhale, hands to shins, look up slightly to lengthen through spine
- Place hands on floor, fingers spread wide and step back to plank (top of a push up)
- Exhale, lower chest towards floor, keeping elbows in and bringing chest down before stomach reaches the floor
- Inhale, lift head and chest, press down with hands until only hands and tops of feet are on floor, shoulders back (Up Dog)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog.
- Inhale, step right foot forward
- Exhale, turn back foot out and bend right knee over right ankle
- Inhale, lift head and chest and reach arms overhead (Warrior 1)
- Exhale, drop hands back to floor
- Inhale, step back to plank (hold breath in plank)
- Exhale, lower chest towards floor, keeping elbows in and bringing chest down before stomach reaches the floor
- Inhale, lift head and chest, press down with hands until only hands and tops of feet are on floor, shoulders back (Up Dog)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog.
- Inhale, step left foot forward
- Exhale, turn back foot out and bend left knee over left ankle
- Inhale, lift head and chest and reach arms overhead (Warrior 1)
- Exhale, drop hands back to floor
- Inhale, step back to plank (hold breath in plank)
- Exhale, lower chest towards floor, keeping elbows in and bringing chest down before stomach reaches the floor
- Inhale, lift head and chest, press down with hands until only hands and tops of feet are on floor, shoulders back (Up Dog)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog. Take 3-4 long breaths through the nose
- Inhale, walk or jump feet forward
- Exhale, fold forward, nose toward knees
- Inhale, bend knees and keep knees bent while lifting head and chest and sweeping arms up (Chair)
- Reach all the way up with hands and straighten legs
- Exhale, bring hands to heart, still standing

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Salutation B

Step 1



Step 2 - inhale



Step 3 - exhale



Step 4 - inhale



Step 5 – hold breath



Step 6 – exhale



Step 7 - inhale



Step 8 – exhale



Step 9 – inhale



Step 10 – hold breath



Step 11 – exhale



Step 12 – inhale



Step 13 - exhale



Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Step 13 – inhale



Step 14 – hold breath



Step 15 - exhale



Step 16 – inhale



Step 17 – exhale



Step 18-inhale



Step 19-exhale



Step 20-inhale



Step 21 – inhale



Step 22 - exhale



For flow variation:

Instead of bringing hands back to the heart at the end of each salutation, you flow right into the next salutation. So, the sequence is:

- Inhale, sweep arms up
- Exhale, fold forward
- Inhale, step right foot back then left foot back to plank
- Exhale, lower down (chaturanga)
- Inhale, up dog
- Exhale, down dog
- Inhale, step right foot forward and then left foot forward

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

- Exhale, fold forward
- Inhale, bend knees and sweep arms all the way up
- Exhale, fold forward (going directly into your next salutation)

Sun Salutation C

This sun salutation is similar to the form in Sun Salutation A, but focuses more on developing flexibility than strength.

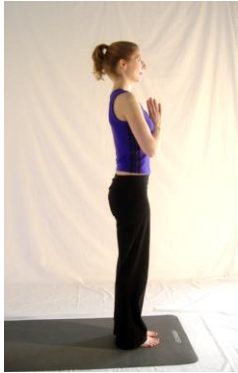
Steps:

- Inhale, sweeping arms up and arching back (hips press forward as arching back)
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips, keeping chest open, then bringing nose towards knees.
- Inhale, step the right foot back and drop down into a lunge (left knee is bent directly over left ankle)
- Exhale
- Inhale, step left foot back, coming into plank (top of a push up)
- Exhale, drop knees, chest and chin to the floor, keeping the hips raised (inchworm)
- Inhale, lift head and chest, pressing down through hands. Keep elbows slightly bent and in close to ribs. Keep low belly on floor (Cobra).
- Exhale, press hips up and back to down dog
- Inhale, step right foot forward and drop down into lunge (right knee over right ankle)
- Exhale
- Inhale, step left foot forward
- Exhale, fold forward, bringing nose toward knees
- Inhale, bend knees, sweep arms out and up, standing up, then arching back
- Exhale, bring hands to heart, in standing position.
- Repeat on other side (bringing left foot back first)

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Salutation C

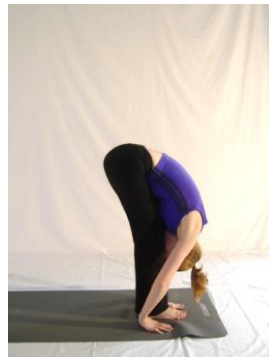
Step 1



Step 2-inhale



Step 3-exhale



Step 4 – inhale



Step 5 – hold breath



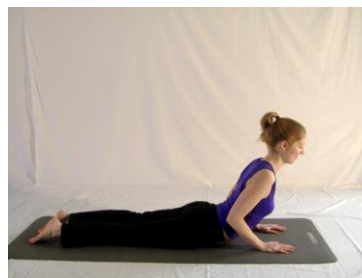
Step 6 - exhale



Step 7 – exhale



Step 8 – inhale



Step 9 - exhale



Step 10 – inhale



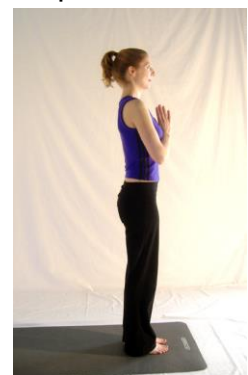
Step 11 – exhale



Step 12-inhale



Step 13-exhale



Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Correcting Specific Problems in Sun Salutations

There are some common problems that students often face when practicing sun salutations. Becoming aware of these problems will enable you to better help your students.

Forward fold –

Problem - Head up in forward fold (strains neck)

Solution – Nose drops towards your knees

Lunge –

Front heel up, hands in front of front foot or knee in front of ankle

Solution – hands on either side of front foot, front knee directly above ankle, move back knee back further

Plank –

Problem – Hips too high or sagging too low

Solution – should be able to see only tops of thighs and feet

Up Dog/Cobra –

Problem – not doing one or the other, but some type of combination where the arms are straight, but the thighs or knees are still on the floor. In up dog, only the tops of the feet should be on the floor and in cobra the arms should remain bent

Solution – have everyone do cobra first, then move onto up dog, practicing both after warm-ups, but before starting sun salutations

Down Dog –

Problem – hands or feet too far apart or back too rounded

Solution – hands are shoulder width apart, feet hip width apart. Bend knees if necessary to keep from rounding back.

Reaching Arms Straight Up or Standing Backbend

Problem – swayback

Solution – tighten thighs, press hips forward slightly

****Note – You will find more detailed information about each of these poses in subsequent sessions of the teacher training program.**

Practice teaching the three main forms of Sun Salutations, using both a traditional form and a flow variation.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Moon Salutation

This salutation is a gentler form of salutation that works well in a basic or beginning yoga class. The focus is on the flow and the flexibility it helps develop.

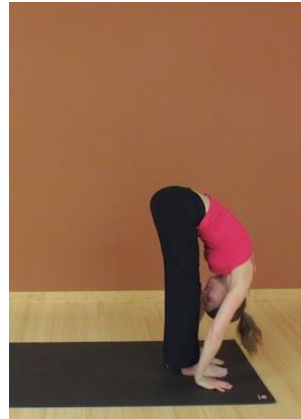
Steps:



Start standing



Inhale



Exhale



Inhale (step back), Exhale



Begin to straighten back leg



Inhale (arm up), Exhale



Inhale (up to standing)



Turn feet to other side



Exhale (triangle), Inhale



Exhale-lunge, Inhale-step forward

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations



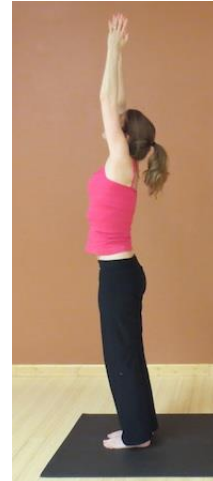
Exhale (fold)



Inhale



Exhale



Inhale



Exhale (fold)



Inhale (step back), Exhale



Inhale (arm up), Exhale



Inhale (come up)



Turn feet to other side

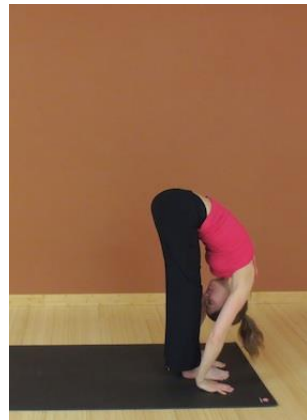


Exhale (triangle), Inhale

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations



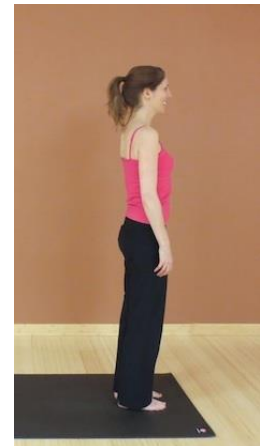
Exhale-lunge, inhale-step forward



Exhale



Inhale



Exhale

Steps:

- Inhale, sweeping arms up and arching back (hips press forward as arching back)
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips.
- Inhale, step the right foot back and drop down into a lunge (left knee is bent directly over left ankle)
- Exhale
- Inhale, turn right foot out, straighten both leg, and reach right hand up (coming into triangle).
- Exhale
- Inhale, come up to standing
- Exhale, turn feet to the right (to the back of room), reach right hand to right foot, and left hand up, coming into triangle.
- Inhale
- Exhale, drop left hand to floor and bend right knee, coming into a lunge (facing the back of the room)
- Inhale, step left foot forward next to right
- Exhale, fold forward
- Inhale, bend knees, sweep arms out and up, standing up, then arching back
- Exhale, bring hands to heart
- Inhale, reach arms overhead, arching back
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips
- Inhale, step the left foot back and drop down into a lunge (left knee is bent directly over left ankle)
- Exhale
- Inhale, turn left foot out, straighten both leg, and reach left hand up (coming into triangle).
- Exhale
- Inhale, come up to standing
- Exhale, turn feet to the left (to the front of room), reach left hand to right foot, and right hand up, coming into triangle.

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

- Inhale
- Exhale, drop left hand to floor and bend left knee, coming into a lunge (facing the front of the room)
- Inhale, step left foot forward next to right
- Exhale, fold forward
- Inhale, bend knees, sweep arms out and up, standing up, then arching back
- Exhale, bring hands to heart

Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to do warm-ups before beginning the practice of yoga asanas? What is the main purpose of warm-ups?
2. What is the difference between warm-ups and stretching? At what point in a yoga practice should deep stretching yoga postures be practiced?
3. Name a series of warm-ups (7-10 warm ups) you could have your class do to warm up most of the body (legs, hips, torso, spine, shoulders, arms)? Explain the parts of the body that is warmed up by each exercise.
4. Why is it important that students do not roll their neck around in full circles?
5. What is a common mistake students make when practicing the spinal balance warm-up?
6. What areas of the body are warmed up in “sun worshipper?” How can people with neck problems practice sun worshipper?
7. Why is it important to keep the knee over the ankle in a lunge position?
8. Where should students be looking when practicing “down dog” in warm-ups? Is it okay for students to bend their knees in down dog? Why?
9. Why should students keep their knees slightly bent when doing a forward fold during warm-ups?
10. What areas of the body are warmed up in “sun flower?” Why should students keep their head and chest lifted during this exercise – keeping their head over their hips and not bent forward?
11. What are the benefits of practicing tadasana (mountain pose) before starting your yoga practice?
12. Explain what “sun salutations” are. What are the benefits of practicing sun salutations?
13. Write down the steps in “preparation for sun salutation.”
14. Practice Sun Salutation A. What is the most challenging part of Sun Salutation A for you personally?