

5 Yoga Asanas to Strengthen Your Hip Flexors

As a society we are very productive. We spend seriously countless hours sitting at a desk, typing away or pushing papers. As a society we are really comfortable. We spend too many hours sitting on the couch watching tv or scrolling the phone.

Neither of these scenarios help out our hip flexors. What's a hip flexor, you ask? It is a set of muscles that connect your lower back to the upper legs: the iliacus and psoas major muscles (aka iliopsoas), and the rectus femoris (part of the quadriceps).

The hip flexors' job is to allow you to bend at the waist and to bring your knee up toward your chest.

People with hip flexor pains and strains generally get it from not moving their bodies enough (sitting for too long), but it can also happen if you overwork the muscles, like can sometimes happen when running, playing sports, and even dancing.

The usual indicator of hip flexor strain is pain at the front of the hip. The muscles can be torn just a little, or a lot, which makes it difficult to walk without a limp.

If you have to sit a lot for work, besides aiming to get up for a few minutes every hour, you can also aim to incorporate the following yoga asanas into your practice to help strengthen and lengthen these critical muscles.

Taking time to stretch slowly will really pay off in the end!

Camel Pose / Ustrasana

Kneel on the floor with your knees hip width apart and tuck your toes on the floor, with your heels high. Keeping your shoulders open put your palms on your lower back and start to lean back. Remember, keep your heart up as you bend your back to reach your hands onto your heels, with your fingers pointing toward your toes.

Breathe deeply for 30-60 seconds as you imagine your chest lifting up. If you can't get your hands all the way to your heels, just keep them supporting your lower back as you bend your head back. When you come back up, do so slowly, and after you've done the pose 3 times, sit down on your shins and lean forward into child's pose for a few breaths to counter that lower back stretch.

High Lunge

This one is easy and really effective at strengthening and stretching the hip flexors. Step your right leg back and put your hands to the ground on either side of your left foot. The ball of the right foot holding your body steady. You are looking for a right angle in your left knee, so adjust the spacing between feet accordingly.

Your torso should be on your left thigh; your back straight and engaged, like the right leg. Stay here for 30-60 seconds and then repeat on the other side. Do this a few times on each side. You can go to Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svasana) between each interval for a break.

One-Legged King Pigeon Pose II / Eka Pada Rajakapotasana II

I know, I know, this pose isn't for everyone, but just try it out, even the first half of it. Best recommendation is to start in Staff Pose (Dandasana – sitting with legs extended in front of you). Bend your right knee and place your foot in front of your sitting bone. Tilt to the right and turn your left leg straight back behind you, fully extended, shin down.

Your right foot and left knee will take your weight, and you can find stability by allowing the right knee to move forward past the right toes. In that balance, reach one arm up and bend the elbow back in order to hold onto the left foot. Bring the other hand to the left foot, and keep your elbows pointed at the ceiling, and like Ustrasana, keep your heart lifted.

When you are ready, allow your head to bend back so that the top of your head is at the ball of your left foot. Breathe here for 20-30 seconds, then slowly come back up, release slowly, then repeat on the other side.

Upward-Facing Dog Pose / Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

Well, you probably know how to do this pose, so I'll keep it short. This is easiest to come into from Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svasana). Keep your wrists directly below your shoulders, and make sure that your shoulders are not slumping over here.

Your thighs should be off the floor, and the muscles fully engaged. It helps to turn your thighs in slightly, and the elbow creases facing forward. Look straight ahead and breathe for a couple breaths. You can move in and out of Downward and Upward Facing Dog (Adho and Urdhva Mukha Svasana) a few times, or just come down to lay on your belly between each time.

Revolved Side Angle Pose / Parivrtta Parsvakonasana

Start with your legs almost 4 feet apart. Toes of left foot pointing forward, toes of right foot pointing to the right; heels aligned. Bend your left knee until it is at a right angle. As you exhale, turn your torso to the left and reach your right hand down to the ground, to the left of your left foot. Bring your left arm up over your ear. Keep your right leg active as you press the thigh upward and extend strongly into the floor with your heel.

Some people find it difficult to keep the right foot flat on the ground. Keep it as low as possible, and work toward

getting it flat over time. Remember, we're working on hip flexors here, so it is important to concentrate on supporting that growth. Obviously repeat on the other side, and hold for 30 seconds on each side, for at least 3 times on each side. This pose is also really great for digestion, and will help those who experience pain in their lower back.

If done with care and control, this set of five poses can be done in under 20 minutes. You might not find time every day to do them, but if you can try 3-5 times per week, you will do a great service to your dear hip flexors. Happy movement!