

# 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!

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## Walking Ease – Use Google Maps to Track Your Distance

Yoga, running, and lifting weights are the physical activities I most enjoy, but I will always love walking. It is a seriously simple thing to do, and seriously effective in keeping our bodies in good health and good form.

Walking is well known to help strengthen bones and muscles, to improve balance and coordination, it can improve your mood, help you be more creative, burn a few calories, lower blood sugar, and best of all, walking [has been shown](#) time and again to decrease your risk of chronic disease.

Just imagine, walk your way to pain-free joints, reduced risk of cancer, lowered blood glucose and insulin resistance, and probably the best benefit: reduce depression and anxiety. Getting your body moving with just a simple walk (it doesn't have to be a power walk) will make huge long-term benefits in

your life!

To maintain a healthy body (and mind!) it is recommended that we walk 10,000 steps each day. That's around 4.5 miles. That's a LOT. Especially if you aren't a particularly fast walker. I think that is part of the challenge... to take that much time each day to break away from the daily stressors in life.

This article isn't meant to be about the benefits of walking, though I can't help referring to them since they are pretty amazing. What I want to share with you, in case you don't already know about this, is the tool freely available at <https://www.google.com/maps> to help you track your walking goals. If you go to this page, it should default zoom into your current location. You can do a right click on your mouse and a popup window will appear that offers directions to/from here. At the very bottom of that list is the tool **Measure distance**. When you select this, a black ring will appear at the spot where you clicked. Go to another point on the map and click again and a dot will appear. Click one more time to make another dot and you will see a line appear with the distance from starting point to ending point. If you keep putting dots at turn points, you will see the distance add up and will clearly see how many blocks you need to go to get to your 4-5 mile point. If you make a mistake, or decide to take a different street, no worries... just click once on the dot that you want to remove, and it goes away, instantly recalculating your distance.

I really like using this tool before I set out for a run especially so I know which streets to take to make up my mileage. I also really appreciate this tool when I'm walking or running in a city where I don't live, where I don't know the streets so well, so I can get a sense of where I'll be and try to find the more visually interesting route. If you click on the little box at lower left of the map page, where it says "satellite," you can see the terrain as well. This is great for when you want to see some nature along the way as well.

You'll see in my screengrab illustration for this post that I was eager to cross as many bridges as possible for this walk. I was also lucky that day to have glorious weather and as it was spring time, I saw many trees blooming, and loved the sound of water rushing under me so often.

A hot tip for those of you with tracking apps: you can pre-plan fun drawings and designs using Google Maps, then set your app to track your route as you walk it. Afterward, you can take a screengrab of the app with the red line in a fun shape over streets. Great social media content right there, folks!

Your measured distance route might take you 10,000 steps, it may take more steps, or maybe you have a way to go to build up to that. See how far you can keep going; continue the positive impact you are having on your body and mind, and challenge yourself to go a certain distance daily. You will love the results no matter where your map takes you!

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## 3 Yoga Asanas for Stronger Wrists

Some of us have weak wrists. Some of us suffer from carpal tunnel. Yoga can help.

First let me tell you a secret about developing stronger wrists with Yoga. There are several poses that you can use, which I'll explain soon. But first, if you haven't read my post [3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy](#), let me tell you something. The tip that doesn't get talked about enough is: keep intention in your fingers. Your fingers help your wrists bear the impact of supporting the weight of your body. When preparing for wrist poses, spread out each lovely extension as

wide as you can, and, like your toes in Tadasana, lift the tips of your fingers and allow the power to radiate from your fingers. If you put intention into sharing the responsibility of the weight, you will lighten your load.

### **Plank Pose**

This is probably the most universal way to gain strength in your wrists. You can do from standard straight legs and back on toe tips and flat hands, or with knees to floor. Variations include side plank and Upward Plank Pose. Hold your version for at least 30 seconds. As you develop wrist and core strength, extend that period to longer times. Work a few minutes of Plank Pose into your day. Even when you are not exercising.

### **Crow Pose**

I don't know about you, but I love this pose. It simultaneously reminds me of the fun I had playing in the yard when I was 7 years old and of how strong it makes me feel right now. I feel empowered knowing I can keep my body quiet in an awkward position. It gives me strength to keep my gaze on that spot just above my head on the floor as I count as many breaths as possible before coming back down, with as much control as possible. Start in a squat and place your wrists directly below your shoulders. Relax into the pose by putting your knees in your armpits, just to do a slight stretch. Then place your knee caps on the back of your triceps as you lean forward slightly. Slowly lift your toes off the floor. If this pose is new to you, you can work to just keep your toes 2-3 inches off the floor. As you gain more strength, your toes can come together a foot off the floor as you maintain a calm, steady breath as you hold yourself in balance on your wrists for an increasing number of breaths.

### **Handstand**

This pose is, of course, not for the faint of heart, but wow, can it make you feel good! Most Yoga teachers don't want you to do a handstand until you are at least into an intermediate level, because it takes an extraordinary control to keep your body in balance during handstand. Normally you are not using the wall, but simply pushing your legs overhead in the middle

of the room. But let's start small. Near a wall, start on all fours – hands flat on the floor and toes tucked under with knees on the ground. Then push your knees up and back, as if in downward dog. When you are ready, flip one leg upward, with the other joining the first directly after. Your fingertips should be about 12 inches away from the wall. Once your heels are on the wall, keep your feet parallel to the floor and toes pointed. Keep the intention and the strength in your legs while maintaining a focus on the strength your fingers are providing to the pose. Once you have breathed 10 deep breaths, slowly, with control, bring your feet (legs straight) down to the floor. As you gain strength, keep in the inverted position for an increasing number of breaths. Generally Handstand is done towards the end of a yoga sequence, so if you are working on Handstand alone, you might want to take a few moments in child's pose at the end to restore your body before you come to stand again.

If you perform these three poses with some regularity, in just a few weeks you will note that your wrists are stronger. And most hopefully the pains you occasionally feel at night or even during the day in your forearms will melt away before long.

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## Mix It Up, Pumping Up Your Workout at the Gym

Staying motivated is always a challenge. If you have access to a gym, it is helpful to mix up your routine from time to time. Some people want to do something different every time they step foot in a gym, others feel more comfortable using 2-3 machines and that's it. This article will hopefully give you some basics on using new machines, and tips on ways to step up



your game if you are already familiar with these machines.

I advocate for mixing up your routine, because, when you do, it sort of confuses your body and it has to work harder to compensate. This means you burn more fat. If you go to the gym regularly, you may or may not be using more than the treadmill and some weights. Consider incorporating equipment like a rowing machine, a stair climber, or elliptical into your regular routine.

### **Rowing Machine**

Rowing machines are amazing because they provide a full-body workout. When you sit down secure the foot holds and set the resistance low, to 2-3. Keep your back erect and core engaged as your knees are bent and hold onto the handle. Start by pulling back on the handle, then push with your feet to extend your legs (keep knees bent slightly) and, leaning back, keeping your arms strong as you pull the bar up to your chest. Stay there for a moment, then bring your body back, first with your feet, then your arms following. Then do another and another, working your way up to 20 reps in a minute, or more! Keep your focus on your form, and keep all your muscles as tight as possible. You can challenge yourself to do more each minute, and then start to increase the resistance.

Rowing machines burn an impactful ~250 calories in 30 minutes. You work your arms, legs, back, and core muscles all while getting in some cardio. If you are a slightly competitive person, you can keep challenging yourself to do more by the minute. And love the sweat it brings! Added benefit to rowing is that it is a non-weight bearing exercise, which is really helpful to those suffering with arthritis, or stiff joints.

### **Elliptical**

The Elliptical machine is popular at most gyms because it a low impact exercise. You benefit from the movement of running, but your joints aren't slammed the same as when you are

running. It is a versatile machine, as you can go forward or backward, you can use your legs and arms, or only your legs, and it is perceived to be easier than running on the treadmill. If you want to use the Elliptical machine for cardio, then work to increase your strides per minute on the machine's screen – you should be aiming to get to about 150 strides per minute if you want to break a sweat.

If you are looking more for toning your thighs, press more forcefully with your heels to work your hamstrings and glutes, and press more forcefully with your toes to tone your quads and the front of your thighs. Your core can get an extra workout if you go hands free and only use your feet to move the machine. Be sure that your top half is not twisting from side to side. You can help yourself stay steady by keeping your hands on your waist. Once you get the hang of the Elliptical, you can intensify your workout by pushing fast for 60 second intervals throughout your workout. Be sure to add a warm up and cool down to the interval.

### **Stair Climber**

Doesn't really take a scientist to figure out that this machine is a great way to build lower-body strength! Anyone who has walked up 2 or more flights of stairs knows that climbing stairs is not for slouches. The great thing about a Stair Climber is that your leg muscles can get really strong. You are working your glutes, quads, calves, and hamstrings. To get the best results, keep your core engaged, and your spine erect. Keeping your body weight as an active force directly above your legs ensures that they work even harder to keep climbing to... um, nowhere?! If you have to use the handrails, only use them to keep yourself erect, and don't hunch over or you'll miss the full exercise.

Like with the Elliptical, you can target specific muscle groups by switching up how you place your feet on the stairs. If you want to target your quads, push off with the ball of

your foot. If you are aiming to target the glutes and hamstrings, put more weight on your heels as you step up.

Because the Stair Climber engages your largest muscles, if you keep up pushing those very active muscles, you end up increasing your metabolism, and you lose weight that much more quickly. Heart pumping cardio plus lower body strength training equals burning more calories while you are working out *and* after you leave the gym, than just a cardio workout alone.

It is pretty obvious how you can take this exercise to the next level. Just increase how fast you climb the stairs. Go from slow climb to normal step to sprinting. In terms of variations, this is where it gets fun: step up to the side, double step up, or going backwards! If you can find some entertainment in the exercise, your time on it will go that much faster, and you'll be closer to reaping the benefits of increased calorie burn in your sleep.

Some fitness machines offer a fantastically complicated option of selections on a digital interface. Most machines have a "manual workout" mode. If you feel overwhelmed by what to enter, just hit the manual button, and find an up or down arrow to increase (and decrease!) your workout intensity. As you use these machines more often, you will discover various built in workout programs such as Fat Burning, Speed Intervals, Calorie Goal, Heart Rate Zone Trainer. You can try a new program each time you use the machine to discover which is your favorite. If you've already got a routine on one of these machines, please share below what makes it exciting for you!

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# Trouble Sleeping? Try the 7-4-8 Breathing Method

I don't usually talk about this, but after I was unexpectedly fired from my job of 18+ years, I felt the stress.

Where will I come up with the money for the mortgage? How will I find a job locally that will pay the same as I was making? Will I be able to make it?

It isn't surprising that I was losing hair and losing sleep.

During that time, I tried several techniques to help me sleep, and the need for trying was serious as on many days I was waking up at 4 in the morning and just couldn't get back to sleep.

One of the methods I tried, and I found worked best for me, is the 7-4-8 breathing method. Simply put, you breathe in while counting to 7, then keep your breath in for 4 counts, and finish by slowly breathing out for 8 breaths.

It takes some practice to go slowly but then you can absolutely reap its benefits.

This method was apparently pioneered by Dr. Andrew Weil, who recommends exhaling completely before you start and make a "whoosh" sound from your mouth as you do so. Then close your mouth and breath silently 7 inhalations, keep the breath in for 4 counts, and then 8 exhalations. Do this 4 times total, or repeat until you fall asleep.

The movement of your body will send a signal of relaxation and calm to your mind. The regulation of your breath also helps relax your muscles as oxygen fills the lungs deeply.

Being truly focused on the three part count means your mind can't get distracted by our daily burdens such as bills to

pay, mouths to feed, or lessons to teach.

Using this method, I find that by concentrating on the count that my body feels heavier and if I can be really still, I start to perceive my mind moving in rhythm to my breath and then fade screen.


This breathing technique has been shown to provide calm for overly anxious people.

**When exposed to a triggering situation, anxious individuals can benefit from slowing down their breathing to help them keep focused on, well, nothing.**

At least hopefully not whatever was making them anxious.

Some people say if you are using this for anxiety (and I guess when you are alone!), that each time you finishing exhaling to blow out your mouth so that your lips flap and make a fluttering sound. I haven't seen why this is suggested, but my guess is that it gets the anxious energy out all the more fully.

If you are experiencing difficulty sleeping, try this method and see if it helps you fall asleep more quickly.

Download Heather's free 15-minute guided meditation to help you sleep! 

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## Face Yoga to Banish Wrinkles

I've never been one to worry much about wrinkles or sagging skin as I've gotten older. I tend to see wrinkles as an

indication of wisdom and life experience. But furrowing my brow is something I don't like the look of on my face, and it started to bother me when I started to see lines form between my eyebrows. I didn't even know how much I furrowed my brow until my mom said something about it to me as I was getting my wedding dress fitted years ago. As I stood there in a small dry cleaning shop in Brooklyn, she said to me, as I was looking at myself in the mirror, "You know, you should really work on that scowl." I wasn't irritated and didn't even feel all that stressed, but I finally realized that this was one of those unintentional habits I'd formed. Though I can't stop time, I can be attentive to moments when I scowl and see if it is possible to just stop myself. A few years ago I learned about face yoga (which earlier I didn't even know was a thing.) What I walked away with most from trying it out was that it really helped me recognize when I am scowling just purely because I felt the muscles I'd been working out during the exercises. I want to share with you some tips for face yoga, otherwise known as face exercises. There are people trained in this form, so I won't pretend to be an expert, but I'd like to share a few tips that I learned to get you started.

**The Owl** helps keep the forehead firm, and reduces lines and wrinkles.

Form a "C" shape with your thumbs and index fingers and place the edge of your hand around your eyes – with your index fingers just above the eyebrows and your thumbs on your upper cheeks. Look up as you open your eyes wide. Pull down slightly your index fingers as you try to raise your eyebrows at the same time. Keep the resistance going for two seconds. Repeat 3 times.

**The Frown Buster** helps reduce lines between eyebrows and firm the forehead, while also relieving tension.

With your fingers slightly spread, put your fingertips on your

forehead, with your index finger nearest your hairline and your little fingers just touching your eyebrows. Allow your eyes to open wide, but don't raise your eyebrows. Gently pull your fingertips away from each other (to the side). Hold the tension for for 10 seconds and then repeat two more times.

**Shifty Eyes** gives the optic nerve a workout and firm up the muscles around the eye that cause wrinkles. This exercise also helps boost circulation. Standing (or sitting) while relaxed with your shoulders back and spine straight, look ahead. Keep your body position and move only your eyeballs. First look as far to the right as possible (again without moving your head) and then look straight ahead. Then look as far to the left as possible and then back to center. Next look as high up as you can, move through the center ahead of you, and then look down as far as possible. Close your eyes for 2-3 seconds after you have looked in all four directions and then repeat again two times.

I would suggest you start with these easy moves to help your face muscles to naturally keep wrinkles away. It has been a long time since I've done these exercises regularly, but recall that if you do a full face yoga routine six times a week, you will see results on the seventh day. People who do this regularly say you will easily look five years younger. While I don't do a full face yoga routine often, by performing these exercises with some regularity helps me much more quickly catch myself from scowling, or wrinkling my forehead in general.

In a future post, I will also share some tips for eye yoga. Back when I was doing eye yoga on a regular basis, my eyesight improved so well I was able to stop wearing glasses! It is amazing what your body is capable of in really a very short amount of time, and with almost no effort!

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# 10 Tips and Tricks to Help Lose Belly Fat

Here are some ideas to get you motivated to lose a few pounds. As always, you have to keep up the positive habits to see positive results. Keep up the good work, and please let me know your most powerful tip or trick in the comments below!

## 1. Up your Interval Training

It really helps to mix up your routine. If you are a runner, don't always go the same speed or distance. Make some runs long and slow and others short and quick. Incorporate resistance training into your cardio routine. When you

## 2. Consume Olive Oil

You probably already know how much I love EV00 from my post [The Many Benefits of Extra Virgin Olive Oil](#). According [to this site](#), consuming 2 tablespoons of olive oil will help "improve your blood pressure, your glucose levels and your good cholesterol." And when you make it up to 3 tablespoons a day, you will start to see the effect of weight-loss. Use olive oil as part of your salad dressing, and use it in place of butter or margarine in your favorite recipes.

## 3. Hydrate with water

Seems a lot of people have trouble getting enough water. We don't all need the same amount of water. How much we should drink depends on our activity level, the weather if our activity is outside, and how much we weigh. The recommended formula is to take about 60% of your body weight and drink that many ounces of water daily. If you weigh 150 pounds, you'd need 90 ounces. Don't drink too much, but don't drink



too little. One of the benefits of drinking water is that you fill up more quickly and don't need to eat as much.

#### 4. Get enough sleep

Getting enough rest is really important to your body. When we don't get enough sleep, our body produces higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, that increases our appetite. Allowing your body to rest calmly will naturally allow that belly to trim down. Another tip to reducing body stress is to keep a regular sleep schedule, even on the weekends.

#### 5. Keep moving

I know, a no brainer, but it is certainly effective. Do small things to start like park at the far end of the parking lot when you go to the grocery store, if you have stairs in your home, walk up and down them 10 times in a day even if you split it up throughout the day. Go for a walk around the block, or more!

#### 6. Vinegar

Probably by now you've seen an ad for the apple cider vinegar diet. The acetic acid of apple cider vinegar lowers your blood sugar levels, decreases insulin levels, improves metabolism, reduces fat storage, burns fat, and suppresses appetite. <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/apple-cider-vinegar-weight-loss> Apple cider vinegar isn't the only vinegar you can use to benefit your health, but it is certainly is a popular one that is easy to find.

#### 7. Reduce Stress

Basically this is the same issue as not enough sleep, in that high cortisol levels get you off balance. Incorporating meditation, yoga, and light exercise (like walking) into your day can have a massive impact on reducing stress, thus showing up in a slimmer waistline.

### 8. Don't eat after dinner

This works wonders for many people. One great rule of thumb is not to eat after 8 pm. Allow your body to digest your food before you start eating again in the morning. When your body is resting at night, it isn't able to burn as many calories when you are up and moving, so you give your body a break by not filling it up in the evening before you sleep for 8 hours.

### 9. Eat smaller meals more often

It is important to keep a reasonable portion if you want a trimmer mid section. Many people like to eat 5 mini meals a day to keep their metabolism active and their stomach organ a moderate size. By eating more frequently your appetite will be suppressed more often, which helps stabilize your blood sugar, thus providing the slim factor.

### 10. Drink green tea

The beneficial components of green tea are its flavonoids and caffeine. These help elevate your metabolic rate and increase fat oxidation (you burn fat quicker than normal). Green tea is also rich with antioxidants that help boost your brain and keep you healthy. Incredibly, studies have shown it also has an impact in helping our bodies fight and prevent cancer. Green tea supplements are also available for those of you who don't care for the taste of green tea.

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## 3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy

There are so many good things we can do so simply, and for free, for our bodies and mind. Yoga is one of them. It doesn't

matter if you are super athletic, or barely get off the couch, you can do yoga poses.

This morning during my own practice, it occurred to me that yoga can be so simple. My earliest days of practice was in the Ashtanga tradition, so I knew asanas to be rigorous and make me sweat.

Taking time to appreciate each pose and how your body interprets the movement is of course important. In just a few minutes, you can do these three poses and your day will be brighter and you will be stronger. Another good habit.

## **Tadasana/Mountain Pose**

If you are just starting out, step up from the couch, and simply stand erect in Tadasana. This is Mountain Pose. Stretch your shoulders back and lift your heart. Tuck in your sacrum (that's the little triangular bone at the end of your spine) just slightly, and keep your core engaged. Your thighs should also be engaged.

A trick to ensure you are really standing steady is to lift your toes, just standing on the base of your foot. If you can keep your balance here, sway just a little to feel the strength within you. Then go back to keeping your mountain firm. Stretch your toes out and place them down, ideally with each toe standing on its own, not touching another.

Your arms are also firm and straight, some teachers say erect fingers touching, others say give each finger some room (like the toes). Be here and breathe for 5-10 deep inhale and exhalations.

### Tadasana

- Improves posture
- Strengthens thighs, knees, and ankles

- Firms abdomen and buttocks
- Relieves sciatica
- Reduces flat feet

## Downward Dog/Adho Mukha Svanasana

The most iconic yoga pose is Downward Dog. Basically, if you can make a big upside down V with your body, you are doing it. The main idea is to keep your back and legs straight, but relaxed. Like Tadasana, your whole body is engaged.

A good way to get into the pose is from being on hands and knees. This way you can get a proper alignment. Make sure your knees are directly under your hips and your hands are slightly forward of your shoulders. Index fingers parallel, but the other fingers spread wide. Tuck your toes under and bring your hips up.

As you extend your knees, keep your heels high off the floor, but work towards getting them close to the ground. Make sure your sitting bones are extending toward the ceiling. Keep your shoulders back, and core engaged.

Breathe deeply and keep a gentle gaze on your belly button. If you feel your neck straining to do that, gaze instead between your knees or toes.

### Downward Dog, adho mukha svanasana

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Energizes the body
- Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands
- Strengthens the arms and legs
- Helps relieve the [symptoms of menopause](#)
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done with head

supported

- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica, sinusitis

## Sukhasana

Sukhasana, or easy pose, is basically meditation pose. Sit cross-legged and put your hands on your knees, palms up or down.

If palms up, you might like to touch your index finger and thumb as you cup your hand. This is Jnana Mudra, which creates an opening effect and allows for a receiving from the divine source.

Universal consciousness is represented by the thumb and individual consciousness is represented by the index finger. Their unity represents the union of divine self with individual self.

As you sit in this posture, with your eyes closed, keep your inner gaze at a spot just above between your eyes. Keep your spine erect, shoulders relaxed, core in, but not forced; the top of your head parallel to the ground.

Breathe slowly and if your mind wanders, you might find some focus by counting 1 to 10 over and over. Stay seated in Sukhasana for as long as is comfortable. Those just starting out might feel a foot fall asleep after 10 minutes or so.

If it is uncomfortable to sit directly on the floor, then find a cushion (small or tall, hard or soft depending on your comfort), or even a chair is fine if the discomfort is too distracting. The more important thing is to keep your spine

straight, and your mind calm and focused on nothing. This is easy pose, afterall.

### [Sukhasana](#)

- Calms the brain
- Strengthens the back
- Stretches the knees and ankles

Looking to get started and want to follow along with a great teacher? Check out Yoga with Adriene's [Foundations of Yoga](#) video series on YouTube! In this video she explains these three poses, and more. Her demeanor will get you off the couch and practice right away with her! You will find so much amazing information!

Did you know that stress, weak digestive system muscles, and physical inactivity can work together to cause constipation? If you are having trouble with this issue, be sure to read the article [Yoga for Constipation: 14 Yoga Poses For Relieving Constipation](#) on Jen Reviews. This sequence of poses, including some powerful twists, will undoubtedly rid your body of toxins and get your system *flowing*!

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## 10 Reasons Why I Run; Running is Just a Fast Walk

There are so many wonderful things about running, or in my case jogging, and I count myself lucky that I have free use of my body. I've always loved to walk around to explore the world around me. Before I got into running, I was doing a lot of fast walking. It wasn't crazy power walking, but I was trying

to make the most of the movement.

Once I realized that I could run (seriously, I was one of those people who couldn't run a block!), I stopped walking, though I do love to hike, and really enjoy earth's treasures that abound. I wanted to share a few reasons why I love running so much, and I hope I inspire some of you to pick it up. My guess is you'll like it, too!

### 1. Gives me a chance to not think

With many activities taking my time, tasks to accomplish, and calls to make, it is nice to just leave it all back at home (or upstairs on the days when I run on the treadmill). When I run outside, I enjoy not talking, not typing, not looking at the computer. I could probably do the same by just sitting on the back yard patio chair, but running sort of puts me in a trance that allows me to let go of any deadlines or other stresses. Sometimes I try to push away thoughts of work or family to keep a clear mind, but often that time away from my desk allows me to think things through to gain clarity on my next step (pun intended) on what I should do in a situation.

### 2. I sleep more soundly

I'll admit it. Running is a challenge. It isn't a power walk, though power walks are *also* great for your body and mind. Running knocks me out when I do it right. I relax more and have more restful nights. I find especially when I'm training for a half marathon that I sleep better because I've really exhausted my body and it takes the opportunity to shut down at night.

### 3. I am happier

I'm not sure if it is because I've pushed myself out the door (or into the basement) and powered through whatever distance was on the agenda, or that I have given myself enough unburdened time to do it, but my day is always brighter after a run. Maybe the sweat build up inside me being let out is where the noted release of endorphins come from (wink).

#### 4. I can do it alone

My schedule allows me to run during the day and I am glad that I can run by myself. I can't always find others to run with at that time, and while I do like to run with my other mother runners and of course my partner Matthew, I love that I have the freedom to do it any time. I don't need a pass, and I'm not bound to start at a particular hour. Usually the miles fly by much more quickly when you have someone at your side!

#### 5. It makes me stronger

When I get going and maintain a steady practice of running, I see that it makes me stronger in other areas of my life. There is a psychological aspect to running in terms of having to get over a challenge. As I count down the percentage (actually, it is usually fractions) of what distance remains on my run, I get over the seemingly insurmountable and that gives me strength to power through at the end and go for a negative split.

#### 6. It is great for my heart

The World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that adults ages 18 to 64 do at least 150 minutes of a moderate exercise or at least 75 minutes of high-intensity physical activity each week, with a recommendation of added muscle strengthening



exercises. Scientists have shown that running can help prevent obesity, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, some cancers, heart disease, stroke.

#### 7. I believe it'll make me live longer

I've read enough studies on heart longevity that show that running or even walking will extend your life. I am pessimistic about how our society is advancing, but I still want to live to the ripe old age of 99. And so, I hope to be walking until then.

#### 8. It boosts my metabolism

I mean, for real. This is probably why most people run. Running burns fat and it burns calories. If you aren't a pig during the week, you will slim right down. One of the huge benefits of running is not having to "diet." I eat as healthy as I can, but I don't worry about eating a little more if I'm hungrier that day, as I know my metabolism is running strong, even when I'm sleeping.

#### 9. It relaxes me

You'd think that sitting on the couch would be more relaxing than going for a run. But seriously, after I get over having to put on the sports bra, I'm 98% of the time happy, ecstatic even, that I made the effort. After the tension of 3-6 miles and a shower, my muscles are relaxed and my mind feels refreshed. This is heightened by the path I jog... trails increase relaxation tenfold.

#### 10. Gives me confidence

If you would ask me, Heather, are you an athlete? I would laugh, as I feel far from it. While I've been running for 3 years, I'm no faster than when I started. Though I've never considered myself an athlete, I own more running pants than jeans or any other pants! The confidence that I gain from running doesn't just come from my steady waistline, but from knowing that I can do a very hard and at times uncomfortable thing to sustain a healthy mind and body. It is why I most recommend running to others.

I would love to hear the reasons why you run. Please share below!

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## 7 Chakras

When we meditate, we provide an opportunity for our body and mind to connect with the universal oneness that brings us all together on this planet right now. As good as meditation is for each of us, it is good for the world!

Meditation on our chakras helps bring balance also in specific areas. Chakra, an ancient sanskrit word, means vortex or wheel. There are seven main energy centers in our body; each one corresponds to an area on our body and has emotional implications.

Unbalanced, or blocked, chakras can cause emotional and physical problems. Meditation helps bring our chakras in balance, which enables our body and mind to function ideally, and be calm, healthy, and compassionate.

## **The seven chakras**

### **Red – Muladhara / Root Chakra – Meditation: “Vam” / “I am”**

Located at your root; represents grounding, survival, fatigue, inner state is stillness and stability, balancing this chakra gives energy to the physical body, controls fear, increases overall health and helps in grounding. Imbalance: low self esteem, low energy, lack of trust

### **Orange – Swadisthana / Sacral Chakra – Meditation: “Lam” / “I feel”**

Located just above root of genitals; biji (seed) mantra, sacral, desire, pleasure, sexuality, passion, creative block, low sex drive, balancing associated with sexual vitality, physical power. Imbalance: feeling uncreative

### **Yellow – Manipura / Solar Plexus Chakra – Meditation: “Ram” / “I do”**

The abode of fire just above the navel center; confidence, intuition, will, wisdom, power, poor digestion, low self-esteem, inner state is laughter, joy, anger. Balancing this chakra helps calm emotions and tension to help better use intuition. Imbalance: angry and helpless, unable to finish tasks

### **Green – Anahata / Heart Chakra – Meditation: “Yam” / “I love”**

Located at the heart center, in center of chest, above of air, *jiva* (individual soul), form of flame , heart, love, compassion, heart disease, fear of intimacy, helps to balance circulatory system, heart and thymus, also promotes universal oneness. Imbalance: feeling unloved

## **Blue – Vishuddha / Throat Chakra – Meditation: “Ham” / “I speak”**

Located above of ether at base of throat, power , expression, creativity, communication, blue, thyroid problem. Imbalance: difficulty expressing feelings

## **Indigo – Ajna / Third Eye Chakra – Meditation: “So hum” or “Om” / “I see”**

Located between the eyebrows, realm of mind, imagination, psychic ability, intuition, awareness, headaches, depression, poor intuition, balances pineal gland. Imbalance: indecision

## **Violet – Sahasrara / Crown Chakra – Meditation: “Hamsah” / “I understand”**

Located at the crown. Visualize *jiva* in the form of a flame. Visualize white light, connection, wisdom, spirituality, understanding, will, promotes thought. Imbalance: loneliness, depression, apathy

Allow your thoughts to leave your mind. Incorporate chakra breathing into your meditation practice occasionally and see how powerful it can be.

Start slowly. Pick one of these chakras that you see having a slight imbalance. It might be an area in your body where you have a pain, or it may be an emotional issue. Reflect on your individual self and see where you can use some focused attention and self-compassion.

Sit in a position in which you can be comfortable for 20 minutes. With your eyes closed, allow your mind's eye to focus on the chakra that you want to bring in balance. Breathe into the chakra. Inhale deeply, exhale slowly. Keep breathing, and

then say the associated mantra above. Go ahead and speak it out loud. If that feels awkward, say it in your mind. On every exhale, for 16 times, say the mantra and keep your mind focused in that area of your body.

Be mindful of the feelings that emerge. There may sometimes be difficult memories or regrets that come to mind. See these as opportunity for growth. Let them be in the past, and use them as a lesson to be better next time and feel the equilibrium emerge. The more often you can give attention to your imbalances, the sooner you will be fully balanced. Give yourself the time to sit often and focus on areas of disruption in your life and give yourself balance. Constantly work at it and you will reap the rewards. And those around you will reap the benefits as well.

If you care to go beyond meditation to balance chakras, you can also consider chakra stone healing, reiki, and crystals.