

Handbook of Yoga Poses and
Breathing for Introductory Intensive



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General guidelines for continuing a home practise.

- A shorter practise but regular is much more effective than a longer, but only occasional practise.
- Find a time of the day when your stomach is empty or when your digestion is finished (3h after a big meal at least).
- It's important to warm up your body well to help prevent injury. So use the warm ups from the warm ups sheet, then choose one of the other sections to do afterwards. Remember to do the counter poses at the end, and **always** make time for some **relaxation** (Savasana).
- Stay on this side of your edge, and *release* into the stretch rather than push into it. Use the release of the out breath to help you.
- Above all have patience and compassion for yourself and notice any tendency to be self-critical.
- After holding a pose, let yourself fully relax back into neutral, "flopping" or easing that part of your body to release any tension.
- Try to include some quiet sitting practise, either with your yoga session or at a different time. It's worth it !
- Become aware of your breathing more often throughout the day, and try to bring a relaxed flow to it, and see what happens ! You may well find you get less upset, and for shorter periods of time. Practise also gently lengthening the breath without creating tension.
- And finally, let your practise be a pleasure and you are more likely to want to return to it.

Breathing Exercises

Spend sometime establishing the pose, make sure the spine is straight, either lying down or sitting, be comfortable in your posture.

Ujjayi breath

Extend the length of the breath to a comfortable degree. Close down the back of the throat (glottis) gently, so that an internal “whispering” sound can be heard on the in and out breath.

When it get easier, extend either the inhalation or exhalation, or when you are practiced, both. You can add a short pause at the top, and then the bottom of the breath if desired.

Kapalabhati

Sitting upright either on a cushion or on a chair. Take a long inhale and release with a long exhale. Then take another long inhale and soften the belly to effortlessly draw the breath into the abdomen, then with a dynamic contraction of the abdominal muscles pull the navel back towards the spine, lifting the diaphragm, to expel the air.

Again release the belly, the breath flows in without effort, and again pull the navel back sharply to forcefully expel the air.

This can be repeated 10-15 times, make sure you feel comfortable with it. Then rest back to soft abdominal breathing for 2-3 cycles and you can repeat up to 4 cycles, resting the breath in between cycles.

Rest in Savasana for 5-10 mn.

Nadi Shodhana (alternate breathing)

Sit straight either on a cushion or on a chair, spine erect. The right thumb will close the right nostril and the right ring finger will close the left nostril alternatively.

Start with a long inhale, and release with a long exhale. Get ready and take a long inhale, close the right nostril and exhale through the left, inhale through the left, close and exhale through the right. Inhale through the right, close and exhale through the left. Keep on going for 10 to 15 mn, ending with an exhale with the left nostril.

If you feel light headed or dizzy, stop and lie down.

End with 5-10 mn in Savasana.

Warm ups

Neck exercise



Inhale head up and back, exhale slowly bring the chin to the chest. Observe the sensation in your neck and shoulders, move slowly with full awareness.

Shoulders

Lift the shoulders up and bring them down several times. Then roll the shoulders, lift them up, roll them forward, bring them down, back and up, 3-5 times and change the direction, up, back, down, forward and up. End with shaking the shoulders. Observe the sensations in the shoulders, notice any click happening.

Opening the shoulders



Sit on your heels, if it is comfortable enough for your ankles and knees. Lift up the spine. Interlock the fingers and extend the arms forward at the level of the shoulders, palms facing out. Keep the arms straight, inner elbows moving inward. Hold it for 5-8 breaths, keep the neck relaxed.

On the next inhale raise the arms up, palms facing the ceiling. Keep the arms straight and hold for another 5-8 breaths. On the exhale release.



Standing with the feet hip width apart, spine erect, roll the shoulders back and either hold the elbows behind your back or place the hands in Namaste, fingers pointing up, back of the hands against the spine, shoulder blades are rolling down, elbows wide so that the whole palm of the hands can touch. Keep the navel moving back towards the lumbar.

Hip opening



Sit tall and straight, legs extending forward, fold the left foot on the right thigh in a half lotus pose. Move the right knee up and down gently without pressure. Then place the foot in the opposite elbow, lift up the flexed foot, pull the shin bone towards the chest, move the heart forward and rock your baby. Change side after a while.



On all four. Step the right foot forward. Slide the right knee under the right shoulder, keep the right toes in contact with the floor. On the exhale, lower the head towards the floor inside your right foot. Hold for a while, keep on breathing. Change side.

Cat and cow



Movement is starting from the tail bone, moving one vertebra at a time with full awareness. On the inhale tilt the tail bone up, curve the back, open the heart towards the floor, roll the shoulders back, lift up the head. On the exhale tilt the tail bone in, round the spine like a cat, let the head drop. Move with the rhythm of your own breath. Repeat several times.

Abdominals

Sit with both legs straight, remove the flesh from underneath the sitting bones. Spine straight. Place both hands under the right calf muscle, lift up the right leg, keep the leg up and keep the arms up. Hold the posture. Keep the face relaxed, and the breathing long and relaxed.

Navasana

Lie down on the back both legs together, arms along the body. On the inhale lift up the chest, arms and both legs. Keep the knees flat, heels pushing away. Move the heart toward the knees so that the spine is straight, avoid rounding the back. Hold for 1-2 mn. Keep on breathing, keeping the eyes soft and jaws relaxed.

Sun salutation : Surya Namaskar

Allow the breath to be your guide



Standing in Tadasana. Big toes together, heels slightly apart. Pelvis slightly tilted forward. Thigh muscles lifting up, spine erect, shoulders rolled back, arms and fingers extended, crown of the head lifting up.

Inhale. And exhale bring both palms in front of the chest, press the palms. Inhale arms up. Exhale bend forward, head towards the knees, Uttanasana, knees can be bent. Inhale head up, back flat, shoulders are rolled back, heart moving towards the floor. Exhale head down.



Inhale, both hands on the floor, step the right foot back, right knee on the floor, both arms up, Virabhadrasana 1. Exhale both legs back, feet hip width apart, sitting bones lifting up to the ceiling, Downward facing Dog. Inhale knees on the floor. Exhale chest on the floor, hips up.



Inhale slide the chest forward, roll the shoulders back, come up, Urdva Mukha Svanasana. Exhale Downward Dog. Inhale right foot forward all the way in between the hands, right knee above the right ankle, left knee on the floor. Exhale both feet forward, head to the knees, Uttanasana. Inhale bent the knees, come up, unroll the spine. Exhale arms down. Repeat on left side.

The Lunge



From all four, step the right foot forward in between the hands. Come onto the fingertips, or on the blocks, and open the chest and breathe comfortably. Stretch the right leg back and extend to the back heel. Front foot nicely rooted, knee above the ankle. Hold for a while, rooting in the earth through the feet and trunk rising to the sky. Repeat on the other side.

Dog pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana)



On all four, open the hands wide, middle fingers pointing forward. Keep the lower arm muscles rolling inward, upper arm muscles rolling outward, to keep your chest open and feel the width in between the shoulder blades. Shoulders are away from your ears. Inhale lift up the knees and heels, exhale pull the trunk back, so that your lower ribs come close to your thighs. Lift up the sitting bones high to the ceiling, the weight of the body moving away from the hands, feel the stretch in your trunk. Move alternatively one heel towards the floor, try to keep your legs straight, thigh muscles moving up towards the hips. Keep the navel towards the lumbar.

Standing poses

Trikonasana (Triangle)



From Downward facing Dog, inhale look in between the hands, exhale step the right foot forward in between the hands. Inhale come up. Adjust your feet so that the front heel is in a straight line with the middle of the arch of the left foot behind. The outer edge of the left foot parallel to the outer edge of your mat. Keep the arch of the back foot lifting up from the mat, the outer edge of your back foot is sticking to the floor. Bring the arms at the level of the shoulders, roll the shoulders back and extend up to the tip of the fingers. Inhale. Exhale extend over to the right side, place your right hand on your shin bone or on a block outside of the right leg, both arms remain in a straight line. Hold for a few long breaths. Inhale come up and release, repeat on the left side.

Virabhadrasana 2 (Warrior 2)



Keeping the feet in the same position than Trikonasana. Arms at the level of the shoulders, roll the shoulders back extend up to the tip of the fingers. Inhale. On the exhale bend the right knee just above the right ankle, try to place the right thigh parallel to the floor, tailbone moving down towards the floor. Keep the trunk straight, both arms at the same level. Repeat on the left side.

Parsvakonasana



Keeping the feet in the same position than Trikonasana, arms at the level of the shoulders, bend the right knee above the right ankle and place the right hand on the block outside of the right foot. Extend the left arm along the ear, stretch and open up the left side of the trunk. Hold for a few long breaths and repeat on the other side.

Virabhadrasana 1 (Warrior 1)



From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step the feet comfortably wide. Turn the right foot forward and turn the left foot 60 degrees forward, both heels on the same line. Hips square. Pull the left heel towards the ground. Bend the right knee above the right ankle. Roll the shoulders back and lift the arms up on the inhale. Look slightly up. Hold the posture for a few breaths. Repeat on the other side.

If you can't breathe fully, you shouldn't be there (D. Swenson)

Forward bends and Hamstring stretches

Supta Padangusthasana



Lie on the back, bend both knees, feet flat on the floor. Place the strap under the arch of your right foot, stretch the right leg up, try to flatten the knee. Slide the left leg along the floor, left foot flexed, left leg is active. Hold for a few breaths.

Inhale and on the exhale lift up the head towards the shin bone, keep the right knee flat. Hold for a few breaths.

Repeat both exercise on the other side.

Parsvottanasana



Step the feet comfortably wide. Turn the right foot forward, let forward 60 degrees, both heels on the same line. Hips square. Pull the left heel towards the ground. Keep the right leg straight, knee flat by lifting up the right thigh. Place 2 blocks on both side of the right leg. Inhale extend forward. Exhale lean over the right leg, place both hands on the blocks, keep the right knee flat. Hold for a few breaths. Repeat on the other side.

Uttanasana (standing forward bend)



Feet together or hip width apart (slightly easier). Inhale lift up the arms, exhale extend forward and down. Keep the knees straight, kneecaps lifting up. Hold your elbows if the hands don't reach the floor, otherwise hold your ankles. Keep the posture for a few long breaths.

Paschimottanasana (sitting forward bend)



Sit with both legs straight in front of you. Remove the flesh from underneath the sitting bones, keep the legs straight, feet flexed. Place the block in front of the feet and the strap in the middle of the block. Inhale move the heart forward, shoulders rolled back, spine extending. Exhale allow the belly to rest on the thighs if it is possible and maybe the chest on the knees and forehead on the shin bones. Hold for some long breaths, keep on extending forward on the exhale.

Padotanasana



Step the feet comfortably wide. Keep both feet parallel to each other, outer edge of the feet parallel to the outer edge of your mat, ankles on top of the feet, arch of the feet lifted up. Place the hands on the hips, inhale. Exhale bend forward place the hands on blocks under the shoulders. If it is easy bring the head on the floor, in between the hands. Hold for a few breaths. Come up on an inhale.

Each Asana and each breath is a complete journey (D. Swenson)

End the practice with a **Twist**



Sit on the side of the chair, squeeze a block in between your knees. Place both hands on the top of the chair. Inhale lift up the spine to the ceiling, exhale twist. Hold the posture for a few long abdominal breaths. Exhale release and turn to the other side.

Backbends

Through all backbends keep the tailbone tucking under so the lumbar spine stays long and spacious. Shoulders should stay down with the collar bones widening away from the sternum so the chest can remain open.

Sphinx



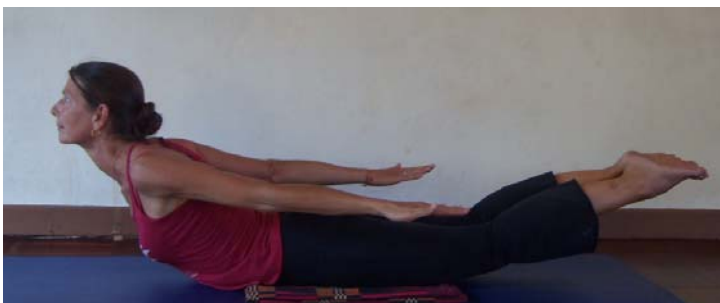
Lie on the chest, place the forearms on the floor. Inhale press the pubic bone into the mat and lift up the chest. Adjust your elbows under the shoulders, keep the shoulders rolled back and the sternum opening forward. Hold for a few breaths.

Shalabasana (Locust) 1



Lie on the chest. Interlock the fingers behind the back, arms straight. Inhale lift up the head, keep the feet on the floor. Hold for a few breaths.

Shalabasana 2



Lie on the chest. Arms along the body, legs together. Inhale lift up the head, the chest, the arms and the legs. Hold for a few breaths.

Dhanurasana



Lie on the chest. Bend the knees and hold the ankles. Keep the knees hip width apart. Inhale lift up the head, the chest and the knees. Hold for a few breaths. Release and repeat.

Table Top



Start from a sitting position. Place the feet about 20cm in away the buttocks, feet hip width apart, hands behind the back, fingers pointing forwards. Inhale, tilt the pelvis up, lift up the hips, so high that you can't see your knees. Keep the thorax flat, like a table top, let the head drop back. Hold for a few breaths.

Purvotasana



Start from a sitting position. Keep the legs straight and place the hands behind the back, fingers pointing forward. Inhale tilt the pelvis up, lift up the hips and pull the toes toward the floor. Keep the whole body in one flat line, let the head drop back. Hold for a few breaths.

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana



Lie on the back, bend the knees and place the feet close to the buttocks hip width apart. Inhale tilt the pelvis up, lift up the hips and place a block under the sacrum. Lift up the chest to try to bring the chin touching the collar bones. Arms are straight, fingers interlocked. Hold for a few breaths, remove the block, release by bringing the spine slowly back to the floor.

Supported Matsyasana



Sit down with the legs straight, place a strap around the thighs, to hold the thighs together but not too tight. Place the bolster behind the back, slide the palm of the hand between the bolster and the sacrum to find the right distance. Lengthen the sacrum on the floor and lean back over the bolster. Allow the shoulders to roll back, on both side of the bolster, keeping the chest open. Hold for a few breaths.

Counter poses

Adho Mukha Virasana



Sit on the heels, keep the knees wide open. Place a bolster in between the knees. Inhale lift up the buttocks, extend the arms forward by walking the fingers forward. Gently pull the sitting bones towards the heels while you still extend the arms forward. This will create a nice stretch in the spine. Lower the chest and rest it on the bolster. Relax the back muscles, hold for a few breathes.

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward facing Dog)



On all four, open the hands wide, middle fingers pointing forward. Keep the lower arm muscles rolling inward, upper arm muscles rolling outward, to keep your chest open and feel the width in between the shoulder blades. Shoulders are away from your ears. Inhale lift up the knees and heels, exhale pull the trunk back, so that your lower ribs come close to your thighs. Lift up the sitting bones high to the ceiling, the weight of the body moving away from the hands, feel the stretch in your trunk. Move alternatively one heel towards the floor, try to keep your legs straight, thigh muscles moving up towards the hips. Keep the navel towards the lumbar.

Uttanasana (standing forward bend)



Feet together or hip width apart (slightly easier). Inhale lift up the arms, exhale extend forward and down. Keep the knees straight, kneecaps lifting up. Hold your elbows if the hands don't reach the floor, otherwise hold your ankles. Keep the posture for a few long breaths.

Lie on the back and gently draw the knees towards the chest, hold them with the arms and round the back. Gently massage your lower back by rolling in circles softly on the sacrum. Release and change the direction of rotation.

Twists

Marichyasana (Var.)



Sit on the side of the chair, squeeze a block in between your knees. Place both hands on the top of the chair. Inhale lift up the spine to the ceiling, exhale twist. Hold the posture for a few long abdominal breaths. Exhale release and turn to the other side.

Pasasana



Come into a squatting pose, keep the heels supporter if they don't reach the floor. Open the knees wide, Wrap the left arm around the left knee, left hand moving back. Roll the right shoulder back and open the right side of the trunk, both hands hold behind the back (use a strap if needed). Hold for a few breaths.

Jatara Parivartasana



Lie on the back, the whole spine flat on the floor. Inhale bend the knees and exhale lift them up towards the chest, inhale straighten the legs towards the ceiling. Hold for a few breaths. On an exhale, bring both legs straight towards the right side (support them with a cushion or bolster if needed) and look on the opposite direction and keep the opposite (left) shoulder in contact with the floor. Hold for a few breaths. On an inhale lift up both straight legs towards the ceiling and repeat on the other side.

Other poses

Utkatasana



Stand with the feet together, bend the knees, bring the tip of the fingers on the floor, tilt the tailbone down towards the floor, roll the shoulders back, inhale lift up the arms. Hold for a few breaths.

Vrkrasana (Tree pose)



Stand up straight, root the supporting foot (start with the left) into the floor. Shift the weight of the body on the left leg and place the right foot inside the left thigh. Place the hands together in front of the chest, on an inhale lift up both arms, allow the spine to grow tall towards the ceiling. Hold for a few breaths, repeat on the other side.

Garudasana (Eagle)



Standing with the feet together, root the left foot and bend the left knee. Place the right leg in front and around the left leg, wrapping the foot behind the left calf if possible. Bring the right elbow at the level of the shoulder, place the left elbow inside the right one, left elbow pressing down, right elbow pushing up, both arms active. Hold for a few breaths and repeat on the other side.

Gomukasana



Sit on a cushion, place the right heel outside of the left buttock, knee pointing forward, left foot outside of the right knee, if possible next to the right buttock so that both knees come on top of each other. Keep your knees comfortable. Keep both hands resting on the upper thigh for a while then repeat on the other side.

Bakasana (Crow)



Squat with the feet apart, toes slightly open to the side, hands on the floor in front of the feet, fingers stretched, middle fingers pointing forward. Place the knees under the armpits, keep the gaze forward. Gently shift the weight of the body towards the toes and then to the hands. When the feet feel weightless lift them one at a time until you find your balance. Hold for a few breaths.

Viparita Karani



Lie on the back, with the buttocks close to the wall, legs bent. Lift up the hips and slide a bolster under the lower back. Straighten the legs up to the ceiling. Hold for several breaths.

Savasana



Take some time at the end of each yoga session for 10-15mn of relaxation, this will allow your body to recover and fully benefit from the postures which have been held.

Lie on the back, feet apart, arms apart, symmetrical posture of the body. Eyes closed. Start by taking a few deep and long breaths and then relax totally, feel the whole body surrendering.