

We often think of children as carefree with few worries and forget that they go through stresses and strains in life just like any adult. In today's society of peer pressure, consumerism and sibling rivalry, children need time and space to find a safe place to release their worries and concerns.

As a yoga teacher and mother, I began to make it a priority to teach my own children yoga on a daily basis and to reinforce the importance of experiencing "sadhana" or personal daily practice. As with most things the younger you begin the easier it becomes. Within every one of us we have the tools to access our true identity which can often become lost during daily life and our routine living. Yoga helps access these tools so that our true nature can shine through in everything we do. When experiencing yoga from a young age, it is about children as individuals gaining a positive relationship with themselves. As they learn they absorb information with pleasure, enthusiasm, and at the same time, have a great deal of fun.

BEGINNER'S



Bhujangasana

Yoga in a Child's Daily Life

To help encourage a daily practice for children, included are some of the key yogasanas and breathing techniques to help beginners from as young as five years. It is important to include at least one of each of the following movements so that the whole body is lengthened in every direction possible. This will help to maximize practice and increase the body's strength and flexibility.

Basic Breathing Technique

Full Yoga Breath

This breathing technique can be included at the beginning of a practice to help connect with the breath, bringing awareness to the mind and slowing down the body. It can also be added at the end of practice to encourage relaxation.

underneath the shoulders. Place the forehead on the floor, let the whole body relax and breathe a full yoga breath with the eyes closed.

2. When you are ready to begin, take a deep breath in and slowly begin to lift the upper body off the floor raising the head, neck and shoulders. Straighten the elbows and keep the shoulders relaxed. It is important to use the back muscles to hold the position rather than the muscles in the arms. Relax the pubic bone towards the floor, tilt the head slightly backwards and breathe for five long slow deep breaths.
3. Visualize the Third Eye point (the space between the eyebrows). As the breath moves inward imagine a bright white light at the Third Eye; as the breath moves outward

YOGA FOR CHILDREN

INDRA SINGH

1. Lie comfortably on your back and become aware of the movement of the breath flowing through the nostrils.
2. Place your hands on top of your abdomen with the middle fingers touching at the navel.
3. As you breathe in allow the abdomen to expand like a large balloon – this will naturally create a space between the middle fingers. As you exhale through the nose allow the abdomen to gently relax. The middle fingers will come back together.
4. Use the full capacity of the lungs.
5. After five minutes you will feel totally relaxed, the mind will be still, and the breath will be smooth and rhythmic.

Bhujangasana/Cobra Pose

Backward Bend Posture

1. Lying flat on the stomach place your legs straight out behind with the feet close together and the soles pointing upwards. Rest the palms of the hands on the floor

visualize the light beaming upwards towards the sky like a laser beam. Breathe deeply, brightening the light with every breath.

4. To release, exhale and slowly relax the body down to the starting position.

Variation

Bhujangasana is a strong spinal stretch and a simpler variation may be practiced in the beginning. This is called “sphinx pose.” It can be achieved in the same way as Cobra pose except the forearms and elbows remain on the floor throughout the pose.

Benefits

Bhujangasana improves circulation in the back and tones the nerves. When the nerves are stimulated this increases communication between the brain and the rest of the body. This asana tones the gynecological area; stimulates appetite and alleviates constipation.

Paschimottanasana

Forward Bend Posture

1. Sit on the floor with the legs out straight and become aware of the sitting bones. Keep the spine lengthened upwards. Visualize a long string tied to the top of your head which stretches all the way up to the sky and with every in breath, the string is lengthening your spine upwards, and helping to keep it straight and long. This creates space between each vertebra in the back.
2. Keep an awareness of the full yoga breath as you raise your arms upwards above the head with the palms parallel and shoulders relaxed. Flex your feet and keep the body in the shape of a right angle.
3. As you begin to stretch downwards towards the feet, keep the spine long by using the full space around you, stretching upward, forward, and if possible aim to stretch beyond the feet. Keep the eyes closed, visualize and feel your body stretching.

4. Grasp your big toes with the fingers and thumbs, pushing into the heels and drawing the toes towards the head. If holding the big toes isn't possible, place your hands on the ankles or the legs. Move into the position slowly without jerking or forcing.
5. As you hold the position, lengthen on the inhalation and relax into the stretch on the exhalation. The more the body relaxes the more it will stretch.
6. To complete, release the fingers from the toes and as you inhale raise the arms up to the parallel position just like in the beginning of the asana, keeping the length in the body until you return back to a right angle. Take a deep breath in, exhale and release the arms down by your sides.
7. At the beginning hold the posture for five long slow deep breaths and as practice increases, lengthen the time.

Benefits

When practiced regularly, Paschimottanasana will increase flexibility in the hip joints; tone and massage the entire abdominal area; and remove excess weight from the abdominal region.

Trikonasana/Triangle Pose

Lateral Stretch Posture

1. Stand to the side of the mat with distance between the feet. Turn your right foot out to the right side and turn the toes of the left foot slightly inwards. The heel of the right foot should be opposite the left instep.
2. Inhale and stretch the arms up to shoulder level with the palms facing down. Exhale and stretch towards the right side. Hold here for two to three breaths and feel the stretch all the way down the left side of the body.



Paschimottanasana



3. Exhale and move the right hand down to rest on the right shin, stretching the left arm directly upwards with the palm facing forward. Turn the head to look up at the left palm, keep the chin tucked in towards the chest and take three to five full yoga breaths. This is a powerful asana which can create wonderful length on both sides of the body. As you hold the stretch, close your eyes and reach up high with the top hand, and visualize the fingertips touching the stars, reaching higher with every in breath.
4. To return to the starting position, inhale and stretch upwards with the finger tips of the left hand. Release the right hand from the shin and bring the body slowly back up to standing position, keeping the arms stretched out at shoulder level. Exhale and release the hands back down to the sides of the body. Turn both feet to face forward before repeating on the opposite side.

Variations

1. If the full position is difficult to achieve in the beginning, start with the legs straight; it may be possible to hold the position with the front knee slightly bent.
2. If there is a problem with the shoulder or arm, relax the top arm on the side of the body or rest the hand on the waist with the elbow pointing upwards. In time and after regular practice the full asana may be achieved.

Benefits

Trikonasana tones the entire body, strengthening the muscles of the waist, back and the legs. It improves digestion; stimulates appetite and alleviates any digestive problems.

Trikonasana

Halasana/Plough Pose

Inverted Posture

1. Lie relaxed on your back with the legs and feet together. Place the arms beside the body with the hands facing down. Connect with the full yoga breath.
2. Inhale and lift the legs so that the toes touch the floor behind the head. Use the hands as support to help roll the body backwards. Make the movement as slow and controlled as possible. As the legs stretch over the head, visualize that the feet are creating a rainbow from the first position all the way back to the floor behind the head,

thus creating the perfect arc. Rest the palms on the lower back, keeping the chin tucked in towards the chest.

3. Although the breath will become slightly restricted, continue to breathe deeply through the nose. This will help to strengthen the lungs and bring a fresh blood supply to the whole of the body when the asana is released. As you hold the asana, visualize the colors of the rainbow filling the whole of your being, helping you to relax into the posture. Beginners can start by holding the pose for fifteen seconds and in time increase to one minute.
4. To release, gently bring the back down to the floor one vertebra at a time with awareness on the movement of the spine. Once again visualize the arc of the rainbow as it slowly moves back down towards the floor. Keep the legs straight and slowly lower them both to the ground.

Variation

If it is difficult to place the toes on the floor behind the head, take the legs back as far as possible and cradle the ankles with the hands so that the feet are a few inches above the ground.

Benefits

Halasana has a multitude of benefits which include: All the internal organs are massaged which helps to activate digestion; one gets relief from constipation and dyspepsia; the spleen is revitalized; insulin production and the function of the liver and kidneys get improved; the spinal column is toned which reduces back pain; and thyroid gland activity is regulated which naturally balances the metabolic rate.

Photos Courtesy: Steve Nicholls, Indra Singh



Halasana

Shavasana/Corpse Pose

1. Lie flat on the back and let the arms rest by the sides of the body with the palms facing upwards. This position will help the chest and heart center to open so that the breath can move through the body without any restriction.
2. The neck is an extension of the spine, so it is important when beginning Shavasana to take a deep breath in, lift the head off the floor, bring the chin in towards the chest and then allow the head to rest back down on the floor. This will help lengthen the whole spine, including the neck.
3. Let the legs rest on the mat allowing the feet to drop to the sides, the hips and thighs will naturally open. Lie still as if you were sleeping and focus once more on the full yoga breath. Inhaling and expanding the chest and abdomen like a large balloon; exhaling and gently letting go.
4. As the breath moves in and out of the body, visualizing the breath as colored light can help deepen relaxation and keep the mind focused. This is a good preparation for meditation.

Variation

The knees can bend so that the feet rest flat on the floor. This position may be necessary if there is a problem with the lower back.

Benefits

Shavasana relaxes the whole body and should be done after every yoga session. It is also beneficial to practice Shavasana before sleep to help let go of any tension that may have accumulated within the body throughout the day. It helps develop body awareness – mentally, physically and spiritually, and when the body is relaxed the whole being can let go. ●



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Shavasana