

12 Best Poses to Get Lean, Strong and Calm

PATRICIA BACALL



Easy Weight Loss Yoga: 12 Best Poses to get Lean, Strong, and Calm

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This book is not intended as a substitute for the advice and guidance of a qualified yoga teacher or the medical advice of physicians. The reader should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention. Learning yoga should be done with a qualified, experienced teacher, and most importantly, common sense and caution should be used in embarking on any physically demanding endeavor.

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Foreword

For anyone contemplating taking up a yoga practice for the purpose of healthy weight loss, I want to acknowledge and congratulate you. You are embarking on a journey that will not only help you become the slender, fit person you desire to be, but the entire practice of yoga, with its numerous and far-reaching benefits, will also help you be calmer, happier, and wiser.

My advice to you is to simply start at whatever level you can handle, and challenge yourself a little bit more when you feel completely comfortable at any given level. In other words, *just get your yoga on!* Sometimes the hardest part of any yoga self-improvement program is just getting yourself onto the mat. Once you're there, the rest is (relatively) easy. One of my favorite motivational phrases is SIBTN, meaning, *Something Is Better Than Nothing!* It has served me well, and now I pass it on to you. Use it to be gentle with yourself, do what you can, and be satisfied with that.

Yoga is best practiced with the intention to engage in self-exploration with a certain degree of curiosity about what each session will reveal, and not to necessarily get better at it. Of course, you want to achieve your goals of feeling good and losing weight, but if you approach the mat with the intention to do as well as you can in this moment, the results will simply start occurring. You'll reap the rewards without the stress of self-judgment. The gentle approach of practicing to achieve better overall health will serve you better than focusing on the specific goal of weight loss; it's a lifestyle change we are seeking. That being said, if you practice yoga principles regularly and with sincerity, weight loss will most probably result.

There are literally hundreds of books written about the thousands of poses that make up the ancient practice of yoga. It is not within the scope of this book to introduce all the poses that would go into an entire yoga practice. After reading this information, you will know more about poses that specifically contribute to enhancing your endocrine, hormonal, muscular, and pulmonary systems — all for the purposes of normalizing your weight — based on my own experience and over 30 years of yoga practice. I recommend that you take classes at a good studio with an

experienced and well-trained yoga teacher. They will introduce you to the entire scope of postures, structure and sequence, breathing, meditation, dietary, and ethical guidelines that make up the yogic lifestyle. You can decide on your own how deeply you want to delve into the practice and engage in as many of the disciplines as you desire.

Yoga for Weight Loss

How to NOT Lose Weight

If you struggle with dieting and have been unsuccessful at losing weight via a diet or other restrictive calorie plans, you're not alone. If you are reading this book, you're looking for a different way to achieve both HEALTH and a slender body and an answer to the frustration you feel about your body, eating, and your weight. And this is a good thing. It shows that you are highly motivated and will keep trying until you get results. Good for you!

Remember that you cannot literally starve yourself into losing weight. (Actually you can, a la TV's "Survivor" program, where you see the contestants shrinking every week before your very eyes while they survive for weeks on a diet of rice, coconuts, and the occasional cheeseburger or donut binge, but you will notice that they also cannot think very clearly, have no energy, and lose a lot of muscle as well). Weight loss brought about by simply limiting intake of food is one of the most energy-sucking, life-deadening, unpleasant ways to become thin. It saps you of the fuel you need to run your most basic metabolic functions. You simply need to be smarter to achieve your weight loss goals and keep the weight off when the diet ends.

Diets don't work. They never have, and they never will. Not only does your body become accustomed to performing the same tasks on the lowered calorie intake, but when you starve yourself, you begin to eliminate your calorie-burning furnace (your muscles). For example, if you normally consume 2,500 calories a day, when you diet and suddenly reduce your caloric intake to 1,000 calories a day, your metabolism will adjust itself so that your body begins to burn only 1,000 calories a day and not the 2,500 that it had expected to burn before. Your body is outsmarting you in dealing with the (self-imposed) "famine." It becomes thriftier with every calorie taken in. Every function slows down, especially burning the excess fat that you prefer your body would burn for fuel. Instead, your body saves its energy stores for important activities for living, such as breathing, eating,

digestion, sleeping, procreating, walking, and so forth. Each calorie you take in becomes precious and is very carefully spent to save the fuel for survival. So when you diet and cut your caloric intake drastically, even if you think you can trick your body into giving up all your fat stores for energy, your energy actually goes down. Plus, when you feel lethargic and low in energy, you will probably crave the foods that will "juice" your energy even more: sugary, dough-y, quick fix foods. (Invariably, the foods with which you try to boost your energy will cause your blood sugar to shoot up and then crash even lower).

It's only logical to think that if you eat fewer calories, you should lose weight. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work like that. Your body works with what you give it, and it will function at the level of survival with the "famine" you've imposed. Our bodies have functioned this way for eons to ensure the survival of the species, and you're not going to change it in a few weeks or months.

You have to achieve a balance of taking in enough calories plus putting out enough energy expenditure to gently coax your body into using its stored fat to fuel your daily energy needs.

Eliminating Your Fat Furnace

Another serious side effect of cutting your caloric intake below 1,500 calories a day is that your body will begin to burn muscle for energy while saving its fat stores for later. Your metabolism will slow down to a crawl to make every calorie count. So when you go off the diet, your body is relieved that the "famine" is over, and it busily begins to add to its fat stores in preparation for the next "food shortage." Your metabolism does not know that YOU are the one who is manipulating the food supply.

This dismal effect is compounded as well—the less fuel-burning muscle you have, the worse, because it takes muscle to burn calories. If you lose muscle mass, you cannot burn calories for energy.

Your body will begin to shut down your metabolism (BMR), and in the end, you won't lose weight at all. You will gain instead!

Why It's Called "Die-eting"

From an emotional perspective, when you think of yourself being on a "diet," you feel deprived, and you naturally think of all the foods that you cannot have while on the diet. When you go "off" your diet, whether you've lost weight or not, you have a tendency to binge on the forbidden foods, thus putting back on all the weight that you (may have) lost while on the restricted eating plan.

So, if diets don't work, how are you to lose weight? It becomes harder to lose weight as you get older, especially since an adult's metabolism (the rate at which we turn calories into energy, and burn the food [fuel] that we put into our bodies) slows down by 3-5% each decade. The fact is that you need to eat less and exercise more in order to simply maintain your weight. And if you want to LOSE weight, you will need to trick your body into amping up its metabolic rate through exercise (in this case, yoga) to build a better calorie furnace (muscle), and to tune up every system of your body to be healthy and functioning properly. Muscle tends to progressively decrease with age, and we cannot afford to lose that mass.

One Body—Many Systems: Tuning up Your Entire System for Health

Weight loss is much easier when all your systems are working correctly, including your metabolic, pulmonary, muscular, and endocrine systems. That's why you need to aim for "healthy" before you can achieve "slim." Every system, gland, and organ has its own contribution to make so your body can function on the food you give it. When any of these systems are not functioning properly, the entire organism gets bogged down. You don't burn food properly for energy. The body produces hormones that cause you to store fat instead of burn it. Bones begin to lose strength because they are not challenged by stress from the muscles, and you end up in a downward spiral of ever-decreasing health and vigor.

Because of the metabolic mechanics of weight loss, we want to have our digestive and endocrine systems functioning as efficiently as possible. If these systems are sluggish or not doing their job, the efficiency of processing food into energy for exercise (and for living) will be compromised, and our ability to turn calories into muscle and burn fat will be less than optimal.

So it is imperative that you try to become as healthy as you can, so that you are not actually working against yourself to achieve your weight loss goals. Health should always come first. For example, if you do not drink enough water and eat enough fiber, your intestines will be filled with impacted waste that hampers your digestion. If you are not digesting your food properly, you will not get all the nutrients your food has to offer. If you are not getting enough nutrients, you will be hungry all the time. If you are hungry all the time, you are probably feeding yourself more to try to satisfy that hunger, and the entire cycle goes on and on.

Every system affects another system in your body, and although each organ and gland has its own job to do, the important idea that I want to impart is that every part of you is interdependent on every other part of you. So breathing is not exclusive from stretching, or from digestion, or from

strength, in creating must work together.	an	optimally	functioning	organism.	All	the	systems

The Glands and Organs Affected by Yoga Postures

Endocrine Glands, including Thyroid, Adrenals, Pineal, Pituitary, Pancreas, and Hypothalamus

Heart

Spleen

Stomach

Lungs

Liver/Gallbladder

Kidneys

Bladder

Large and Small Intestine

Endocrine Glands and the Hormones They Produce

The endocrine glands secrete hormones that regulate various functions throughout the body. Endocrine glands release hormones (chemical messengers) into the bloodstream to be transported to various organs and tissues throughout the body. For instance, the pancreas secretes insulin, which allows the body to regulate levels of sugar in the blood. The thyroid gets instructions from the pituitary to secrete hormones that determine the pace of chemical activity in the body (the more hormone in the bloodstream, the faster the chemical activity; the less hormone, the slower the activity).

The entire human body is made up of interdependent systems, which exist in an extremely delicate balance. When the body needs to react to a certain situation, the system allows certain hormones to be released from those glands. Fortunately, even though we might abuse one of the systems, others will take over to a certain extent for a certain period of time. For example, if you are not getting the energy you need for your daily tasks

from metabolizing the food you eat, or assimilating the nutrients, the adrenals will be called on to produce more of the "fight or flight" hormone, adrenalin, to give an additional boost in energy. However, if the adrenals are called on too often to provide this extra energy, they will become exhausted. If you're not eating enough nutrient-rich foods you need for energy, again, the adrenals will have to work overtime.

Another example would be if you cannot digest certain fats, the liver will overproduce bile, and the gall bladder will be worn out or painful gallstones will form.

So with yoga, not only do the postures and lifestyle help make all the glands and organs healthy and more efficient, but you become more sensitive to your body. You can be aware of the fact if and when something is not functioning properly.

Hypothalamus

The hypothalamus is a small portion of the brain that is in very close proximity to the pituitary gland. It controls the pituitary hormones by releasing hormones that stimulate or inhibit their release. For example, the hypothalamus secretes gonadotropin releasing hormone, which causes the production of gonadotropins (follicle stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone) by the pituitary. It also produces corticotrophin releasing hormone, thyrotropin releasing hormone, and growth hormone releasing hormone.

Pineal Gland

The pineal gland is a small gland located within the brain that secretes the hormone_melatonin, which regulates the cycle of sleep and waking.

Pituitary Gland

The pituitary is sometimes referred to as the "master gland" because it controls hormone functions such as temperature, thyroid activity, growth during childhood, urine production, testosterone production in males, and ovulation and estrogen production in females. In effect, the pituitary gland functions as our thermostat that controls all other glands responsible for hormone secretion. Your pituitary gland receives messages from another part of your brain, the hypothalamus, which has received messages from the environment or other areas of your body. For example, if one of your hormone levels gets too low, your hypothalamus will send a message via hormones to your pituitary gland. In response, your pituitary gland secretes hormones of its own and sends them through your blood stream like little messengers. If all is going as it should, these hormones reach the gland that had not been producing enough of its own hormones. The hormones from your pituitary gland then stimulate new hormone production out of the misbehaving gland. If a gland is overproducing hormones, then your pituitary gland will send the message to lower hormone production.

Thyroid and Parathyroid Glands

The thyroid produces thyroxin and triiodothyronine, which is known to regulate metabolism. It also secretes <u>calcitonin</u>, which helps regulate calcium levels. Some of the other critical functions that the thyroid controls include body temperature, energy and fuel combustion, digestive enzymes, stomach acid production, fat and protein synthesis, metabolic rate, and synthesis and release of hormones that control bone and hair growth and skin rejuvenation.

Adrenal Glands

There are two adrenal glands, referred to as suprarenal glands, located on top of each kidney. The adrenal glands are composed of two major components, the adrenal cortex and the adrenal medulla.

The hormones produced by the adrenal cortex are vital for life and include the glucocorticoids, mineralocorticoids, and some of the sex hormones, like androgens and small amounts of estrogen.

The adrenal medulla secretes hormones including both epinephrine and norepinephrine. Adrenal medulla increases available energy, heart rate, and metabolism.

Pancreas (both a gland and an organ)

Located between the stomach and the small intestine, the pancreas is a part of the digestive and endocrine system. It functions as both an endocrine gland and as an exocrine gland. As an endocrine glad, it produces several important hormones, including insulin, glucagon, and somatostatin. As an exocrine gland, it secretes pancreatic juice containing digestive enzymes that pass to the small intestine. These enzymes help in the breakdown of the carbohydrates, protein, and fat in the chyme, the pulpy acidic fluid that passes from the stomach to the small intestine, consisting of gastric juices and partially digested food.

Here is an example of how the pancreas works in secreting hormones that control your blood sugar levels. Insulin and glucagon are hormones that work to regulate the level of sugar (glucose) in the body to keep it within a healthy range. The amount of glucose in your bloodstream and cells varies depending on what you've eaten, how much exercise your muscles are doing, and how active your body cells are. These two hormones, insulin and glucagon, have the job of keeping tight control on the amount of glucose in your blood so that it doesn't rise or fall outside of healthy limits. When someone is a Type 1 diabetic, they must give themselves insulin shots because their pancreas doesn't work, and too much glucose in their blood causes "hyperglycemia."

Knowing the symptoms of hyperglycemia in its early stages can help prevent more serious complications later on. Some of the earliest symptoms include increased thirst, blurry vision, frequent urination, headache, and fatigue. As hyperglycemia progresses, it can cause other symptoms like bad breath, dry mouth, confusion, abdominal pain, and weakness.

If you eat a lot of sugar at any one time, your blood sugar goes way up, and your body releases insulin to bring it down. To do this, insulin forces your body to store all that sugar in fat cells.

In the long term, a few things can happen. Your fat cells may begin to hold onto that energy a lot longer, making it even harder to lose weight or making it even easier for you to gain. Those constant insulin spikes can cause something caused Insulin Resistance, which is basically the first step in Type 2 diabetes. Insulin Resistance can be caused by medications, not

taking enough insulin, diet choices, and illness. If left untreated, it can cause an array of health complications, some of which can be fatal.

Ovaries

Found only in women, these two small glands produce estrogen, progesterone, and inhibin. Estrogen and <u>progesterone</u> are the primary sex hormones responsible for many of the female secondary sex characteristics. Inhibin is a hormone that controls levels of follicle stimulating hormone, which regulates egg development.

The ovaries are sensitive to the effects and changes of the endocrine or hormonal system. They respond to and produce their own hormones as needed by the body. In fact, the second major role of the ovary is to secrete the sex hormones, like <u>estrogen</u>, progesterone, and very small amounts of <u>androgens</u>, which cause the typical female sex characteristics to develop and be maintained.

In addition, the ovaries also respond to <u>FSH</u> and <u>LH</u>, which are produced by the pituitary gland. FSH, or Follicle Stimulating Hormone, causes the estrogen level to rise and a group of egg follicles to grow each month. As one follicle becomes dominant and reaches maturity, the higher estrogen level will cause the LH (luteinizing hormone) to surge, triggering ovulation.

Testes

A pair of glands found only in men, the testicles produce sperm and secrete testosterone, the primary hormone responsible for the male secondary sex characteristics. The testes, also known as testicles or male gonads, lie behind the penis in a pouch of skin called the scrotum.

The Hormones Yoga Stimulates to Help You Lose Weight

These hormones are all a part of our marvelous and complicated endocrine system. The endocrine system controls weight, metabolism, sexual development, energy output, hair and bone growth, and other functions.

functions.
☐ Thyroid – (thyroxine and T3) Controls the rate at which muscle cells use energy
□ Adrenaline – One of the functions of adrenaline is to break down fat stores and burn them. Some researchers believe that adrenaline can also decrease appetite.
☐ Insulin and Glucagons – Both fat-storing and fat-burning hormones that regulate the amount of blood sugar in your body at any one point
\square Testosterone – Regulates fat production and builds lean muscle mass that assists in fat burning
☐ Human Growth Hormone (HGH) − Regulates how much fat instead of sugar gets burned for energy
☐ Insulin-like Growth Factor — a fat-burning hormone that gets stimulated by HGH and helps fuel your body between meals by releasing stored fat and sugar to create energy for functioning

Introduction to Yoga

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj,' which essentially means to join or unite. The union referred to is that of the individual self uniting with the Cosmic Consciousness or the Universal Spirit. Yoga is a means to achieving this goal. The true essence of <u>yoga</u> involves elevating the life force or 'Kundalini' at the base of the spine through a series of physical and mental exercises. At the physical level, the methods comprise various yoga postures or 'asanas' that aim to keep the body healthy.

However, the ultimate goal of yoga is to help the individual transcend the self and attain enlightenment. As the Bhagavad-Gita says, "A person is said to have achieved yoga, the union with the Self, when the perfectly disciplined mind gets freedom from all desires and becomes absorbed in the Self alone."

Thousands of years ago, when yoga was invented, it was for the purpose of creating a way to not only keep the body healthy, but to be able to be calm and composed enough to sit in yoga postures and meditate for long periods of time. If the body is overly agitated, it creates waves of agitation in the mind, which makes meditation (a state in which you want your mind to quiet down) difficult. They also knew that certain breathing rhythms created specific mental and physical benefits, and they learned how to use breathing to either calm down or invigorate the system. Exercises in breath control, such as breath retention and deliberate inhalation and exhalation for specific mental and physical benefits, are called pranayama.

Benefits of the Yogic Lifestyle

Yoga is not a religion; it is a way of living where the aim is "a healthy mind in a healthy body." Understanding that we are physical, mental, and spiritual beings, yoga helps promote a balanced development of all the three. Other forms of physical exercises, like aerobics, assure only physical well-being. They have little to do with the development of the spiritual body. Yoga recharges the body with life force energy, which:

- Facilitates attainment of harmony and equilibrium
- Promotes self-healing
- Removes negative blocks from the mind and toxins from the body
- Enhances personal power
- Increases self-awareness
- Helps in attention focus and concentration
- Reduces stress and tension in the physical body by activating the parasympathetic nervous system

By practicing yoga, you will feel rejuvenated and energized.

Yogic Diet

Keep in mind that in order to lose weight, all systems must be working optimally, or at least successfully, for you to be getting the most nutrients from your food. Only then will you be able to have the energy to move through your day and to practice yoga. To be able to achieve "effortless" weight loss, your goal should be to constantly have nutrients slowly being released into your blood stream, and for that, you must eat often and eat the right foods. Fortunately, the foods that enable the slow drip of nutrients into your system are also the ones that can help you shed pounds. And if you continue to eat them for the rest of your life, you'll naturally shed your excess weight and stay slim and healthy.

In addition, practicing yoga will contribute to the desire to eat lighter, healthier foods, and you might even want to explore vegetarianism, which is the dietary discipline that most serious yogis adhere to. The digestion and assimilation of meat is more difficult and takes more energy than that of vegetables and dairy products. It would be an interesting experiment for you to challenge your assumptions and beliefs about what kinds of food you need to eat for health, strength, and happiness. It will give you insights into yourself as you progress with your yoga program.

Yoga and Weight Loss

Weight loss is the result of complex interaction between various body systems and can be influenced by multiple factors, including but not limited to lifestyle, diet, and genetics. There really is no miracle weight loss diet where you can eat everything you want in unlimited quantities and have weight drop off. The bottom line is that you need to eat fewer calories and burn more. However, that doesn't necessarily mean eating less food. You can eat a LOT of the kinds of foods that boost your metabolism, make your body burn calories just to digest them, nurture your glands, tune up your endocrine system, and keep you full. So there is no need to be hungry all the time. You simply need to change the proportions of the kinds of foods you eat, substituting healthier, "livelier" foods for "deadening," caloriedense foods. What foods to eat are addressed in many other books about healthy eating, so I will not go into what foods to eat here. As Aldous Huxley said, "If most of us remain ignorant of ourselves, it is because selfknowledge is painful and we prefer the pleasures of illusion." Meaning of course, that self-examination is difficult, and that by practicing yoga, we become confronted with who we think we are, but it may not really be who we are. We have the opportunity to engage in valuable practice to explore who we are beyond our emotions, physical selves, and thoughts. For example, cutting down on sugar may expose various cravings and help you uncover how you might be "using" sweets to energize or soothe yourself without even giving it a single conscious thought. You can use the yogic lifestyle to become more sensitive to yourself and explore your inner workings.

Yoga tunes up your entire system and makes it function better. Yoga is perfect for weight loss because it is more than just a physical workout; it will help you to deal with stress in your life without resorting to food to energize or soothe yourself. Your first goal for achieving lasting weight loss is to get as healthy as you can. Knowing what systems are affected will help you to understand why this is necessary and ultimately achieve this most important goal.

There are different types of asana (physical) yoga that can help with weight loss, such as hatha, ashtanga, vinyasa flow, and power yoga. Some

types help with weight loss more than others because of the caloric expenditure involved, but your yoga practice for weight loss does not have to be extremely strenuous to work well for you. Gentle hatha yoga, and even seated chair yoga, will give many health benefits and can be helpful with weight loss because you are triggering the parasympathetic nervous system, which regulates breathing, digestion, and hormones.

These days, hatha is most often used to describe gentle, basic classes with no flow between poses. A hatha class will likely be a slow-paced stretching class with some simple breathing exercises and perhaps seated meditation. This is a good place to learn beginners' poses, relaxation techniques, and become comfortable with yoga.

Many people try a hatha class and love the relaxed feeling; others may decide that hatha yoga is too slow and meditative for them. If you fall in the latter category, try vinyasa for a completely different experience.

Vinyasa yoga, in which movement is synchronized to the breath, is a term that covers a broad range of yoga classes. This style is sometimes also called flow yoga because of the smooth way that the poses run together and become like a dance. The breath becomes an important component because the teacher will instruct you to move from one pose to the next on an inhale or an exhale. Vinyasa is literally translated from Sanskrit as meaning "connection," according to Ellen Stansell, PhD, RYT, a scholar of yogic literature and Sanskrit. In terms of yoga asana, we can interpret this as a connection between movement and breath.

Depending on the type of yoga you perform, calories burned during your workout can vary from 180 to 360 calories per hour. Power yoga is often the common choice for weight loss because of its triple forces, including strength, flexibility, and cardio. That said, every kind of hatha yoga can be beneficial.

In a typical 90-minute session, you will have touched almost all the muscles, ligaments, organs, glands, and bones of the body in some way. The deep breathing techniques used in coordination with the postures help flush out toxins and water weight. Yoga also boosts the lymphatic system and encourages it to perform better.

The Best Poses for Your Practice

With hundreds of yoga poses to select from, how do you know which ones will be best for you? Here I'll not only introduce you to the poses that I think are most effective for weight loss, but I will also explain why the poses will help you tune up your metabolic fat burning system, and thus help you lose weight faster.

The yoga poses I've chosen to focus on in this book are:
☐ Forward Bends
☐ Back Bends
☐ Side Bends
□ Spinal twist
□ Bridge
□ Crescent
□ Cobra
\square Plow
\square Bow
□ Chair
☐ Downward Facing Dog
And, while not technically a yoga posture:
□ pranayama, or deep breathing practice

These are by no means a complete yoga practice, and you should enlist the assistance of a qualified yoga instructor to help you create a well-rounded practice plan that is suitable for your age, ability, and the amount of time you have available to practice. Even if you do not have time for 60-or 90-minute classes in your schedule, just 20 minutes a day of yoga practice will have a *very significant* effect on your health, weight, and well-being.

It is always good to challenge yourself to do the best you can at any time, but it is **never** to your benefit to push yourself past the point of discomfort and into pain. My motto has always been, "Live to practice

another day." Injuries can be a tough way to learn the lesson of being gentle on yourself. Use common sense, err on the side of caution, and remember that doing yoga well and without injuries will give you the strength and confidence to go further in your next session on the mat.

Yoga: The Marriage of Movement and Breath

First, a few word about breathing and its importance. As mentioned, the word yoga means "union." Generally, it is accepted that it is a union between body, mind, and soul, but it's also a union between movement and breathing. Especially in ashtanga and power yoga, we attempt to create a marriage between the movements and the breath to create one unbroken and even flow to the poses, including the breath in either an "inflow" or an "outflow" with each movement. Every moment of your yoga practice is filled with breathing, except for the final resting pose, or Corpse Pose, where you allow your breathing to become very quiet and soft.

All breath is taken in through and flows out through the nose, which is said to be both warming for the system on the inhale and cooling on the exhale, depending on the intensity of the practice. The breath is drawn deep into the lungs, so you can feel your ribs expand with each breath. You have to be conscious of the breath because breathing deeply and continuously is not our natural way to breathe. Finally, the breath is relaxed and not forced in any way. True, the breath has to be conscious and intentional, but that is not the same as *forced*. If someone were listening to you without being able to see you, they would think that you were simply relaxing, doing deep breathing. In other words: no grunting, groaning, pursing the lips, blowing, holding the breath, gasping, moaning, etcetera. Imagine a sleeping baby's breathing, and try to consciously imitate that throughout your entire yoga session. You do not need to breathe particularly slowly in yoga. If the pose demands more prana, more air, just breathe faster in and out through your nose. And don't be afraid to back off from the intensity of the pose if it makes you too exhausted or breathless.

The Poses

Forward Bends



Variation 1 – Hands on shins



Variation 1 – Hands on floor



Variation 3 – Forearms tucked behind calves



Variation 4 – Seated, holding feet, or as far as your hands can reach

Forward bending stretches out the back side of the body completely, from the Achilles tendons to the top of the neck. It creates spinal decompression using gravity alone, and it is a very gentle and safe way to add more space to the intervertebral discs. This is important because as you age the weight of the body tends to make the discs bulge slightly, and if they ever bulge enough to begin impinging on any of the spinal nerves, the result is often very painful. So any kind of natural spinal decompression is valuable, but it must be done gently to avoid any damage to ligaments and muscles.

The important thing to remember with forward bending is to attempt to keep the spine relatively flat and bend from the hips rather than at the waist. The goal is to stretch the hamstring muscles and not strain the muscles in the lower back. When starting out, you may be so tight that you will feel any attempt at a forward bend all the way from the back of your knees to your neck. As you get a little more flexible, you'll be able to tell which muscles are getting the greatest stretch, and you'll be able to adjust the pose accordingly.

Forward bends can be done standing or sitting, with straight legs or slightly bent legs, narrow stance or hip width or wider. With the wide leg forward bend, you may also want to try adding a small spinal twist by stretching the right hand over to the left foot and vice versa. This twist stimulates the adrenals, stretches the intercostal muscles, (which makes deep breathing easier), and compresses and stretches different parts of the colon and small intestines. Forward bending even helps in digestion by gently compressing and massaging the abdomen. Standing forward bends also help digestion by relieving some of the weight on the intestines from gravity.

Side Bend



Side bends are great for waking up and trimming excess fat from around the waist and side of the hip area, because they work one side of the body while stretching the other. Side bending makes deep breathing easier while in the pose, and thereby makes your everyday breathing more efficient. The pose expands your breathing capacity by stretching the intercostal muscles between the ribs. The pose eliminates toxins because it increases lymph flow by stimulating the areas with the most lymph glands, including the armpit and groin areas.

The pose is achieved by first stretching both arms over the head, clasping the hands together, and extending the index fingers out. Keep the elbows drawn in to the side of the head and keep your arms as straight as possible. Use your back muscles to move your upper arms farther back behind the ears if you can. Reach up with both arms, then pull your shoulders down and away from your ears, so your shoulders are not hunched up around your ears. Inhale, then slowly on an exhale, start dropping your upper body to the side. Keep your chest open to the front of the room, as if you were being held between two giant sheets of glass, so

your body stays on one plane. It's okay if you cannot go over very far to the side, just a few inches will do for a start... if you feel comfortable there, you can always go a little farther. Keep your face either looking straight ahead, or look up slightly toward the ceiling if your neck is comfortable. Keep breathing here for 30 seconds, then come back up, and side bend on the other side. It will feel so good, you'll probably want to do it again on each side!

Plow Pose



The plow pose is essentially an inverted forward bend. All inverted poses are beneficial for sending more blood to the brain and giving your circulatory system a rest by reversing the force that your heart must struggle against most of the time (gravity). The plow pose is an especially important inversion because it increases circulation to the thyroid, adrenal, and pituitary glands.

Lying on your back, place your hands palms down on the floor with your thumbs just under your hips. Bring both legs up toward the ceiling, (one at a time or together,) and using your abdominal muscles, attempt to bring your feet up to your forehead while still keeping your hips on the floor. If you can do this without difficulty, simply swing your legs over your head again with a little more controlled force to elevate your hips and bring your feet toward the floor beyond your head. You can either support your hips with your hands, or grasp your hands as you gently allow your entire spine to stretch. Depending on your flexibility, your feet might touch the floor or not, and that's completely okay if they do not. Keep your chin tucked into the hollow of your throat to stimulate the thyroid gland, and to protect your neck from strain, do not turn your head to either side unless you are very sure you can do that without injuring yourself.

Backward Bends



Let's now explore standing back bending, Cobra, and Bow poses. The benefits of back bending poses are that they stretch out the front of the abdomen and wake up the deep postural muscles that make up our core while strengthening the back muscles that allow us to remain upright. Keeping these muscles strong will protect the back against strains from lifting because we will be "practicing" using the muscles in a controlled way. Back bending opens up the hip flexor muscles as well, (the tight muscles in the front of the body where the legs meet the torso). Most people have very weak hamstring (back of the thigh), gluteus (buttocks), and lower back muscles, and overly strong quadriceps muscles in the front of the leg. This creates imbalances that lead to injury.

Poses that involve backward stretching create circulation to the groin area and help to stimulate the lymph system creating lymphatic drainage. This allows us to eliminate toxins (that create cellulite, puckered skin, and water weight).

When practicing this posture, engage the gluteus muscles in the buttocks, stretch up the chest, drop your shoulders, and keep lifting the heart area. Think of this as more of a "chest lift" than a "back bend," then

drop your arms back as far as you can behind your ears, and look up. Pull in your stomach muscles, and keep your hips engaged, hugging the muscles into the bones.

Cobra Pose



The cobra pose resembles a cobra that is ready to strike. This pose stimulates the kidneys and adrenals and strengthens the organs of the digestive system. Besides facilitating weight loss, it makes the spine more flexible and opens up the chest, for better breathing. Have you noticed how some people have rounded shoulders and sunken chests? Some yoga experts say that cobra pose helps you to overcome fear, expand your heart and experience more love in your life.

Lying prone with the tops of the feet on the floor, place your hands flat on the floor beside your chest. Hug your elbows into your sides, using your arm and back muscles, arch up as far as you comfortably can. It is not important that you straighten your elbows. Keep your hipbones on the floor and keep pressing your shoulders down away from your ears. You can look upward or straight ahead if looking up causes any neck discomfort. Take three deep inhales and exhales here, then release.

If there is any tightness in the lower back, do a counter-stretch called Child's Pose. Push your body back and sit on your heels with your buttocks, your knees slightly open so your body can nestle in between your thighs, and with your arms by your side, rest your head on the floor.



Bow Pose



Bow Pose, which is a prone back bend, boosts energy and keeps your metabolism high. It strengthens your back muscles while stretching and opening up the front of your body. It also opens up the heart area significantly, and by opening up the intercostal muscles in the rib cage, the bow pose trains your breathing muscles to function more efficiently with less effort.

Lying face down on your mat, bend your legs at the knee, flex your feet at the ankle. Reaching your arms straight back, grab your ankle or shin with the palm facing in our out. Kick your legs back to arch and lift your upper body, and then reach up toward the ceiling with your feet. Take five deep inhales and exhales and feel your diaphragm muscle working. As you expand it, you might even be able to rock your body with your breath a little. *Yeah!! Rock it!*

After coming out of the pose (gracefully), rest on your stomach with your head resting on your folded arms facing to the right to relieve any tension in the neck that the pose might have generated. Repeat the pose and rest for another 30 seconds with your head facing to the left.

Bridge Pose



The bridge pose, like the plow, is a gentle inversion that works with gravity to open the chest and shoulder area. As the hips rise, the chest is pressed up towards the chin, and the movement massages the thyroid gland. As mentioned earlier, stimulating the thyroid encourages production of the hormones that regulate the body's metabolism. This pose engages the hamstrings, large muscles of the back of the thigh, and elevates the heart rate if held for 30 seconds.

To do this pose, lie on your back with your knees bent and your heels fairly close to your hips. You will notice, if you have difficulty lifting your hips, that you get the best leverage if your heels are directly under your knees. Press your hips up toward the sky, attempting to make a straight "plank" from your knees to your shoulders, using your hamstring muscles and not your buttocks. Try to relax your butt and avoid squeezing. If you can rock yourself from side to side and lift your body up enough to bring your upper arms behind your back and clasp your hands, this completes the pose. If you can't do that for now, allow your arms to stay at your sides, and you will still gain significant benefit.

In addition to massaging the thyroid gland, this pose slightly engages the perineum muscle, which in turn stimulates both the testes and the ovaries.

The perineum muscle is the muscle at the base of the body located between the anal sphincter and the urogenital muscles. With practice, this muscle can be isolated and engaged for a variety of purposes—when you practice contracting this muscle, you are strengthening your pelvic floor muscles. A strong pelvic floor can help prevent urinary incontinence later in life. If you are a man, exercising your perineal muscles can prevent possible

prostate problems and impotence. Women can perform perineal exercises to prepare for and recover from childbirth as well as prevent uterine prolapse.

Spinal Twisting



There are so many wonderful benefits to twisting and wringing your spine to give it length and suppleness. Not only do spinal twists give articulation to every vertebrae, but they also keep the discs in between the vertebrae spongy and lubricated. Since there are so many nerves running up and down the spine, spinal twists both energize and sooth the nervous system and trigger deep relaxation, especially when coupled with deep breathing (pranayama). Spinal twists also tone the muscles in your abdominal region and stimulate your entire digestive system. By stretching the entire spine, including your neck, you address the area where we hold a lot of stress. If you don't already know it, stress plays a big part in your metabolic balance; it inhibits the ability of the immune system to protect the body, slows wound healing, and may even diminish muscle strength.

There are a variety of ways to do spinal twists, which includes sitting, standing, and lying down. Here we will discuss only the seated and lying down versions since standing spinal twists are more advanced poses.

Sit with your left leg stretched out in front of you, with the right leg bent at the knee, and the right foot resting on the outside of the left knee. Place your right hand behind the base of your spine, and lifting the left arm up and over the bent right knee, use your left elbow to push against the outside of the right knee to facilitate the twisting pose. Inhale as you lift the crown of your head up toward the ceiling, and exhale as you twist to the right, sending your gaze behind you. Use your straight right arm to support the spine. Inhaling, stretch up. Exhaling, twist. Do this two more times. If you want to loosen up your neck a little bit as you are twisting, lift your

face toward the ceiling, and then drop your chin down to your shoulder. Repeat, then release and switch sides. *Keep breathing*...

Crescent Pose



Variation 1 – Ball of the rear foot on the mat



Variation 2 – Knee of back leg and top of the foot on the mat

The crescent lunge pose helps speed up your metabolism by increasing the heart rate. It burns calories like crazy. It's also good for strengthening the legs and opening up the groin area where the torso meets the legs. This area is significantly short and tight on almost everyone who sits most of the time at work. This pose works the large muscle groups in your thigh and hip area.

To get into the pose, step back with one leg and keep the heel lifted with weight on the ball of the foot. Position the other leg far enough away from your body so that when you bend your knee, the knee stays over the foot, not extending past it. This might entail opening up your legs a little more than what you would expect. Balancing on the ball of the foot in the back, lower your body straight down, not forward over the front bent leg. Engage your abdominal muscles so that your body stays in a straight line, don't let your abdomen bulge forward, and then lift your arms up toward the sky, trying to get your upper arms as close to your ears as you can. You can point your fingers at the sky or clasp your hands with just the index fingers extended. Look straight ahead or look up if your neck feels comfortable doing this. This pose can also be modified and done with the back knee and top of the foot on the ground.

Stay in the posture for 15-30 seconds, then release and change legs. *Keep breathing...*

Chair Pose



This pose engages 70% of all the muscles in your body, which includes the back, abdominals, glutes, and all the thigh muscles. Therefore, it is excellent for raising your heart rate and increasing your metabolism.

With your feet parallel to each other and slightly apart, raise your arms over your head with palms facing inward, or join the palms together. Keep your upper arms next to your ears. Take a breath. Exhaling, bend your knees trying to make your thighs parallel to the floor. In this pose, your knees will project out over your feet. Try to make a right angle between your upper and lower leg and between your thighs and your body.

Move your shoulders down and back, engage your abdominal muscles, and point your tailbone towards the floor. Stay in this pose for 30 seconds, breathing as much as necessary. Keep your breathing deep, even though your breaths might come faster. Release and stand up.

Downward Facing Dog



The downward facing dog pose stretches and engages the stomach, shoulders, back, arms, and legs. It reverses gravity for your entire upper body and takes pressure off the heart, which makes it work less to get blood flowing to the organs in the upper body and the brain. Like other inversion poses, the reverse action of gravity on the body gets the lymphatic fluid flowing in opposite directions, which helps remove toxins from your system. This pose is also good for metabolic balance and elimination because it relieves gravitational pressure on the abdomen.

Start on the floor on your hands and knees. Make sure your knees are directly below your hips and your hands are slightly forward of your shoulders. Spread your palms with your index fingers parallel or slightly turned out, and tuck your toes under.

Exhale and lift your knees away from the floor. At first, keep the knees slightly bent and the heels lifted away from the floor. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis and press it lightly toward the floor. Lift your hips toward the sky. Inhale...

Then with an exhalation, push your top thighs back and stretch your heels down toward the floor. Straighten your knees, but be sure not to lock them.

Engage the outer arms and press the bases of the index fingers actively into the floor. Slide your shoulder blades down your back. Keep the head between the upper arms; don't let it hang.

Downward Facing Dog is one of the poses in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. It's also an excellent yoga asana all on its own. Stay in

this pose anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes. Then bend your knees to the floor with an exhalation, sit back on your heels, bring your head to the floor, and rest in Child's Pose.

Conclusion

As I mentioned before, these are elementary poses that may or may not make up a complete yoga session for you, depending on your experience, general fitness level, and flexibility. For some, it might be enough, but not enough, if you have a regular exercise regimen. However, even this short sequence will help everyone who adds it to his or her daily life. How can I be so sure of this? Because human beings didn't evolve to sit or lie down 22 hours a day. Our ancestors had to bend and lift and chop and jump and run and climb daily just to survive, and obesity was rare. It's ironic that we have to simulate these activities in our daily routines because a plentiful food supply is normal for most of us living in developed countries.

In closing, the only way to lose weight and keep it off the rest of your life is by **changing your lifestyle** and adopting a healthy one as your goal, which includes the challenges of moving, breathing properly, continuously feeding yourself "alivening" foods, and learning to avoid the temptation of overindulging in "deadening" foods or substances.

By accepting the discipline, you will improve your chances for living a longer, happier, healthier life. The yogic lifestyle will make you grow as a person mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is the main reason to practice, not just to lose weight for vanity's sake, but to evolve as a fearless, fully actualized person who can be both self-reliant and sensitive, empathetic to others, strong, and in tune with the greater purpose of improving life on earth.

Good luck in your yogic and health endeavors, and if you ever want to write, I can always be reached at <u>info@vivationusa.com</u>.

About the Author



Patricia Bacall is an internationally acknowledged wellness advocate and has been teaching various aspects of health and emotional healing since 1980. She has trained in yoga, massage, nutrition, and Vivation breathwork. She is the author of *Loving Yourself Thin*, the Vivation Breathwork method for achieving your ideal body without dieting or deprivation, and *The New Weight Loss Blueprint* available on Amazon.com, and at www.lovingyourselfthin.com.

A yogi for more than 30 years, she believes that yoga enhances every aspect of life and can work with any other type of exercise program to maintain youth and enhance longevity. She follows the eight limbs of yoga, including the various ethical guidelines of nonviolence and truthfulness.

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