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How to do yoga mudras

People Images/Getty Images Team Byrdie can't say enough good things about yoga. It's much more than just stretching and breathing—yoga gets your heart pumping. Working on your practice also helps you sleep better and prepares you for stressful situations (read: no more tense shoulders and clenched jaw). If you stick to it, you may experience improved joint mobility, boosted metabolism, and a stronger body. See? Yoga is no joke. And the best part is that you don't need to sign up for ClassPass to reap its benefits—you can do it right in your living room (with Netflix paused, of course). But what if you have no idea where to start? Each and every one of us has been an amateur yogi at some point—it's all about understanding the basics. Hence, we tapped Jenny Chen, a certified yogi, for the must-know yoga poses for beginners. She did us one better and created an entire sequence that will take you from position to position, so you can flow through a full beginner-friendly routine on your own. Ready to get started? Check out Chen's step-by-step yoga sequence for beginners. Yoga has many benefits and is considered a low-impact exercise. However, there are some precautions you can take to ensure you don't injure yourself. "Discomfort is OK, but pain isn't," says master yoga teacher and CEO of Omēta Holistic Wellness Omri Kleinberger. "Don't try to prove anything to anyone, especially if it means taking unnecessary risks, like trying postures you're unfamiliar with." He says beginners can start by taking a yoga class so a teacher can give proper instruction on correct form. "Practice with guidance, and you will be able to get immediate feedback if what you're feeling is what you should be feeling," he says. Even though yoga is safe for most people, if you have any of the below conditions, you should ask your doctor if yoga is right for you, says the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Pregnancy Knee, hip, or back injuries High blood pressure Eye conditions, such as glaucoma Balance issues You should listen to your body while going through the poses, stopping if you feel pain. Some people may need to avoid some poses, especially those back poses in extreme flexion or extension. Keeping these things in mind, most people can safely practice yoga and reap all the benefits. "Beginners see the most change over the least amount of time. Overall flexibility and strength will increase relatively fast, as will endurance, stamina, and a general feeling of well-being. It can affect your appetite, metabolism, and elevate your mood, just like other forms of physical exercise," says Kleinberger. "The low impact keeps you relatively safe from injury, while learning how to be mindful has immense potential to mentally enhance and change your life." 01 of 14 Getty Images Chen starts out the sequence with child's pose, which Kleinberger enjoys as well. "Restful postures are great because they build confidence while allowing for space and rest," he says. Kneel on the floor, with your feet together and knees about hip-width apart. Either let your stomach rest between your legs, or bring your feet and legs together. Place your arms back near your legs, with your palms up. You can also lay your arms out in front of you, palms on the ground, for an even greater stretch. Take a couple of breaths into your lower back here. 02 of 14 Getty Images On your next inhale, straighten your legs, and bring your backside up so you are in downward-facing dog. Place your hands in front of your head, with your arms shoulder-width apart and fingers spread out wide. While pressing your hands down, try straightening your legs as much as you can. You can alternate between bending and stretching your legs or come onto the balls of your feet and pedal. This means that while you're in the pose, you will take turns on each leg, softly extending the stretch by going up on your toes on one foot and then the other. This will help your muscles warm up. After you take a couple of breaths in downward-facing dog, come to the tops of your toes, and either step or jump both feet to the front of your mat. You will want your feet to be right behind your hands—like you're touching your toes. 03 of 14 Getty Images Inhale to rise, and stand tall for mountain pose. You want to think of rolling your back up one vertebra at a time as you rise. When you're standing upright again, see if you can evenly distribute your weight throughout your feet. Stand with your feet together and your arms at your side. Think about rotating your thighs inward, while tightening your core. When it feels right, raise your arms above your head. (In the image above, she has gone past this point and is accelerating the pose by arching her back and looking upward.) Always move slowly when escalating any of the poses—it's good to try to push yourself, but stop if something doesn't feel right. It's important to keep in mind not to hyperextend your muscles if you're going to attempt to arch backward. 04 of 14 Getty Images It is now time for your first transition in this sequence. Transitions help you flow from one pose to the other while maintaining your breathing and form. Let your arms lower to the ground in front of you (where they had been when you were in downward-facing dog). When you feel your hands are planted evenly, then you can step or jump your feet back into a plank position, as shown above. Keep your core tight and your body in a straight line. 05 of 14 Getty Images From the plank, you will transition into the cobra pose. Slowly lower your chest, and bend your elbows until you're all the way against the ground. Take a deep breath, and during that inhale, keep your hands planted on the ground, and lift your chest for a cobra pose. (See above for example.) When you let that breath out and exhale, sit your butt back against your calves, and stretch your arms forward so you return to child's pose. From here, repeat the previous steps to go into downward-facing dog. This sequence (Sūrya Māmāsakar, or sun salutation A) can be repeated. This cycle begins with child's pose into mountain pose, and it finishes with cobra. You can repeat this a couple of times before moving on, if you'd like. 06 of 14 Getty Images After you finish the sun salutation sequence (as many times as you want), you should be in a downward-facing dog. It is now time for your second transition. Inhale and step your right leg forward. Try to aim for your foot to come in between your hands. Keep your back leg outstretched. Look up slightly and hold. 07 of 14 Getty Images The second transition will flow seamlessly into your next pose, which is warrior I. As you exhale, ground your left heel so that you feel stable, and rise up to warrior I. Your right leg should be bent at a 90-degree angle, and your left leg should be straight behind you. Your back foot will be turned perpendicularly from your front foot. Reach your arms up when you feel steady. (In the example, the woman is stretching back and leading with her arms for a deeper stretch.) Again, only try to accelerate poses when you feel very secure in your ability, and always go slowly, being careful not to hyperextend your muscles. 08 of 14 Getty Images You will next flow into the warrior II pose, which is meant to both strengthen your legs and increase flexibility. Lower your arms to be in line with your shoulders. Keeping your feet in the same position, open the arms to warrior II. Look out at and past the tips of your fingers. Stretch your arms slightly farther as you hold. 09 of 14 Getty Images You will next flow into Trikonasana, or the triangle pose. From this pose, you will repeat the last few poses in a sequence of moves. Take a deep inhale as you straighten the right leg. Reach your right arm over and down to grab your right shin. When you feel balanced, lift your left arm and reach up, with your palm facing the same direction as your chest. Bring your arms down in front of you, under your shoulders, before stepping your foot back and returning to the plank position. Lower all the way down again. Inhale to cobra, and exhale to downward-facing dog. This should be slow. Keep your breathing consistent. Repeat the last sequence of moves (beginning with warrior I) on the opposite side. From downward-facing dog, step or jump into a forward fold. This means you should let your head drop as you reach to touch your toes. If you can't reach your toes, let yourself stretch as far as you can, and relax your neck as you reach. 10 of 14 Getty Images When you're ready, come up to tree pose. This challenges your balance and strengthens your core and lower body. On your inhale, reach your leg up to place your left foot on the inside of your right leg, on your calf or upper thigh. Make sure you're not placing your foot on your knee. When you find your balance, bring your hands in front of your heart, with your palms together. If you feel steady, reach the arms up, keeping your pinky fingers in. Hold this pose, then repeat with the opposite foot. 11 of 14 Getty Images The seated twist pose is meant to improve spine mobility, as well as digestion. Listen to your body, and stop if you feel any pain. Lower your body down into a seated position. Bend your right leg into a 90-degree angle. Swing your left leg over so that your left foot is resting against the outside of your right knee. Hold onto your left foot with your right hand, and twist over your left shoulder. Hold for a few counts. When you're done, switch sides and hold. If you're first starting out and your hips are tight, put a blanket under them to add support and comfort. 12 of 14 Getty Images The next move in the sequence is the pigeon pose. If you have knee problems or experience pain with this pose, make the adjustments described below. Take the leg that is crossed over your knee and extend it backward for pigeon pose. If you can, try looking up to extend your back. Stop if you feel any discomfort. Hold for a few counts while taking deep breaths. If you have knee problems, you can also flip onto your back, keeping the leg positioning the same (this move is called a figure four), so you are not putting weight on your knee. Move to a downward-facing dog again before stepping or jumping to the front of your mat to repeat pigeon pose on the other side. 13 of 14 Getty Images From the pigeon pose, let yourself go into a forward fold, hanging your head and reaching for your toes. You will next transition into the bridge pose. From this position, slowly sit, and then lie on your back. Keep the bend in your knees so that your fingertips are grazing the backs of your heels. Inhale to reach your pelvis up toward the sky for bridge pose. You want to feel your butt come off the ground. Press your shoulder blades closer together so that your hands can clasp each other, if that feels comfortable. You can place a block under your sacrum (aka right above your tailbone) to give additional support to your lower back. Slowly lower down one vertebra at a time, beginning with your tailbone, followed by your middle back and shoulders. Next, you can windshield wipe your knees over to each side of the mat. Keep the knees together as you do this. You want to lightly rotate your hips to let your knees touch the ground next to you, without moving your shoulders. As they move from side to side, they should look like the windshield wipers on a car. Repeat one more time. 14 of 14 Getty Images Give your body one final, big stretch, and then settle into the prone Savasana. This final pose is meant to let your body relax after your workout. You can also perform this move by lying on your back. Lie on your stomach with your arms in front of you (or you can bend them if it's more comfortable, like in the picture above). Allow your head to rest and turn to the side, with your legs outstretched behind you. Focus on your breathing, and clear your mind. Rise whenever you're ready. Byrdie takes every opportunity to use high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial guidelines to learn more about how we keep our content accurate, reliable and trustworthy. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Yoga: what you need to know. Updated April, 2021. Prove you're no slouch: Stretch taller and look leaner with this back-sparing yoga routine. It's a recipe for rounded shoulders: We sit all day with our heads down, pecking away at keyboards and swiping smartphones. Time to straighten up! Not only does proper posture strengthen your core and keep your spine in alignment, it can help you stay energized. When you're hunched forward, you're in sluggish mode; standing with shoulders back allows you to take deeper, fuller breaths and makes you feel more awake and alert. RELATED: 14 Reasons You're Always Tired To improve your stance, you need to stretch out your shoulders, open up your tight hip flexors and lift your chest. Two of my favorite poses to do just that are Warrior 1 and Triangle with extended arms. Warrior 1 lengthens the front of the thighs, raises the chest and engages the abdominals, while Triangle releases the tightness in the hips and thighs and stretches the waist, shoulders and back muscles, all to support better form. After doing these moves on both sides, notice how much easier it is to stand with an elongated stature. You may even feel like you grew an inch or two! RELATED: 10 Ways to Have Great Posture as You Age 1. Stand at the front of your mat with hands on hips. Step back with left foot into a long lunge. Drop outer left heel so toes face forward at a 75-degree angle. Lunge deeper into front knee, lift arms, press palms and look up to hands for Warrior 1. Hold for 5 to 8 breaths. 2. From Warrior 1, straighten right leg as you turn chest to the ceiling. Place right hand on right ankle or shin while you lift left arm directly above you, coming into Triangle pose. Inner right thigh should stay engaged. Hold for 5 breaths. 3. Reach left arm above head toward the front of your mat, palm facing down. Bring right arm under right ear, reaching forward with palm up. Hold for 3 breaths. Lift to stand, and with hands on hips step to the front of your mat. Repeat sequence on other side. MEET KRISTIN AT WANDERLUST!Join her for the launch of Wanderlust 108, the first-ever Mindful Triathlon. It takes place on Sept. 13 in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, N.Y., and features a 5K run (Kristin will lead the pre-race stretch), yoga classes and more. Yes, you can do a headstand! Learn how to master some of the most challenging yoga poses with these tips. It's never too late to learn headstand. Or Crow pose. Or side plank with extension. These are all power poses, ones that require superior strength and a serious dose of chutzpah. Kristin McGee, yoga instructor and Health's contributing yoga and wellness editor, says that (almost) anyone can eventually achieve them, so (assuming you don't have injuries) challenge yourself to try one or more of these moves—and feel your confidence soar! side-plank-extension-yoga-challenge Illustration by Jess Levinson Why do it: While a simple side plank is easy enough to master—and a great way to strengthen your trunk—adding a toe bind will up the intensity factor while increasing strength in your entire body. How-to: Lie on one side with legs stacked; place palm beneath shoulder and lift hips. Extend top arms up. Bend top leg, pressing sole of bottom foot into the mat. Bring top food and top hand together, grasping big toe. Hold here for a few slow, even breaths before lowering back down to start. Modify it: Do a regular side plank with legs together, or just lift top leg. You can also bring the top foot to the floor to modify further. RELATED: 8 Tips for Leaving Yoga Class Totally Blessed-Out Illustration by Jess Levinson Why do it: This move makes you feel like a legit yogi, and it improves balance and core strength. How-to: Begin with knees bent, palms flat on the floor about shoulder-distance apart and about 12 inches in front of feet; spread fingers wide. With arms as straight as possible, get onto balls of feet and place knees in armpits. Slowly shift weight forward onto hands with head lifted. Lift one foot off the floor at a time, keeping knees in place. To return to start, shift weight backward and lower feet to floor. Modify it: Using a block under feet can help your liftoff; prep moves like Downward Dog and plank help increase the core strength needed here. RELATED: Improve Your Balance With This Squat-to-Calf Raise Move Illustration by Jess Levinson Why do it: Inversions like the headstand help improve circulation, increase energy, and build ab and shoulder strength. How-to: Place the short end of your mat about a foot away from a wall. Place forearms on mat. Interlace fingers, pinkies touching the floor, and bring top of head into space between wrists. Keeping shoulders above elbows, walk feet toward torso, legs straight, lifting hips above torso. Bring legs toward the wall. Stay here, or try to bring one or both legs off the wall. Reverse motion to come back to the floor. Modify it: Prep by practicing Dolphin pose (it's like Downward Dog, but on forearms).

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