



YOGA FOR ALL SEASONS

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Building a Home Practice—Principles for Structuring a Daily Yoga Routine

To structure a daily practice to build a healthy spine, you want to focus on creating/maintaining flexibility and increasing the strength of the back muscles. To build flexibility, make sure to do the six (plus one) movements of the spine every day. As we showed in class, these can be done lying down, sitting, in table position, or standing.

One of the best poses to build the strength of the back muscles are is locust pose, and one of the best poses for building core muscles (the stomach girdle that also helps support the spine) is Warrior III, or the prep poses for Warrior III that we have been working with in class. In the following we describe all of this in more detail.

Building Flexibility—

The Six (Plus One) Movements of the Spine:

Forward bend, backbend, side bend right and left, twisting right and left. Plus Traction.

Depending on how much energy you have, you can move your spine through these movements either lying down, sitting, or standing. You can also combine the movements, maybe starting out lying and, as you get more energy, moving to a standing position.

The Six Movements of the Spine in Standing Position

Half moon pose: Bring your arms overhead with your hands clasped, index fingers pointed upwards in a steeply position. Focusing on lengthening rather than side bending, exhale and lean to the right, coming into a lateral stretch. Hold for 30-60 sec. all the time focusing on lengthening through the left side. Repeat on the other side.

Standing Cat Cow: On an exhale, arch you back and bend forward at the hips, draping your chest over your thighs. Inhale, and roll back up, hunching your back in a cat stretch. Repeat 6-8 times.

Twist: Bring your arms out to the side. Turning from your pelvis first, gradually come into a twist, focusing on lengthening through the spine. Shoulders and neck turn last. Lengthen on the inhale, twist deeper on the exhale. Hold for 30 sec., then repeat on the other side.

Traction: Stand facing a wall with your feet about one foot-length from the wall. Bring your arms overhead and press your palms against the wall. Stretching from the base of your spine, gradually lengthen upwards, using your palms to create a slight traction.

The Six Movements of the Spine in Seated Position

You can do this cross-legged or in a chair.

Half moon pose: Bring your arms behind your head clasping your hands behind your head. Focusing on lengthening rather than side bending, exhale and lean to the right, coming into a lateral stretch. Make micromovements, drawing small circles with the elbow pointed toward the ceiling to create further length. Hold for 30-60 sec. Repeat on the other side.

Seated Cat Cow: On an exhale, arch you back and bend forward at the hips, draping your chest over your thighs. Inhale, and roll back up, hunching your back in a cat stretch. Repeat 6-8 times.

Twist: If you are sitting in a chair, turn sideways on the chair and put your hands on the back of the chair. Turning from your pelvis first, gradually come into a twist, focusing on lengthening through the spine. Shoulders and neck turn last. Lengthen on the inhale, twist deeper on the exhale. Hold for 30 sec., then repeat on the other side.

Traction: (from hero position). Sit on your heels in hero position. Bend forward at your waist, bringing your arms out in front coming into a puppy stretch with your buttocks about a foot from your heels. Glue your palms to the floor and at the same time, pull backwards from your pelvis, creating traction through the spine.

The Six Movements of the Spine in Supine (Lying) Position

Half moon pose: Lying down, move your legs to the right, bringing your left foot on top of the right. Bend to the right with your torso, coming into a lateral stretch. Bring your arms overhead and clasp your hands around the elbows. Hold for 30-60 sec. all the time focusing on lengthening through the left side. Repeat on the other side.

Sacral Clock: Tip your pelvis up and down in a supine cat-cow, first flattening the lumbar spine into the floor, then arching it up. Work back and forth for 60 sec., slowly and with awareness, spending more time in areas where you feel the movement isn't as smooth. Next, rotate the sacrum area clockwise, then counter clockwise, again slowly and with awareness, working tender, less conscious areas.

Twist: Bring your left foot on top of your right knee (right leg stretched out on the floor). With your right hand, grab a hold of your left knee, and pull it towards the floor, coming into a supine stretch. Shoulder should be on or close to the floor (this is more important than getting the knee all the way to the floor). Hold for 60 seconds, then repeat on the other side.

Traction: Bend your knees. Put your palms next to you and press them into the floor. Pull slightly with your hands towards the feet, creating traction in the lower back.

Strengthening Poses

Locust

Lie on your stomach with your hands by your sides, palms facing down. To warm up, lift left leg up and down 2-3 times, then right leg. Next, lift your chest up and down, coming into a baby cobra, just a few inches from the floor. Repeat several times, going a bit higher each time, as the energy builds in the body.

Warm up for about 60-90 seconds (you will be able to hold the final pose much longer if you warm up the muscles first), then come into the final pose: Lift your chest, legs, and arms up from the floor, arms in a Peter Pan flying position behind you. Hold for 20-30 seconds, then repeat, holding for as long as you can.

Warrior III Prep—Core Strengthener

- Come into table position. Lift one leg and point it out behind you. Hold position for as long as comfortable. Repeat with other leg.
- Lift one leg and the opposite hand, stretching and keeping length through the spine. Repeat on other side.