



YOGA

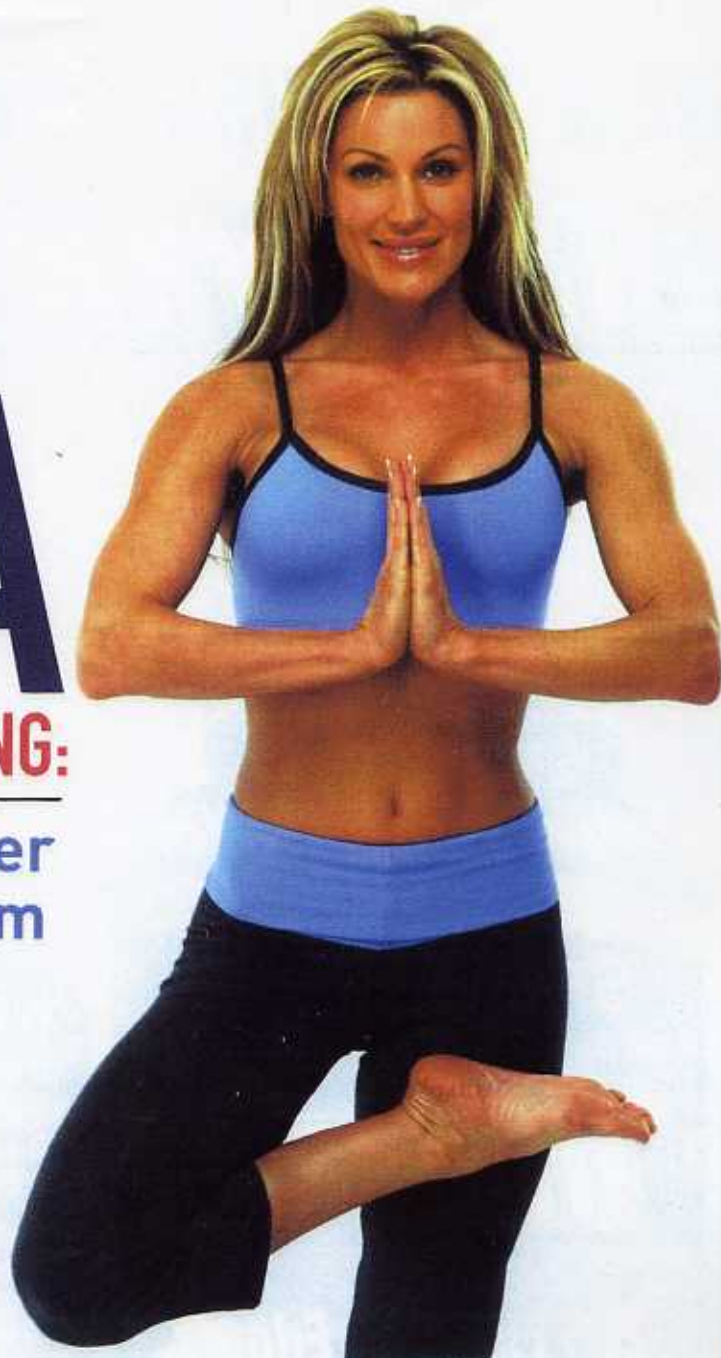
FOR WEIGHT TRAINING:

Sculpting Your Inner Focus For Maximum Strength Gain

"Yoga is the focusing of the mind ... from that arises mastery of the body."

— FROM *THE YOGA SUTRAS* BY PANTANJALI

BY PEGGY HALL | PHOTOGRAPHY ALEX ARDENTI



At first glance, yoga and weight training seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. Chanting and incense hardly seem to go with forced reps and drop sets. But on closer inspection, the two disciplines have much in common: they are both tools for improving health, increasing fitness, developing focus and transcending any self-limitations. Like weight training, yoga helps you get right down to the core of who you are. And as you'll discover, no chanting or incense is required.

In fact, yoga is about more than

simply mastering a series of poses - yoga is about staying calm and focused in challenging situations so you remain fully present in each moment. With yoga, you learn to direct your attention to whatever you're doing, from changing the weight stack to changing your clothes.

Physically, yoga is a perfect complement to weight training because it restores energy by nourishing and revitalizing every cell in the body. You'll be able to recover more quickly between workouts and approach each training session with renewed energy

and enthusiasm. Not only does yoga help heal and prevent injuries but, it also helps improve flexibility so you can work each muscle through its full range of motion.

While it's ideal to take a yoga class once or twice a week on an active rest day to rejuvenate your body between workouts, why not simply incorporate yoga right into your weight-training routine? Use the yogic principles of breath and awareness, along with a few key poses between sets to revive your muscles while calming your mind and energizing your body.

breath and awareness

Yoga means union, the connection of the mind and body through the energy of the breath. When you breathe consciously, you learn to focus your mind and stay present in your body. Slow, deep, even breathing infuses the body with prana (or life essence) and deepens the connection to your inner self. Why not try it right now? Inhale for a count of four, pause slightly and then exhale for a count of four, contracting your abdomen to expel all the used air. Let your belly expand naturally on the inhale, then expand your rib cage, letting the air fill your lungs. Slowly exhale, closing the rib cage and contracting the abdomen. There...don't you feel better already?

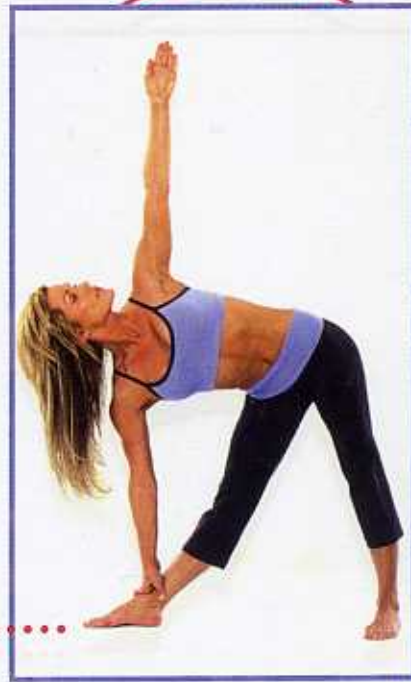
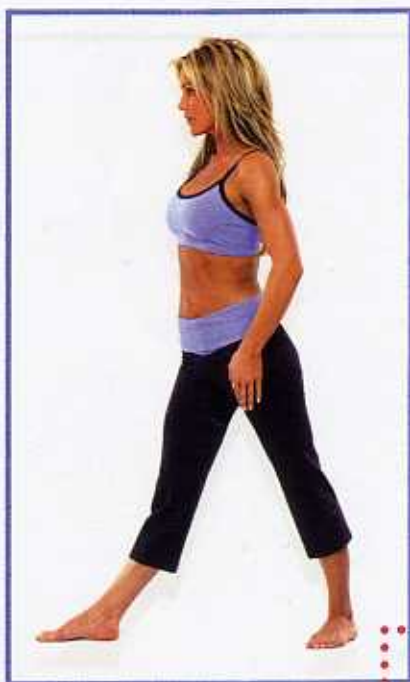
While working out, stay with the rhythm of your yoga breathing and begin to direct the prana right where it's needed. Doing a set of biceps curls? Put your mind right into the muscle and feel it contracting. Let each breath match the cadence of your movement and help you dissolve any distractions. Breathe, focus and stay connected to your body. Vividly see and feel how your muscles are shaping, becoming lean, firm and defined.

Choose a different pose from those listed below to do between each set of exercises to stretch and revitalize the muscle group you've just worked.

dancer's pose

Stretches shoulders, chest, knees, quads and low back. Improves balance and focus.

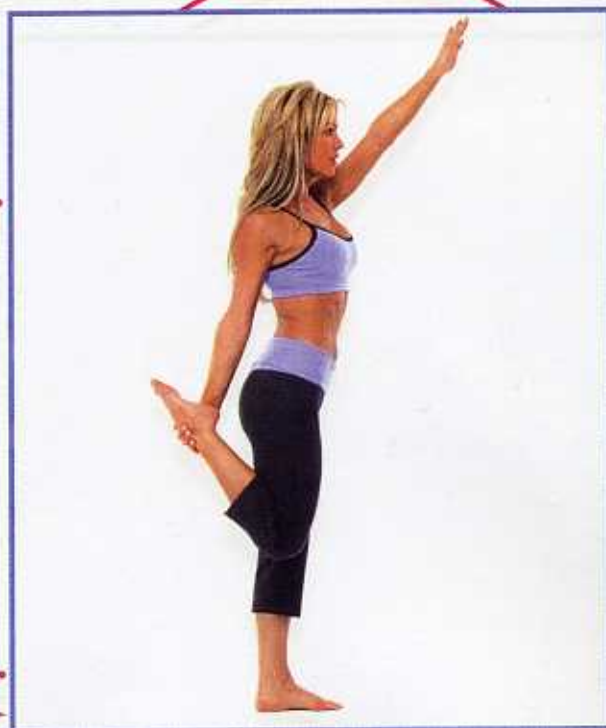
Stand with your feet together and shift your weight to your left foot. Turn your right palm facing out and extend your left arm overhead. Clasp the top of your right foot with your right hand, keeping the knee directly under the hip. For a deeper stretch, press your right foot firmly into your hand as you reach your chest forward (not shown), arching the spine slightly. Hold for three to five breaths and repeat on the other side.

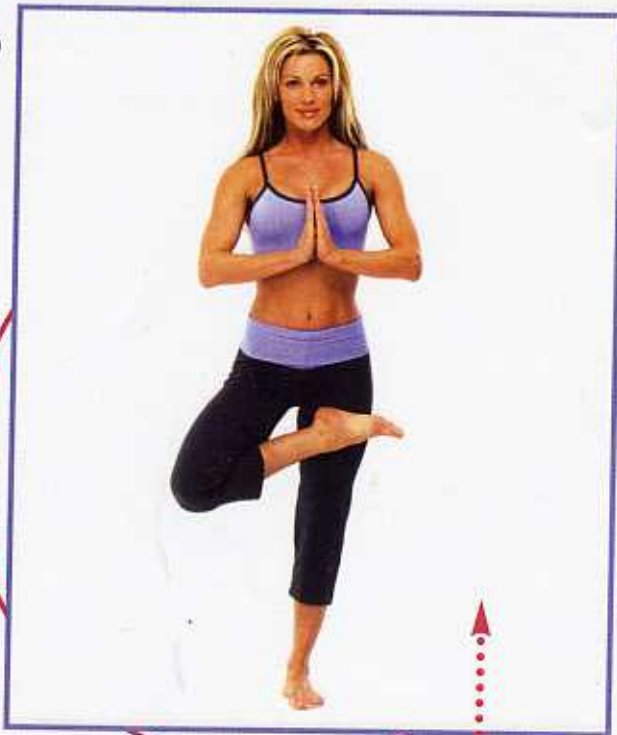


triangle

Stretches shoulders, spine, hips and hamstrings.

Stand with your feet a couple feet apart in a comfortable stride. Point your right foot straight ahead and your left foot at about 60 degrees. Extend your arms and reach to the right as far as possible. Keeping your chest and shoulders open to the side, reach your right hand toward your shin or ankle without collapsing in the waist. Tuck your tailbone slightly to get a nice stretch at the top of your left hip. Look up at your left hand, or to release your neck, look down at your right foot. Hold for three to five breaths and repeat on the other side.





tree

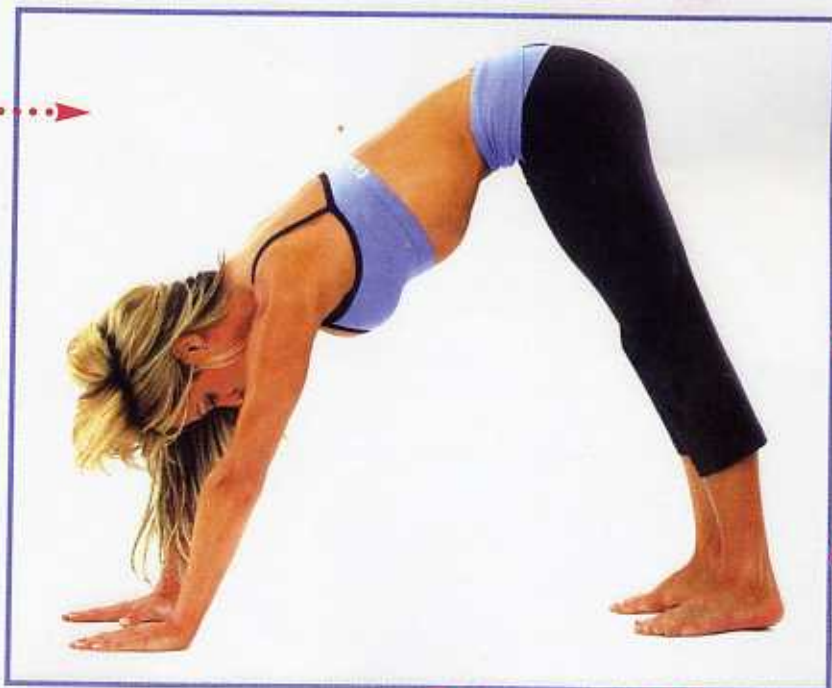
Stretches hips, knees and spine. Improves balance and calms the mind.

Start with your feet hip-width apart and shift your weight onto your left leg. Draw your right ankle high onto your left hip bone. For a less intense stretch, place the sole of your foot against your inner thigh. Press your palms together at your chest and lengthen your spine. Gaze at a spot on the floor for focus. Breathe deeply and evenly for five to eight breaths and repeat on the other side.

down dog

Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings and calves. Strengthens the wrists.

Start on all fours with your hands shoulder-width apart and toes curled under. Spread your fingers wide and make sure your whole palm is in contact with the floor. Lift your hips and press your torso toward your thighs, keeping your knees slightly bent if needed. Focus on sending your breath right into your calves and hamstrings as you press your heels toward the floor. Hold for eight to 10 breaths.



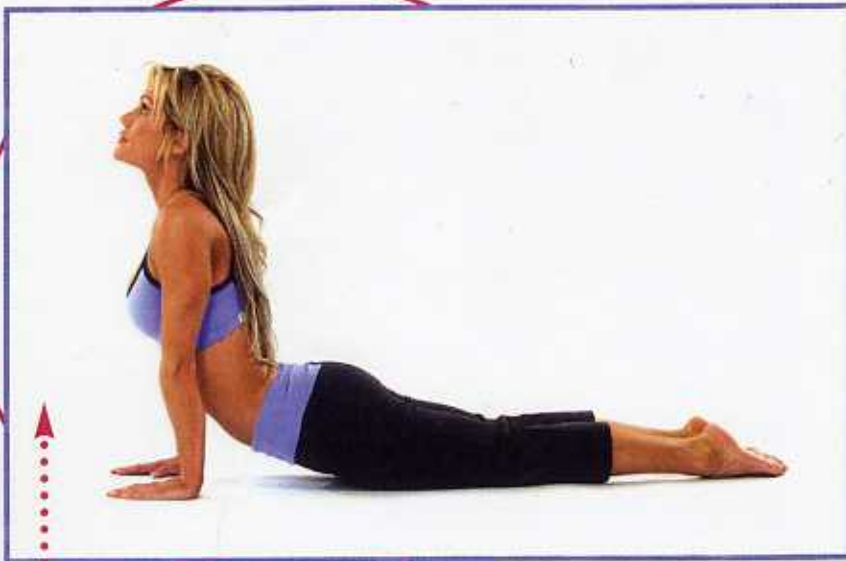
Which Yoga Is Best for Me?

The ancient practice of yoga is so vast, there is sure to be a style that meets your needs. Be sure to try out various classes and teachers until you find a good fit.

- Looking for a rigorous, challenging workout? **Ashtanga** is a fast-paced series of poses designed to build strength and improve cardio fitness. Power yoga is a close cousin to Ashtanga, but often with a larger variety of poses.
- Are you creative and spontaneous? **Vinyasa or flow classes** offer innovative poses linked in a fluid, dance-like manner often accompanied by inspiring music.
- Do you love discipline and routine? **Bikram yoga** is a set sequence of 26 postures practiced in a sauna-like room. Poses are held much longer than in vinyasa or ashtanga classes so you'll develop mental toughness as well as physical suppleness.
- Are you inclined toward precision and detail? **Iyengar yoga** focuses on proper alignment and long holds, often incorporating blankets, straps and blocks to adapt the poses to any level.
- Looking to strengthen your spiritual self? **Kundalini yoga** uses fast-paced, repetitive movements along with chanting and mantras to provide a spiritual element to a high-intensity physical workout.
- Do you want to reduce stress and create a sense of calm and balance in your life? Classes in the tradition of **Kripalu, Anusara, Svaroopa or Viniyoga** are soothing and restorative.

All About "Om"

According to yoga, "om" is the primordial sound of the universe. By chanting this Sanskrit syllable, one can align with the energy of the universe and connect to the source of life. Take a nice long inhale and on a slow exhale, chant "ahh...oh...oong." Let the sound linger, resonating deep inside. Repeat several times to help promote a natural state of bliss.



up dog

Stretches the back, chest and shoulders.

Lie on your belly and place your hands under your shoulders. Extend your arms without locking out your elbows and lift your chest. Squeeze your shoulder blades together to open and stretch your chest. Hold for five to eight breaths and then release into child's pose by pressing your hips onto your heels (not shown).

seated meditation

Calms and clears the mind.

Sit tall in a cross-legged position, keeping your shoulders right over your hips. Let your hands rest palms-up on the backs of your knees. Close your eyes and take several deep slow breaths. ■

