

full-body yoga workout

Gain strength, endurance, flexibility and more with these yoga poses

BY KAREN J. BANNAN

LEAD PHOTO: TODD LANGLEY

EXERCISE PHOTOS: JOAQUIN PALTING

Yoga has become the new “It” exercise, and for good reason. Research shows that yoga practitioners—even beginners—gain flexibility, strength and endurance almost immediately. Yoga also offers mental- and health-related benefits, as well. Yoga soothes the mind, reduces the incidence of asthma attacks and lowers blood pressure. It also helps alleviate carpal tunnel syndrome and eases the pain of arthritis.

“Yoga is a full-body workout,” explains Hari Kaur Khalsa, author of *A Woman’s Book of Yoga*. “It works on the muscles and the glands, bringing out strength and inner radiance. It’s also a great mood elevator.”

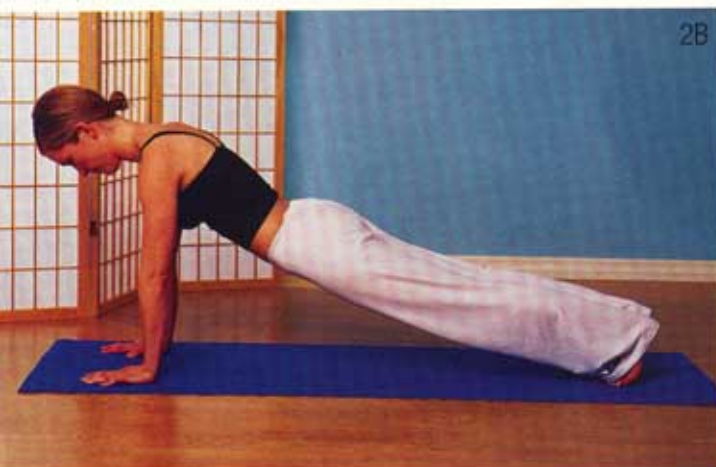
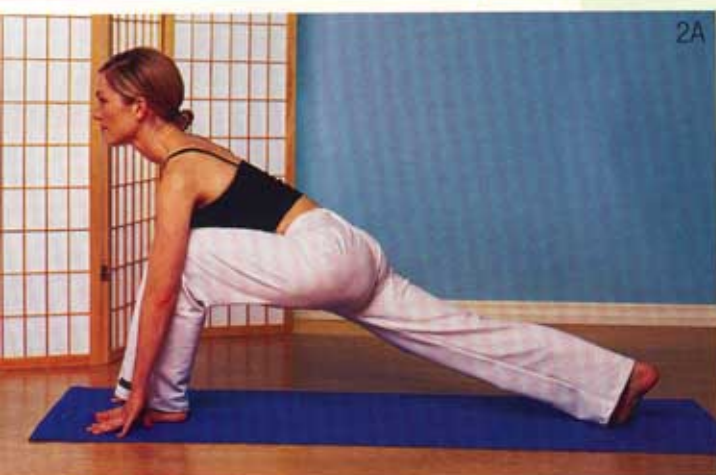
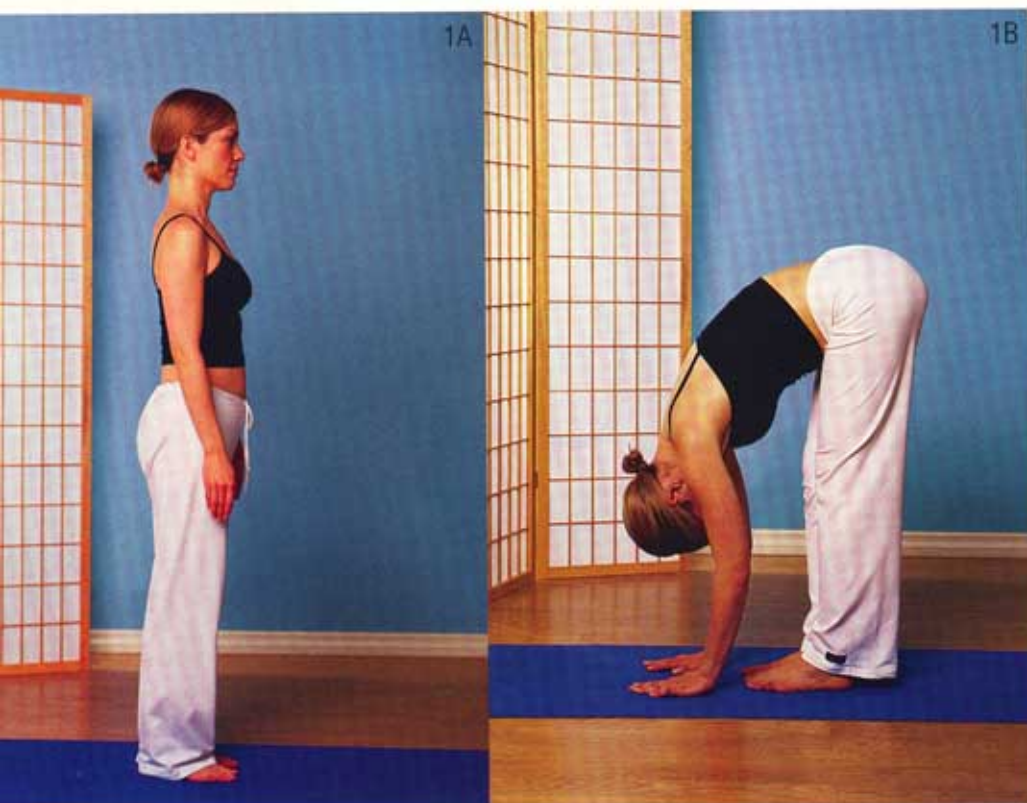
Getting started

If you’ve wanted to give yoga a try but aren’t sure how to get started, take note. We’ve designed a 30-minute yoga workout that will help you build muscle and increase flexibility. You don’t need any equipment, although you may want to remove your sneakers and socks before you get started. Bare feet can help you grip the floor during balancing poses.

The balancing and standing poses we’ve included start from Mountain pose, also known as its Sanskrit name Tadasana. Mountain pose is achieved by standing with your big toes touching, heels slightly ajar. Your shoulder blades should be pulled back and down, while your legs and abdomen are tight and your head and spine are lifting upward.

It’s important to go slowly at first. Hold each position as long as you comfortably can. Once you get the feel of the poses, let them flow quickly into each other. And don’t forget to breathe. It might sound silly, but one of the most common mistakes a new yogini makes is holding her breath while she’s holding a pose. In addition, watch your joints—your knees, elbows and wrists. Knees should never travel past your ankles in standing poses. Finally, be aware of your body alignment. Picture a large string passing through the top of your head, through your spine and into your hips. If you imagine that string is tight at all times, proper alignment—head held high, directly above your neck, spine lifting and hips tucked under—will come naturally.

As you move into the poses remember you should never feel pain. “The important thing is to relax and enjoy your practice,” Kaur Khalsa says.



The warm-up

Sun Salutation stretches warms up every major muscle group in the body. Your goal should be to make this warm-up one continuous, flowing movement.

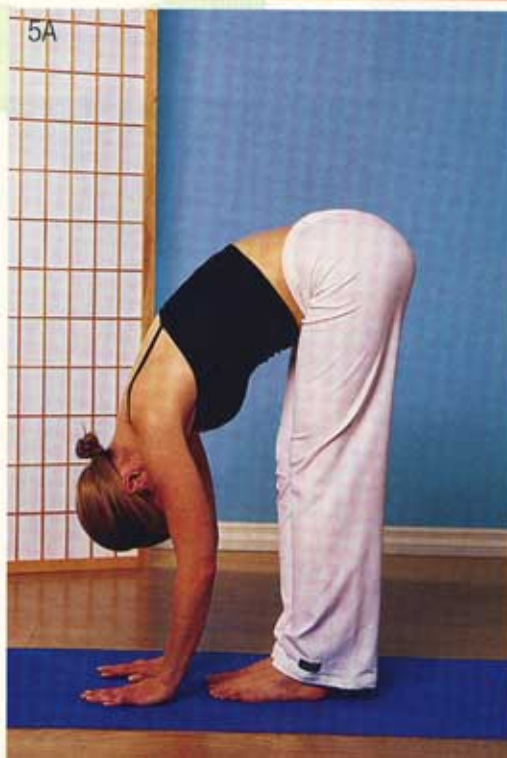
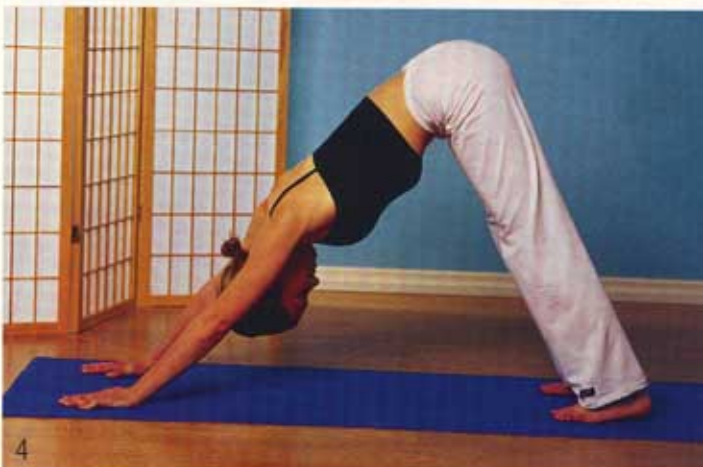
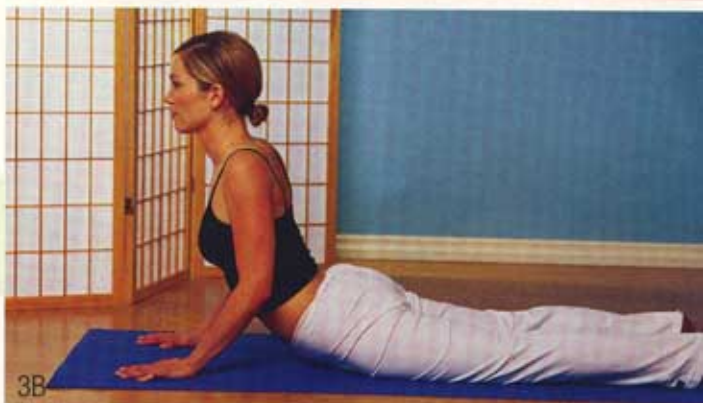
1 Standing in Mountain pose—arms at your sides, shoulders relaxed—take a deep breath in through your nose, stretching your hands and arms up toward the ceiling. Keeping your hips stable, exhale and hinge from the waist into a forward bend (Uttanasana), touching your toes.

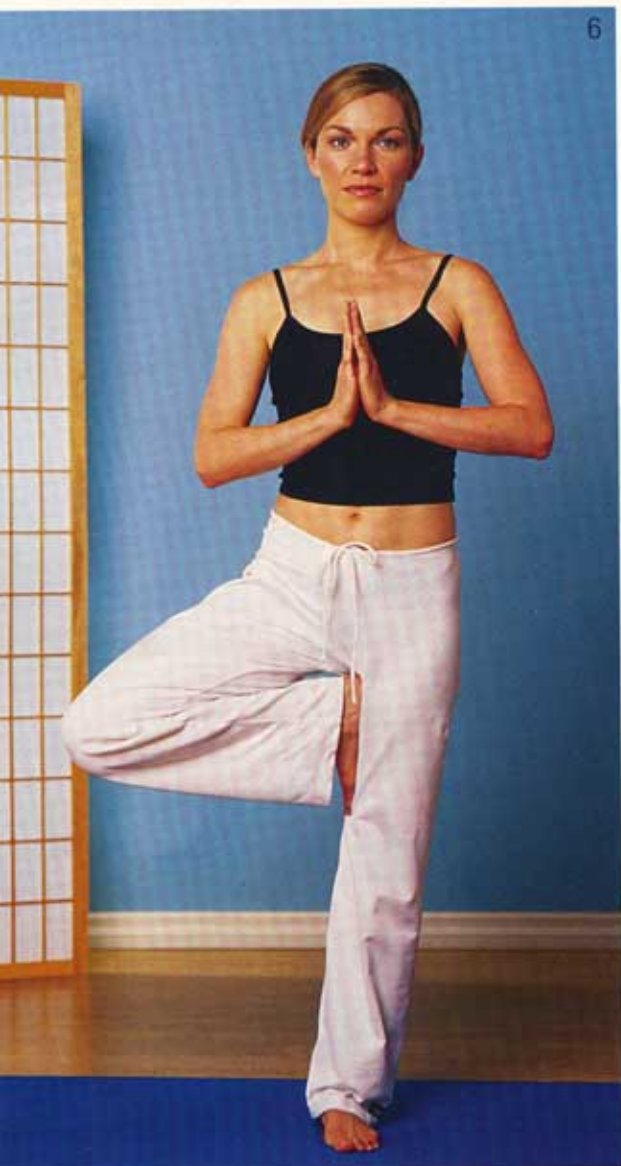
2 After pausing for a moment, take a giant step back with your right leg, coming into a lunge and letting your right knee touch the floor. Extending your arms, step back with your left leg and balance on your hands and toes, coming into plank—your body is in a straight line, arms extended but not locked, weight resting equally on your toes and hands.

3 Keeping your elbows close to your body and your hips in the air, lower your knees, sternum and chin onto the floor. Elbows should skim the body as you lower yourself to the ground; buttocks stay lifted. Shift into Cobra (Bhujangasana) by pressing into your palms and extending your arms, lifting the chest off the floor. At the same time, hips lower onto the ground.

4 Take a breath before moving into Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana) by pushing your hips up and extending your arms. Your heels reach for the floor and your arms and legs stretch out, extending through the armpits and the heels, respectively. Neck is neutral as you gaze back at your groin.

5 Looking into the hands, inhale and step your right foot in between your palms and then your left, bringing your back into a forward bend. Inhale and swing both arms up over your head, arching your back. Release into Mountain pose. Repeat three times on both sides.





balancing poses

Balancing poses build core strength—the abdomen and lower back muscles—as well as working the small stabilizing muscles of the feet and ankles. In the beginning, hold the poses as long as you can—stumbling and unsteadiness is natural when you first get started. Eventually, you'll work your way up to two minutes for each pose.

6 Tree (Vrikshasana)
From Mountain pose, sink your weight into your feet, feeling the floor pressing back at you. Shift your weight on to the left leg and lift your right leg, placing the sole of your right foot on the inside of your leg—ideally on your inner thigh. Never rest your foot on the knee joint itself. Press the thigh and the sole of the foot together. Bring hands together in front of your chest, elbows facing out and down. Switch legs after 30 seconds, working your way up to two minutes. The Tree pose works ankles, feet, thighs, calves and chest.

7 Standing Hand to Big Toe (Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana)
Beginners should start by shifting their weight into the right foot, rooting it to the ground. Bending the left leg, you'll draw the knee up toward your chest. Clasp the knee, raising it until you feel a stretch in the hamstring. Hold the pose for 30 seconds, release the leg and repeat on other side. Once

you're comfortable in the pose, when your knee is bent up, grab the big toe on the bent leg and slowly extend the leg out in front of you while still grasping the toe. Head should lift up toward the ceiling and back remains straight. The standing leg should be straight but not locked.



standing poses

Standing poses build your calves, legs and glutes. They also work the shoulders and the arms. In the beginning, hold the poses for 30 seconds on each leg, building up to two minutes on each side.

8 **Warrior 2**
Stand with legs apart, about three to five feet, depending on your height. Turn your right toes in and your left toes out. Extend arms out to sides, fingers spread and shoulders relaxed. Gaze into left hand and come into a lunge position by slowly bending left knee into 90-degree angle. Your knee should be directly above the ankle. Stand in the pose for 30 seconds, working your way up to two minutes on both sides. Concentrate on feeling the knees pulling away from each other, tucking the groin under, and flattening the outstep of the extended leg.

9 **Warrior 1**
From Warrior 2, clasp your hands together, pointer fingers pressing together and facing up. Arms are extended upward and touching the side of the temples. Extend the

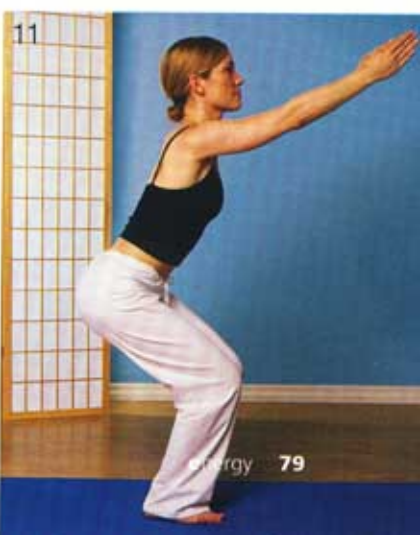
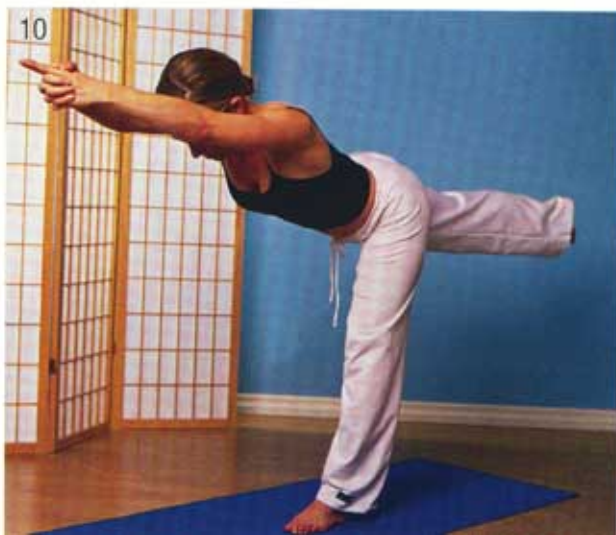
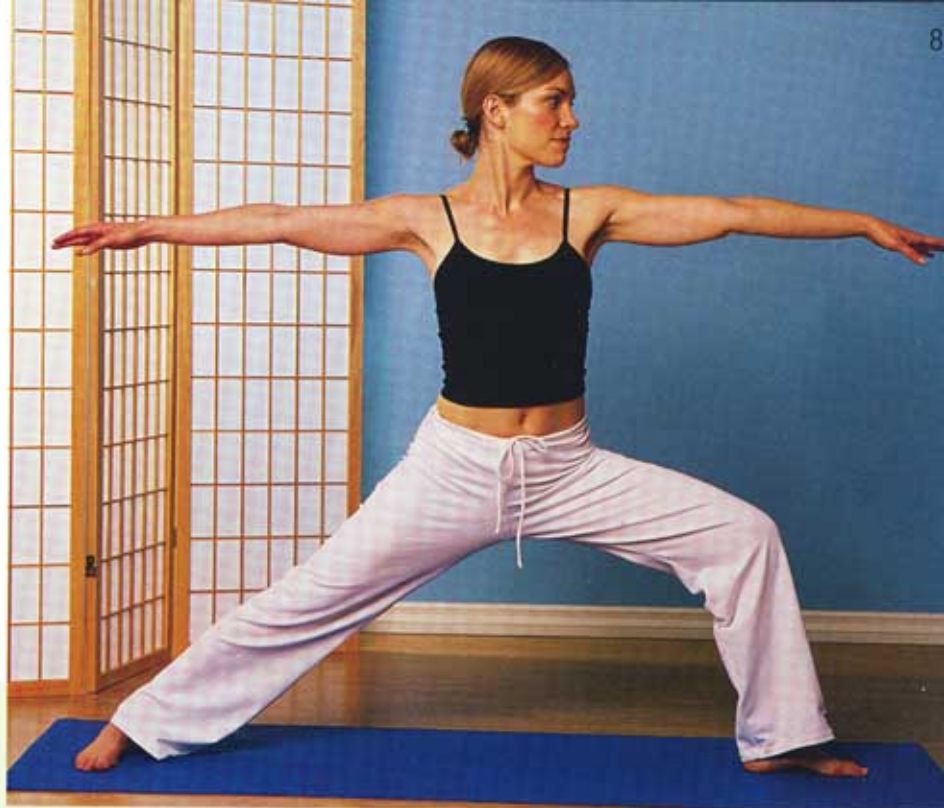
bent leg so both legs are straight. Scissor the legs together so hips face forward. Slowly bend the front knee and sink into a 90-degree angle. Knee should be directly above the ankle.

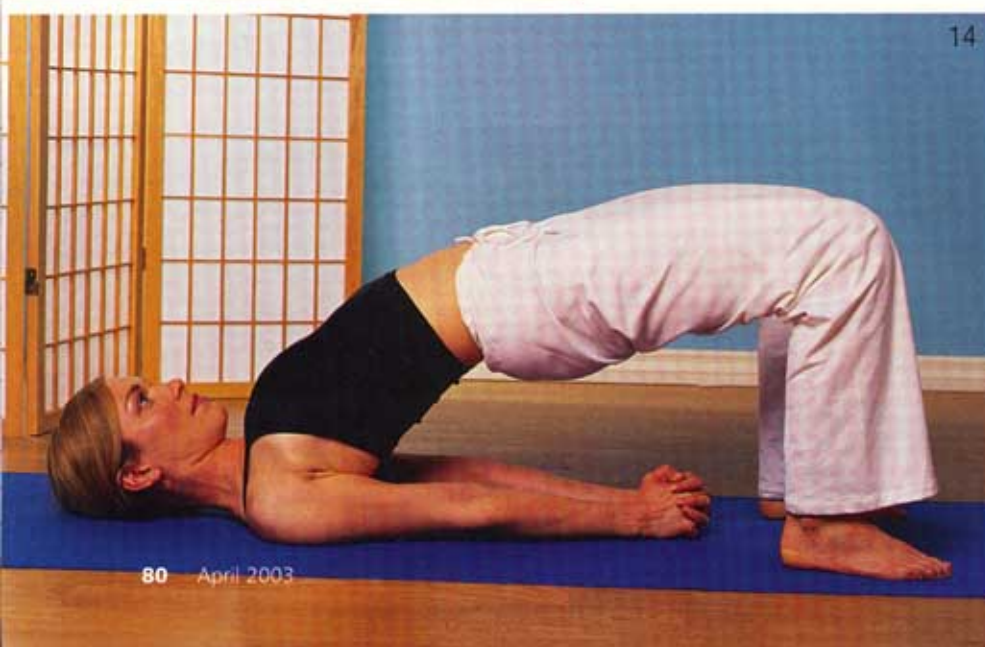
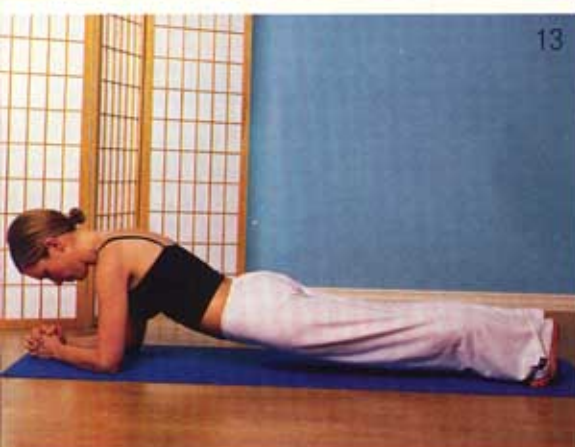
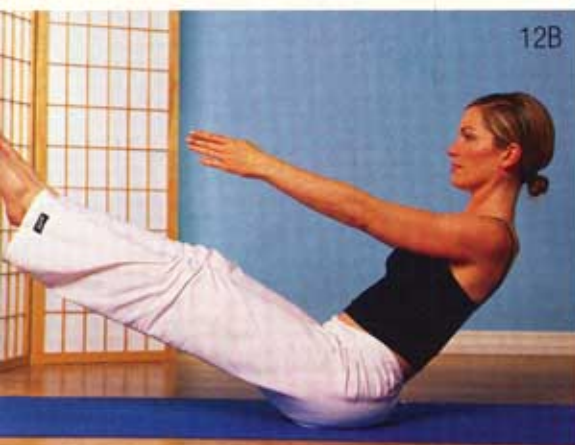
10 **Warrior 3**
Standing in the Warrior 1 pose, lower your abdomen onto your front thigh as your hands extend out in front of you. Slowly, shift the weight into the bent leg, pushing up into a standing position as the back leg extends behind you. Hands, still clasped, extend to the front. Feel the legs and arms pulling

away from each other as the standing leg supports your weight.

11 **Chair or Fierce pose**
(Utkatasana)

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and facing forward. Take a deep breath in and sink your glutes down toward the floor as you extend both hands up into the air. Knees should be directly above the ankles so you can see your toes if you look down. Your back has a slight sway in it, bringing the lower back into the stretch. Stand in the pose for 30 seconds, working up to three minutes.





core muscle work

Every one of these poses builds the abdomen and lower back muscles. Modified Chaturanga also builds the lats, shoulders, chest and hamstrings. Try holding each pose for at least 15 seconds, building up to five minutes each as you build inner strength.

12

Boat (Paripurna Navasana)

Start in a seated position, knees bent in front of you. Resting your hands on your knees, lean back while keeping the neck in a neutral position. Slowly lift the knees off the floor, balancing on your sit bones as you extend your legs and arms directly in front of you. Don't let the back round. Instead, lift the chest and tighten the abdominal muscles. Hold the pose until exhaustion.

13

Modified Chaturanga Dandasana

Lying on your stomach, come up onto your forearms, clasping the hands together. Elbows should be directly underneath the shoulders. Keeping the neck in a neutral position, curl your toes under, balancing on your toes and forearms. Your body should be in a straight line, hips tucked under and shoulders pulling back. Come out of the pose after 30 seconds to five minutes by lowering the knees and releasing the arms.

14

Bridge (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana)

Lie on your back, feet close to the glutes, knees bent and arms at your sides. Inhale and lift your hips toward the ceiling while tightening the glutes and inner thighs. Try and lift the hips high enough so the thighs are parallel to the floor. Beginners can press the hands and arms into the floor. Once you're comfortable in the pose, clasp the hands under the waist, rolling the shoulders back and under, stretching the chest and activating the shoulders and rhomboids. Hold for one minute, working your way up to three minutes.