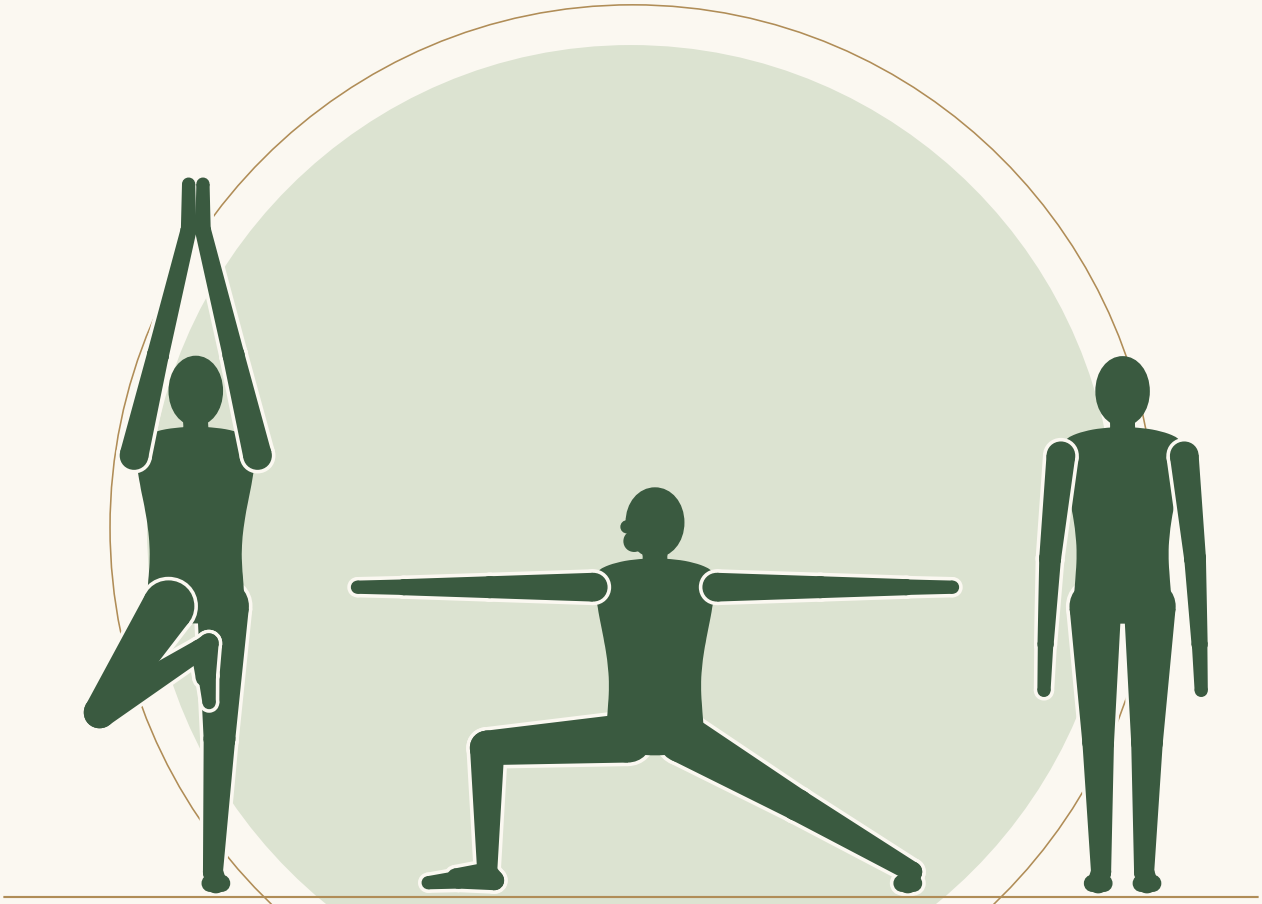
FREE GUIDE

Introduction to Hatha Yoga

Foundations of a balanced practice



History · Breathing · Eight foundational postures · A 30-minute sequence

Yoga Wisdom — Styles, Postures & Practice

YOGA.SPIRITUALLAND.COM

CONTENTS

Inside this guide

01 **Welcome** introduction and learning objectives 3

02 **What Hatha Yoga is** meaning and a brief history 4

03 **The elements of practice** asana, pranayama, relaxation, meditation 5

04 **How a Hatha class runs** the arc of a session 6

05 **Breathing for beginners** three-part breath and the extended exhale 7

06 **Eight foundational postures** step by step, with safety notes 8

07 **Props, modifications and counterposes** making the practice fit you 13

08 **A 30-minute beginner sequence** one balanced session 14

09 **Benefits, limits and precautions** what yoga can and cannot do 16

10 **Building a home practice** rhythm, space and progression 17

11 **Closing summary** the essentials on one page 18

12 **Safety disclaimer** 19

> **How to use this guide.** Read the first five chapters once before you step onto the mat — they explain what you are doing and why. Then use the posture pages and the 30-minute sequence as your practical companion. You need a non-slip mat, comfortable clothing and, ideally, a folded blanket and a yoga block or a firm cushion.

CHAPTER 01

Welcome

Hatha Yoga is where most people begin, and where many experienced practitioners return. It is unhurried, adaptable and complete: posture, breath, rest and attention, held together in one practice.

If you have never practised yoga before, the variety of styles on offer can be confusing. Some classes flow quickly from one posture to the next, some hold passive shapes for minutes, some are rigorously technical. A class called simply "Hatha" usually sits in the calm middle ground. Postures are held for several breaths, there is time to adjust and to rest, and the session ends with a proper relaxation. That makes it an excellent foundation, whatever direction your practice later takes.

This guide introduces Hatha Yoga in the way I teach it to beginners at our yoga farm in Gokarna, South India: a little background so that you understand the tradition you are stepping into, a clear method for breathing, eight foundational postures explained step by step, and a complete 30-minute sequence that you can practise at home. The emphasis throughout is on safety and on quality of attention rather than on how far you can stretch.

Nothing here requires you to be flexible, sporty or young. It does ask you to be patient, to listen to your body honestly and to practise a little and often. Those qualities, more than any posture, are what yoga trains.

Learning objectives

By the end of this guide you will be able to:

- ✓ explain what Hatha Yoga is, where it comes from and how it relates to other modern styles;
- ✓ name the four main elements of a Hatha session and describe how a typical class is structured;
- ✓ practise two calming beginner breathing techniques: the three-part breath and the extended exhale;
- ✓ come into, hold and leave eight foundational postures safely, with the most important alignment points;
- ✓ recognise when to modify a posture, which props help, and when a counterpose is useful;
- ✓ practise a complete 30-minute beginner sequence on your own;
- ✓ set up a realistic, sustainable home practice and know when to seek guidance from a teacher or doctor.

> Please read the **safety disclaimer** at the end of this guide before you begin practising, particularly if you are pregnant, injured, or living with a medical condition.

CHAPTER 02

What Hatha Yoga is

The word has two meanings today: a centuries-old tradition of physical and energetic practice, and a gentle, all-round class on a studio timetable. Both are worth understanding.

The meaning of the word

The Sanskrit *haṭha* literally means “force” or “effort”. It describes methods that work through the body and the breath, rather than through contemplation alone. A later, symbolic reading divides the word into *ha* and *tha*, associated with the sun and the moon, and understands Hatha Yoga as the balancing of complementary energies — activity and rest, warmth and coolness, effort and ease. The literal meaning is the older one, but the idea of balance has become central to how Hatha is taught today.

A brief history

Hatha Yoga took shape in medieval India over several centuries, within ascetic and tantric circles. Its best-known text is the **Hatha Yoga Pradipika**, compiled in the fifteenth century by **Svatmarama**. It brings together earlier teachings on posture (asana), breath regulation (pranayama), cleansing practices, seals and locks (mudra and bandha), and inner absorption. Strikingly, it describes only a modest number of postures, most of them seated, and treats them as preparation for breathing and meditation rather than as a goal in themselves. A later manual, the Gheranda Samhita, presents a similar path with a somewhat wider range of postures.

The posture-rich practice you meet in studios today is much more recent. In the twentieth century, teachers in India combined elements of the older tradition with new ideas from physical education and therapy. The most influential was **T. Krishnamacharya**, who taught in Mysore from the 1930s and later in Chennai. His students — among them B.K.S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi and his son T.K.V. Desikachar — carried their own versions of his teaching around the world. In parallel, the students of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh spread a gentler, devotional form of Hatha practice.

HATHA AND THE OTHER STYLES

Because almost all physical yoga descends from the Hatha tradition, the differences between styles are of emphasis rather than kind. **Vinyasa** links postures in continuous movement; **Ashtanga** follows fixed series; **Iyengar** centres on precise alignment and props.

Sivananda is a form of Hatha with a set structure and a strong spiritual framework; **Yin** holds passive floor postures for minutes. A class simply called “Hatha” usually holds active postures for several breaths, with pauses in between.

The aim of the practice

In the classical texts, physical practice is a means, not an end. Postures steady the body so that one can sit comfortably; breathing refines and calms the mind; both prepare the ground for concentration and meditation. Modern Hatha classes are usually more physical than this, but good teaching keeps the original spirit: a posture held with awareness and an easy breath matters more than a deeper shape reached through strain.

CHAPTER 03

The elements of practice

A balanced Hatha session weaves together four elements. Each supports the others; leaving one out changes the character of the whole practice.

01 · ASANA

Posture

Asanas are held positions — standing, kneeling, seated, lying, balancing, bending forwards and backwards, twisting. In Hatha they are entered slowly, held for several breaths and left with the same care. They build strength, mobility and stability, and above all teach you to notice sensation precisely.

02 · PRANAYAMA

Breath regulation

Prana is often translated as life force, *ayama* as extension or restraint. For beginners, pranayama means making the breath slow, smooth and conscious — not forcing it. Vigorous techniques and breath retention belong to later practice, under a teacher's guidance.

03 · RELAXATION

Deliberate rest

Rest is not a break from the practice; it is part of it. Short pauses between postures and a final relaxation of several minutes in Savasana give the body and nervous system time to settle. Many practitioners find this the part of class they value most.

04 · MEDITATION

Attention

Meditation in a beginner's Hatha class is usually simple: sitting quietly and resting the attention on the breath for a few minutes. The same quality of attention is cultivated in every posture — noticing without judging, adjusting without forcing.

Three principles that run through everything

Steadiness and ease

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describe posture as *sthira sukham asanam* — posture should be steady and comfortable. Look for that balance in every pose: enough effort to be stable, enough ease to breathe freely.

Breath as a guide

A calm nasal breath tells you that you are working at the right intensity. If the breath becomes jerky, held or laboured, you have gone too far: ease off until it settles again.

Non-harming

The ethical principle of *ahimsa*, non-harming, applies to yourself too. Sensation of stretch or effort is welcome; pain, especially sharp or joint pain, is a signal to stop.

CHAPTER 04

How a Hatha class runs

There is no single format, but most well-rounded classes follow a recognisable arc: from arriving, through warming and effort, to stillness.

	PHASE	WHAT HAPPENS	TYPICAL TIME
1	**Arriving**	Sitting or lying quietly, settling the breath and turning the attention inwards.	**3–5 min**
2	**Warming up**	Gentle joint movements, spinal mobilisation such as Cat–Cow, sometimes slow Sun Salutations.	**10–15 min**
3	**Standing postures**	Mountain, Tree, Warriors and Triangle build stability, strength and alignment.	**15–20 min**
4	**Floor work**	Backbends, forward bends, twists and hip openers, each held for several breaths.	**15–20 min**
5	**Gentle inversion**	Usually simple ones such as Bridge or legs resting up a wall. Advanced inversions only for experienced students, with a teacher.	**3–5 min**
6	**Breathing**	A few minutes of calm pranayama, seated.	**5 min**
7	**Final relaxation**	At least five to ten minutes in Savasana, sometimes followed by a short meditation.	**5–15 min**

A full class typically lasts 60 to 90 minutes. The 30-minute sequence later in this guide follows the same arc in condensed form, so that you learn the logic of a session and not just a list of postures.

Before your first class

- Eat lightly: practise two to three hours after a main meal, or an hour or so after a small snack.
- Wear clothing you can move and bend in. Practise barefoot.
- Arrive a few minutes early and tell the teacher about injuries, pregnancy or health conditions.
- Take the props you are offered; they are tools, not signs of weakness.

During class

- Watch first, then move. It is fine to stay in a simpler version.
- Rest in Child’s Pose whenever you need to — a good teacher will respect it.
- Don’t compare: the person next to you has a different body and history.
- Stay for the final relaxation. It is where much of the practice settles.

CHAPTER 05

Breathing for beginners

The breath is the thread that holds a Hatha practice together. Before learning any technique, learn to notice the breath as it is.

In yoga postures the usual guidance is to breathe slowly and smoothly through the nose, letting the exhalation lengthen a little. You do not need to control the breath constantly; it is enough to return to it whenever you notice that you have tensed, rushed or held it. The two techniques below are gentle and suitable for most beginners. Practise them sitting comfortably — on a folded blanket, a cushion or a chair — or lying on your back with the knees bent.

The three-part breath

Also called full yogic breath. Sanskrit: *dirgha pranayama*.

1. Sit or lie comfortably. Rest one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Breathe in and out through the nose a few times without changing anything.
2. **Belly.** On the next inhalation, let the belly soften and rise gently under your lower hand. Exhale and let it fall. Repeat a few times.
3. **Ribs.** Move the lower hand to the side of your lower ribs. Inhale into the belly, then let the breath continue sideways so the ribs widen. Exhale slowly.
4. **Upper chest.** Let the inhalation continue up until you feel a slight lift under the collarbones, without raising the shoulders.
5. Exhale in reverse, or simply let the whole torso soften. Continue for 8–12 breaths, then return to natural breathing.

The three “parts” are an aid to awareness, not three separate movements. With practice they merge into one wave of breath. Never fill the lungs to bursting: about three-quarters full is plenty.

The extended exhale

A simple way to let the breath slow down.

1. Breathe naturally through the nose and count the length of a comfortable inhalation — perhaps three or four.
2. Make the exhalation a little longer than the inhalation, for example in for 4, out for 5 or 6.
3. Keep it smooth and silent. If you feel you need to gasp at the next inhalation, the exhale is too long — shorten it.
4. Continue for 2–5 minutes, then let the counting go.

Many people find this pattern settling, and it is useful before sleep or during final relaxation.

BREATHING SAFELY

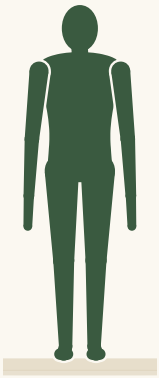
- Never strain or force the breath, and do not hold it. If you feel dizzy, light-headed or anxious, stop and breathe normally.
- Vigorous techniques such as Kapalabhati and practices with breath retention are not covered here. They should be learned gradually from an experienced teacher, and are not suitable for everyone — for example during pregnancy, with high blood pressure or heart conditions.
- If you have a respiratory condition such as asthma, keep the practice very gentle and follow your doctor’s advice.

CHAPTER 06

Eight foundational postures

These eight postures appear in almost every Hatha class. Together they cover standing, balancing, kneeling, bending, back-bending and rest — a vocabulary from which a balanced practice can be built.

For each posture you will find the Sanskrit and English names, the key facts, numbered steps, breath guidance and the most important safety points. Hold times are suggestions for beginners. Where a posture is practised on both sides, the illustration shows one side; practise the other side for the same number of breaths.



Standing evenly, arms relaxed by the sides.

SAFETY

- If you feel light-headed after standing still, bend the knees slightly and shift your weight.
- If the knees tend to hyperextend, keep a micro-bend.

TĀḌĀSANA · STANDING

Tadasana · *Mountain Pose*

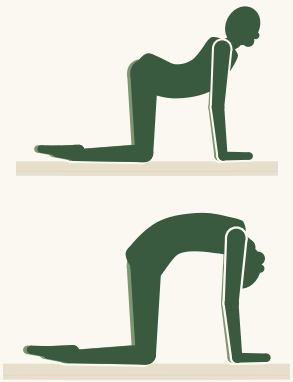
CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Standing	Beginner	5–10 breaths

Standing still, with attention. Tadasana is the blueprint for every standing posture: feet rooted, legs active, spine long, head balanced lightly on top.

1. Stand with the feet together or hip-width apart, whichever feels steadier. Spread the toes and feel the weight evenly across heels and balls of the feet.
2. Engage the thighs gently so the kneecaps lift, without locking the knees back.
3. Let the pelvis rest level; the tailbone points down towards the floor.
4. Lengthen the sides of the waist. Let the shoulders settle away from the ears and the arms hang naturally.
5. Balance the head so the ears are roughly above the shoulders. Soften the face and gaze straight ahead.

Breath. Slow nasal breathing. Feel the ribs widen as you inhale and the weight settle into the feet as you exhale.

Make it easier. Stand with your back near a wall, or hold a chair if your balance is unsteady.



Top: Cow, belly softening, chest forward. Bottom: Cat, spine rounding upwards.

SAFETY

- Keep the movement small with neck or back problems, and move only in a pain-free range.
- For sensitive wrists, rest on the fists or forearms.

MĀRJĀRYĀSANA–BITILĀSANA · KNEELING

Marjaryasana–Bitilasana · *Cat–Cow*

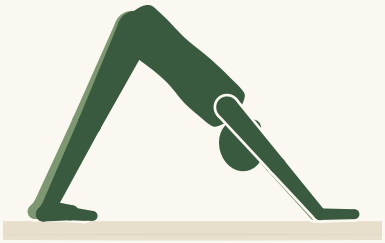
CATEGORY	LEVEL	PRACTISE
Kneeling, spinal movement	Beginner	6–10 rounds

Two postures linked by the breath: the spine rounds like a stretching cat, then arches gently. An ideal way to warm up the back.

1. Come onto hands and knees: wrists under the shoulders, knees under the hips, a blanket under the knees if needed.
2. **Cow:** as you inhale, let the belly soften towards the floor, draw the chest forward and lift the gaze slightly.
3. **Cat:** as you exhale, press the floor away, round the spine towards the ceiling and let the head relax down.
4. Move slowly, letting each movement last as long as the breath.

Breath. Inhale into Cow, exhale into Cat. Let the breath set the pace.

Make it easier. Practise seated on a chair, hands on the knees, rounding and arching the spine with the breath.



An inverted V: hips high, back long, heels reaching down.

SAFETY

- Avoid or keep very short with uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma or other eye conditions, and in later pregnancy unless your doctor and teacher approve.
- With wrist or shoulder pain, practise on the forearms or choose Child's Pose.

ADHO MUKHA ŚVĀNĀSANA · INVERSION

Adho Mukha Svanasana · *Downward-Facing Dog*

CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Mild inversion	Beginner–intermediate	3–8 breaths

A whole-body posture that lengthens the back and the backs of the legs while strengthening the arms. Beginners should bend the knees generously.

1. From hands and knees, place the hands a little in front of the shoulders, fingers spread. Tuck the toes under.
2. As you exhale, lift the knees and send the hips up and back.
3. Keep the knees bent at first so that the back can lengthen; the long spine matters more than straight legs.
4. Press the hands evenly into the mat and let the head hang between the upper arms.
5. Let the heels move towards the floor only as far as they comfortably go.

Breath. Steady nasal breathing. Each exhalation lets the hips lift and the spine lengthen.

Make it easier. Hands on a chair seat or a wall; or come down to rest in Child's Pose after a few breaths.

Sitting back towards the heels, forehead resting, arms forward.

SAFETY

- Avoid with acute knee injury; with knee discomfort, place a rolled blanket behind the knees.
- In pregnancy, take the knees wide to make room for the belly.

BĀLĀSANA · KNEELING

Balasana · *Child's Pose*

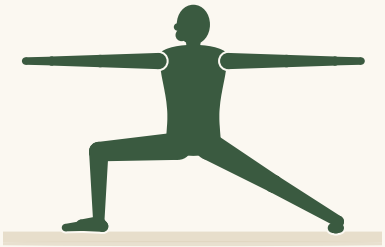
CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Resting, forward bend	Beginner	30 sec – 3 min

The resting posture of a Hatha practice — the place to return to whenever you need a pause, and a gentle counterpose to backbends.

1. Kneel with the big toes together and the knees together or apart.
2. Sit back towards the heels as far as is comfortable.
3. Fold forward and rest the forehead on the mat, a block or your stacked fists.
4. Extend the arms forward, or rest them alongside the body with palms up.

Breath. Breathe into the back of the ribs and feel them widen as you inhale.

Make it easier. Place a cushion between the buttocks and heels, or rest the chest on a bolster or pillows.



Right side shown: right knee bent over the ankle, gaze over the right hand.

SAFETY

- With knee problems, bend the front knee less and watch the alignment closely.
- With high blood pressure, avoid long holds; with neck problems, look forward instead of over the hand.

VĪRABHADRĀSANA II · STANDING

Virabhadrasana II · *Warrior II*

CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Standing	Beginner	5–8 breaths each side

A wide, steady standing posture that builds strength and stamina in the legs and teaches even, patient effort.

1. From Tadasana, step the feet wide apart (about 1–1.2 m) and stretch the arms out at shoulder height.
2. Turn the right foot out 90° and the left foot in slightly. Hips and chest face the long side of the mat.
3. As you exhale, bend the right knee towards a right angle. Keep it over the ankle, pointing over the second and third toes.
4. Keep the left leg straight and the outer edge of the left foot grounded. The trunk stays upright, centred between the legs.
5. Turn the head to look over the right hand. Hold, then straighten the leg and repeat on the left.

Breath. Inhale to lengthen through the arms and spine; exhale to settle into the front leg.

Make it easier. Shorten the stance, bend the knee less, or rest the hands on the hips.

Balancing on the left leg, right sole on the inner left thigh.

SAFETY

- Practise beside a wall or chair if you have balance difficulties, low blood pressure or feel dizzy.
- With high blood pressure, keep the hands at the chest rather than overhead.

VṚKṢĀSANA · BALANCE

Vrikshasana · *Tree Pose*

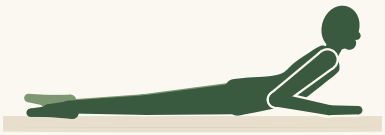
CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Standing balance	Beginner	5–8 breaths each side

A standing balance that trains focus and steadiness. Wobbling is part of the practice: each small correction is the posture at work.

1. Stand in Tadasana. Shift your weight onto the left foot and find a steady point to look at.
2. Turn the right knee out and place the right sole on the left ankle, calf or inner thigh — **never against the knee**.
3. Press foot and leg gently into each other; keep the pelvis level.
4. Bring the palms together at the chest, or raise the arms overhead with palms together, shoulders soft.
5. Hold, then lower the foot slowly and repeat on the other side.

Breath. Keep the breath slow and even; a held breath makes balance harder.

Make it easier. Rest the toes of the raised foot on the floor with the heel against the ankle (a “kickstand”), or touch a wall.



Low Cobra: elbows bent and close to the body, chest lifted.

SAFETY

- Lift only as far as the lower back is comfortable; stop if you feel pinching.
- Avoid in pregnancy and after recent abdominal surgery; seek guidance with back injuries.

BHUJAṄGĀSANA · BACKBEND

Bhujangasana · *Cobra Pose*

CATEGORY	LEVEL	HOLD
Prone backbend	Beginner	3–5 breaths, 2–3 rounds

A gentle backbend from lying on the front. The lift comes mainly from the back muscles; the hands only support.

1. Lie on your front, legs extended and the tops of the feet on the mat.
2. Place the hands under the shoulders, elbows bent and close to the sides.
3. Press the tops of the feet and the pubic bone lightly into the floor.
4. As you inhale, lengthen forward and lift the head and chest a little. Keep the elbows bent and the neck long.
5. Exhale and lower slowly. Rest with one cheek on the hands between rounds.

Breath. Inhale as you lift, exhale as you lower. Breathe smoothly while you hold.

Make it easier. Practise Sphinx: forearms on the floor, elbows under the shoulders.

Lying flat, arms alongside the body, feet falling outwards.

SAFETY

- With lower-back discomfort, bend the knees or place a cushion under them.
- In later pregnancy, rest on your left side instead of the back.

ŚAVĀSANA · RELAXATION

Savasana · *Corpse Pose*

CATEGORY	LEVEL	STAY
Relaxation	Beginner	5–10 minutes

Conscious relaxation at the end of practice. It looks like doing nothing, but staying still and awake is a skill in itself.

1. Lie on your back. Let the feet fall apart, about hip-width or wider.
2. Rest the arms a little away from the body, palms facing up.
3. Tuck the chin very slightly so that the back of the neck is long.
4. Close the eyes. Let the body become heavy, part by part, from the feet to the face.
5. To come out, deepen the breath, move fingers and toes, roll onto your side and rise slowly.

Breath. Let the breath be completely natural. Simply observe it.

Make it easier. Cover yourself with a blanket and place a folded blanket under the head.

CHAPTER 07

Props, modifications and counterposes

A posture should fit the person, not the other way round. Modifying is skilful practice.

Useful props — and what to use at home

- **Non-slip mat.** The one essential. On a slippery floor, standing postures become unsafe.
- **Blanket.** Folded under the knees in kneeling poses, under the hips for sitting, under the head in Savasana, and over you for warmth.
- **Block or firm cushion.** Brings the floor closer — under the hands or forehead, or between the thighs in Bridge. A stack of thick books works.
- **Strap.** Extends the arms when hands cannot reach the feet. A belt or scarf will do.
- **Wall or chair.** Support for balance and a gentler version of Downward-Facing Dog with the hands on the seat.

When to modify

- You cannot breathe smoothly in the full version.
- You feel the posture in a joint (knee, wrist, lower back, neck) rather than in the muscles.
- You are tired, unwell, stiff in the morning, or returning after a break.
- You have an injury or condition — in which case ask a teacher or physiotherapist for a version suited to you.

The four most common adjustments

- **Bend the knees** in forward bends and Downward-Facing Dog to protect the lower back.
- **Shorten the stance** in standing postures to reduce load on knees and hips.
- **Lower the arms** — hands on hips or at the chest — when shoulders tire or blood pressure is a concern.
- **Reduce the range** in backbends: lift less, stay longer.

Preparatory postures and counterposes

A **preparatory posture** warms and mobilises the areas a following posture will ask more of. A **counterpose** gently returns the body towards neutral after a posture that took it strongly in one direction. Not every posture needs either: a symmetrical, moderate pose such as Tadasana or Warrior II needs no counterpose, and over-sequencing can make a practice fussy. The principle is simply to avoid going from cold to intense, or from one strong extreme straight to its opposite.

POSTURE	HELPFUL PREPARATION	USEFUL AFTERWARDS
Downward-Facing Dog	Cat–Cow to warm the spine and wrists	Child's Pose to rest arms and shoulders
Warrior II	Tadasana; a few gentle knee bends	No counterpose needed; rest in Tadasana if the legs are tired
Tree Pose	Tadasana, to find even weight on both feet	A few breaths in Tadasana, shaking out the legs
Cobra Pose	Cat–Cow; lying on the front for a few breaths	Child's Pose, a mild forward bend that releases the lower back
Bridge Pose	Cat–Cow; Cobra	Knees hugged gently to the chest, then Savasana

CHAPTER 08

A 30-minute beginner sequence

One balanced session, following the arc of a full class: arrive, warm up, stand, bend, rest.

Practise slowly, breathing through the nose. Times include transitions. If anything does not feel right today, leave it out and rest in Child's Pose or Savasana instead. Bridge and Easy Pose are not among the eight postures above; follow the short cues and keep both gentle.

		POSTURE AND CUE	TIME
1		**Sukhasana — Easy Pose** *Sit cross-legged on a folded blanket. Three-part breath for 8–12 rounds, then natural breathing.*	**4 min**
2		**Cat–Cow** *On hands and knees, 8–10 slow rounds with the breath (Cow shown).*	**2 min**
3		**Balasana — Child's Pose** *Rest for 5–8 breaths, arms forward.*	**1 min**
4		**Downward-Facing Dog** *Two holds of 4–5 breaths, knees bent. Rest in Child's Pose between holds.*	**1½ min**
5		**Tadasana — Mountain Pose** *Walk the hands back to the feet, bend the knees and roll up slowly. Stand for 6–8 breaths.*	**1½ min**
6		**Vrikshasana — Tree Pose** *5–8 breaths each side; wall nearby if needed.*	**2 min**
7		**Virabhadrasana II — Warrior II** *Two rounds of 4–5 breaths on each side, resting in Tadasana between.*	**3 min**
8		**Bhujangasana — Cobra Pose** *Lie on the front. Three low lifts of 3–5 breaths, resting between.*	**2 min**
9		**Balasana — Child's Pose** *Counterpose to Cobra, 5–8 breaths.*	**1 min**
10		**Setu Bandha — Bridge Pose** *Roll onto the back. Two rounds of 5 breaths, lowering slowly.*	**2 min**
11	–	**Knees to chest** *Hug the knees gently and rock a little from side to side.*	**1 min**
12		**Savasana — Corpse Pose** *Complete relaxation. Roll to the side and come up slowly.*	**7 min**
13		**Seated close** *Sit quietly with the extended exhale (in 4, out 6) for a few breaths.*	**2 min**
		Total	**30 min**

Understanding the sequence

Why this order? Breath and Cat–Cow warm the spine before the weight-bearing Downward-Facing Dog. Standing postures come while you are fresh. Cobra is followed by Child's Pose to release the lower back, and Bridge by knees-to-chest. Relaxation comes last, when the body is ready to be still.

Bridge in brief. Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat and hip-width apart, arms by your sides. Inhale and lift the hips only as high as is comfortable; keep the head still and the knees in line with the hips. Exhale and lower slowly. Avoid with neck injury or in later pregnancy unless advised otherwise.

Adapting it to your day

SHORT ON TIME — 15 MINUTES

Easy Pose with three-part breath (2 min), Cat–Cow (2), Downward-Facing Dog (1), Tadasana (1), Tree Pose (2), Warrior II (2), Child's Pose (1), Savasana (4). Keep the relaxation even when everything else is shortened.

STIFF OR TIRED

Double the time in Cat–Cow, bend the knees well in Downward-Facing Dog, practise Tree with the toes on the floor, and replace Cobra with Sphinx on the forearms. Lengthen Savasana and cover yourself with a blanket.

READY FOR A LITTLE MORE

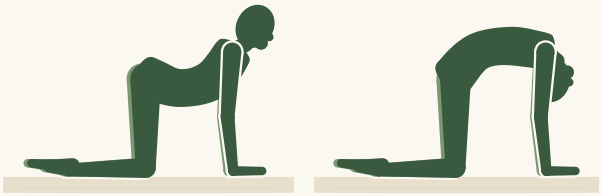
After two or three weeks, hold the standing postures for one or two extra breaths and repeat Bridge a third time. Add new postures only one at a time, and keep the breath smooth as the measure of effort.

EVENING PRACTICE

Practise the same sequence more slowly, with longer exhalations and a longer Child's Pose. If standing postures feel too stimulating late in the day, keep them short and extend the final relaxation.

THROUGHOUT THE SEQUENCE

- Come up from folded and lying positions slowly, pausing if you feel light-headed.
- Keep head-below-heart postures short, or skip Downward-Facing Dog, if you have high blood pressure, glaucoma or other eye conditions, or are pregnant.
- Pain, dizziness or breathlessness are signals to stop and rest.



Cat–Cow: the warm-up you can return to on any day, in any mood.

CHAPTER 09

Benefits, limits and precautions

People come to Hatha Yoga for many reasons, and experiences vary. It is worth being honest both about what regular practice may offer and about what it cannot do.

What many practitioners find

With regular, sensible practice, Hatha Yoga:

- ✓ may improve flexibility and range of movement in the hips, spine and shoulders;
- ✓ may build functional strength and balance, particularly through standing postures;
- ✓ can increase body awareness and attention to posture in daily life;
- ✓ can encourage a slower, calmer breathing pattern, which many people experience as relaxing;
- ✓ offers a regular, structured time for rest and attention that can support a sense of wellbeing.

Research on yoga in general suggests it can be a useful part of an active lifestyle, but results differ from person to person and none is guaranteed.

Limitations to keep in mind

- Yoga is not a treatment for illness or injury and does not replace medical care, physiotherapy or prescribed medication.
- A gentle Hatha practice is not a complete fitness programme: it offers limited cardiovascular training, so walking, cycling or swimming remain worthwhile.
- Changes in flexibility and strength come slowly — over months, not sessions — and depend on regularity.
- Learning from a book or video has limits. A qualified teacher can see what you cannot, and correct it.
- Flexibility is not the goal. Pushing for range can strain ligaments and joints, particularly in very mobile people.

PRECAUTIONS AND CONTRAINDICATIONS

- **Consult your doctor before starting** if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart condition, glaucoma or another eye condition, osteoporosis, or have had recent surgery or injury.
- **Head-below-heart postures** such as Downward-Facing Dog should be kept short or avoided with uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma and some eye conditions. Advanced inversions such as Headstand and Shoulderstand are not suitable for beginners practising alone.
- **Pregnancy:** seek specialist pregnancy yoga guidance. Avoid lying on the front, deep backbends, strong twists and, in later pregnancy, lying flat on the back for long periods.
- **Joint and spinal problems:** work within a pain-free range, use props, and seek individual guidance from a teacher or physiotherapist.
- **Breathing:** do not hold the breath or practise vigorous techniques without supervision, especially with high blood pressure or heart conditions.
- **Stop** if you feel pain, dizziness, numbness, unusual shortness of breath or discomfort in the chest, and seek medical advice if symptoms persist.

CHAPTER 10

Building a home practice

Twenty calm minutes, three or four times a week, will teach you more than one heroic session a month. Regularity is the quiet engine of yoga.

Create the conditions

- **A place.** A corner with enough room to stretch your arms in every direction, a non-slip surface, fresh air and no draught. Keep your mat and blanket there so that starting is easy.
- **A time.** Morning practice often feels clear and stiff; evening practice softer and more mobile. Choose the time you can keep, and practise on an empty or light stomach.
- **Quiet.** Phone on silent and out of reach. Tell others in the household that you will be unavailable for half an hour.

A realistic rhythm

Weeks 1–2	The 30-minute sequence two or three times a week. Learn the postures; don't rush.
Weeks 3–6	Three or four sessions a week. On busy days, 10 minutes of breath and Cat–Cow still count.
After 6 weeks	Hold standing postures a breath or two longer, add new postures one at a time, and consider a class with a qualified teacher to refine your alignment.

Practise well

- ✓ Always warm up before standing postures and backbends.
- ✓ Balance your session: something standing, something bending forwards, something bending back, something resting.
- ✓ Practise both sides for the same number of breaths.
- ✓ Change one thing at a time — a longer hold, or one new posture — and notice how your body responds the next day.
- ✓ Never skip the final relaxation, even if you shorten everything else.
- ✓ Keep a simple note of what you practised and how you felt. Patterns become visible after a few weeks.

> **When to find a teacher.** If a posture consistently causes discomfort, if you have an injury or health condition, or if you feel stuck, a few sessions with a qualified teacher are worth more than months of guessing. Ask where they trained and tell them about your health history.

> **On difficult days,** lie in Savasana with the extended exhale for ten minutes. That is a complete practice too.

CHAPTER 11

Closing summary

Hatha Yoga is less a single style than a living tradition. At its best it offers a patient, balanced practice in which posture, breath and attention support one another.

REMEMBER

- ✓ Hatha means effort — balanced by ease.
- ✓ The Hatha Yoga Pradipika (15th century, Svatmarama) is its best-known text; modern posture practice owes much to Krishnamacharya and his students.
- ✓ A session combines posture, breathing, relaxation and meditation.

ON THE MAT

- ✓ Breathe through the nose; let the exhale be long and smooth.
- ✓ Steady and comfortable: enough effort to be stable, enough ease to breathe.
- ✓ Sensation is welcome; pain is a signal to stop.

YOUR EIGHT POSTURES

Mountain · Cat–Cow · Downward-Facing Dog · Child's Pose · Warrior II · Tree · Cobra · Corpse Pose

Practise them within the 30-minute sequence, modifying freely.

GOING ON

- ✓ Little and often, with rest days.
- ✓ Add one new thing at a time.
- ✓ Learn from a qualified teacher when you can.

Start simply, stay curious, and let consistency matter more than intensity.

Explore individual postures in the Asana Library and related styles in the Yoga Styles overview at yoga.spiritualland.com.

PLEASE READ

Safety disclaimer

This guide is for general education. It is not medical advice and does not replace individual instruction from a qualified yoga teacher or the advice of your doctor.

Yoga is a physical practice, and every body is different. The postures, breathing exercises and sequences described here are intended for healthy adults practising at a gentle, beginner-friendly level. Nothing in this guide is intended to diagnose, treat or prevent any illness or condition, and no particular result is promised.

BEFORE YOU PRACTISE

- Consult your doctor before starting if you are pregnant or have recently given birth, have an injury, have had recent surgery, or live with a medical condition — for example high or low blood pressure, a heart condition, glaucoma or another eye condition, osteoporosis, a spinal or joint problem, or a balance disorder.
- If you are under medical or physiotherapy care, show this guide to the professional treating you and follow their advice.
- Tell any teacher you practise with about injuries or health conditions so that they can suggest suitable modifications.

WHILE YOU PRACTISE

- Stop immediately if you feel pain — particularly sharp, sudden or joint pain — or if you feel dizzy, faint, short of breath, numb or unwell. Rest, and seek medical advice if the symptoms persist.
- Never force a posture or hold your breath under strain. A steady, comfortable breath is the most reliable sign that you are working at the right intensity.
- Practise on a non-slip surface with enough space around you, and use a wall or chair for support in balancing postures if you are unsteady.
- Practise on an empty or light stomach, and come up slowly from lying or folded positions.

You practise at your own risk and remain responsible for your own wellbeing. The author and publisher accept no liability for any injury or loss arising from the use or misuse of the information in this guide. Information is believed to be accurate at the time of publication, but yoga instruction varies between traditions and teachers, and you may meet other valid ways of practising these postures.

YOGA WISDOM — STYLES, POSTURES & PRACTICE

Introduction to Hatha Yoga

A free guide · First edition, 2026

© 2026 Oliver Michael · Yoga Wisdom / Spiritual Land
yoga.spiritualland.com · oliveryoga@gmail.com

Free to download and print for personal use; please do not resell or redistribute modified versions.

Text and illustrations are original works created for Yoga Wisdom. All rights reserved except as stated above.

Oliver Michael is a German yoga teacher who has lived and taught in India for around nineteen years, where he co-runs Namaste Yoga Farm in Gokarna, Karnataka, and teaches Hatha, Sivananda and Yin Yoga.

More guides, posture pages and articles on yoga styles, breathing and meditation: **yoga.spiritualland.com**

This guide is educational and does not replace medical advice or individual instruction. Please read the safety disclaimer before practising.