

Focus: Yoga for Swimmers

Level: General

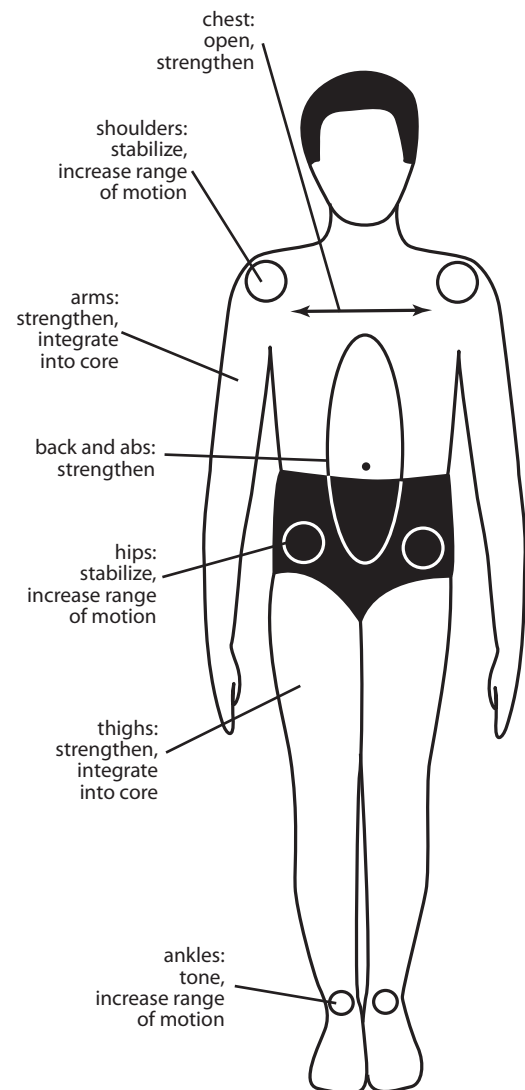
Theme: Stabilizing and opening joints, opening chest, strengthening core and back

Swimmers face unique challenges that other athletes never have to consider. Though water as a medium for exercise is supportive and low-impact, the mechanics of any given stroke, coupled with way the body responds to exerting itself in water, create their own problems. Attention must be paid to the joints and the muscles that manipulate them, lest they become unbalanced and de-stabilized. The arms and legs must work in coordination and be integrated into the core for an effective stroke. This sequence is designed to complement a regular swimming regimen.

The primary aims of the sequence are as follows:

- a) To stabilize the hips and shoulders, counterbalancing the tendency for muscle to lengthen away from the joint;
- b) To increase range of motion in the hips and shoulders;
- c) To open the chest, counterbalancing the tightening that can come with heavy upper-body work and the stress that can be placed on the rotator cuff as a result;
- d) To strengthen the muscles of the core and back;
- e) To integrate the arms and legs into the trunk for effective stroke coordination.

The sequence is extensive, potentially taking an hour or more to complete in its entirety, depending on how long you choose to hold each pose. The poses are grouped together in progressive units, however, and it is possible to break the sequence down into smaller chunks.



The Practice

1. STANDING POSES - strengthen legs, stabilize and open hips, tone core muscles.
2. BACKWARD EXTENSIONS AND ARM BALANCES - strengthen back, chest and arms, integrate arms into core.
3. ABDOMINAL POSES - strengthen abs and legs.
4. HEAD STAND - strengthens back and shoulders, integrates legs into core.
5. ARM AND CHEST OPENERS - open chest and take stress off rotator cuff.
6. SHOULDER STAND, PLOUGH POSE AND VARIATIONS - open chest, strengthen back and arms, integrate legs into core

For the most inclusive practice, do each pose (except for Head Stand and Shoulder Stand) twice, holding the poses for at least 20 seconds and anywhere up to 1 minute. Head Stand and Shoulder Stand can be held for 3 to 10 minutes. (Head Stand should only be performed once you have achieved competence in the pose in a class setting.)

For a shorter practice, you have a few options:

- a) Practice one or two poses from each section and end with the arm/chest openers and Shoulder Stand.
- b) Practice one section with the arm/chest openers and Shoulder Stand. This would give you three or four practices to cycle through over the course of a week.
- c) Practice two sections with the arm/chest openers and Shoulder Stand.

<i>pose</i>	<i>set-up</i>	<i>instructions</i>	<i>effects</i>
Tadasana (Mountain Pose)	Belt wrists shoulder width behind back.	Press out against belt, draw shoulder blades into back. Lift and open chest. Draw navel in and engage abs. Roll tailbone down to heels. Pull thighs up and extend legs.	Tones muscles of upper back, lower back and core. Opens chest. Engages and tones rotator cuff.
Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)	Belt wrists shoulder width behind back.	Stretch both legs and firm them up into hip sockets. Roll front thigh out as much as possible. Press out against belt, draw shoulder blades into back. Lift and open chest. Draw navel in and roll tailbone to back heel. Roll trunk and chest up to ceiling.	Stabilizes and opens hip joints. Stretches hamstrings. Tones muscles of core and back. Opens chest. Engages and tones rotator cuff.
Utthita Parshvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)	Belt wrists shoulder width behind back.	Roll front thigh out as much as possible. Firm outer thigh back into hip. Press out against belt, draw shoulder blades into back. Lift and open chest. Draw navel in and roll tailbone to back heel. Roll trunk and chest up to ceiling.	Stabilizes and opens hip joints. Stretches and tones hamstrings. Tones muscles of core and back. Opens chest. Engages and tones rotator cuff.
Thigh Stretch at wall	Place back shin flat against wall with knee on blanket. Place front shin or foot on floor. Hands on blocks or on thigh.	Roll tailbone to standing knee. Pull navel in and lengthen waist. Move waist back towards wall.	Stretches quadriceps and lengthens psoas. Relieves pressure on lower back. Tones abdominals.
Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)	Belt wrists shoulder width behind back.	Press into back heel. Roll sacrum to back heel. Stretch back leg. Press out against belt. Draw shoulder blades into back and open chest. Roll trunk around to face evenly out over front leg.	Stabilizes and opens hip joints. Stretches quadriceps and lengthens psoas. Stretches and tones hamstrings. Tones muscles of core and back. Opens chest. Engages and tones rotator cuff.
Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)	Interlock fingers and raise arms.	Press into back heel. Roll sacrum to back heel. Stretch back leg. Spread palms and wrists. Press index finger knuckles up to ceiling. Soften neck and shoulders. Roll trunk around to face evenly out over front leg.	Stabilizes and opens hip joints. Stretches quadriceps and lengthens psoas. Stretches and tones hamstrings. Tones muscles of core and back. Increases range of motion in shoulder.

pose	set-up	instructions	effects
Makarasana (Crocodile Pose)		Draw shoulder blades into back and lift elbows. Lift hands and keep them light on back of head. Roll tailbone to heels. Extend legs, keeping them together.	Stabilizes shoulder blades. Strengthens back.
Vashisthasana (Vashistha's Pose)		Draw shoulder blade strongly into back. Broaden and lift chest. Engage side abs.	Stabilizes shoulder blades. Strengthens back, arms and lateral core muscles.
Chaturanga Dandasana II (Four Limbed Staff Pose)	Performed with toes pointed and tops of feet on ground.	Connect shoulder blades into back. Broaden chest and lift tops of shoulders. Press feet into floor and extend leg to shoulder blades. Engage abs. Lift from between shoulder blades.	Strengthens arms, back, core and chest.
Ardha Adho Mukha Vrkshasana (Right Angle Full Arm Balance)	Sit with back against wall and extend legs. Mark off where heels are. Come to all fours and place hands where heels were. Walk feet up wall to make a right angle with body.	Spread fingers and palms. Extend arms. Connect shoulder blades into back. Roll tailbone up to ceiling. Press feet into wall and extend legs.	Strengthens arms, chest and back. Tones core.
Adho Mukha Vrkshasana (Full Arm Balance)	Belt forearms at shoulder width just below elbows.	Spread fingers and palms. Extend arms. Connect shoulder blades into back. Roll tailbone up to ceiling. Extend legs and scrub heels up wall. Reach whole body up to ceiling.	Strengthens arms, chest and back. Tones core.
Half Forearm Stand	Sit with back against wall and extend legs. Mark off where heels are. Interlock fingers and place forearms on floor with elbows where heels were. Walk feet up wall to make a right angle with body.	Press into wrists. Connect shoulder blades into back and lift shoulders. Roll tailbone up to ceiling. Press feet into wall and extend legs.	Strengthens arms, chest and back. Tones core.
Pincha Mayurasana (Peacock Feather Pose)	Belt upper arms above elbows. Place block between hands to keep them from coming together.	Roll weight into wrists and thumbs. Connect shoulder blades into back and lift shoulders. Roll tailbone up to ceiling. Extend legs and scrub heels up wall. Reach whole body up to ceiling.	Strengthens arms, chest and back. Tones core.

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Shalabhasana II (Locust Pose)	Lie on belly. Press backs of hands into floor, draw shoulder blades into back, lift head and chest. Bend legs, feet apart. Lift thighs up. Bring feet together. Bring thighs together.	Draw shoulder blades into back and look up. Roll tailbone to knees.	Strengthens back muscles, especially quadratus lumborum, erector spinae and upper gluteus.
Urdhva Prasarita Padasana (Upward Extended Feet Pose)	Belt wrists shoulder width. Belt thighs and/or ankles. Perform without belts to increase difficult. From floor, raise legs to 30°, 60°, 90°. Either return to floor or hold the stages again on the way down.	Extend arms and lengthen ribs away from pelvis. Ground upper back into floor. Engage upper and lower abs. Pull navel in towards spine and anchor waist down towards floor. Push heels up with tailbone.	Strengthens core and thighs.
Ardha Navasana (Half Boat Pose)		Pull navel into spine. Round waist back. Reach legs away.	Strengthens core and thighs.
Urdhva Prasarita Padasana/ Halasana Combination (Upward Extended Feet Pose, Plough Pose)	Repeat 5-10 times.	Extend arms and legs. Pull navel into spine. Keep reaching waist towards floor. Use control and not momentum to perform sequence.	Strengthens core and thighs.
Ardha Navasana from roll back (Half Boat Pose)	Feet flat on floor. Roll waist towards floor. Lift legs into Ardha Navasana and hold. Place feet on floor and roll remainder of way down. Roll back up. Lift legs into Ardha Navasana and hold.	Pull navel into spine. Round waist back. Reach legs away.	Strengthens core and thighs.
Roll back with twist	a) Hold onto shins and roll waist back. b) Twist from this position with one hand on floor. c) Reach hand away, other hand on floor. d) Reach both hands away.	Inhale, pull navel into spine. Exhale, roll waist out through palm.	Strengthens core.
Jathara Parivartanasana (Belly Turning Pose)	Either knees bent or legs straight. Belt straight legs for support. Perform without belt for greater challenge.	Keep shoulders and shoulder blades pinned to floor. Inhale, pull navel in and lengthen sides. Exhale, roll bell and ribs away from legs.	Strengthens core. Integrates arms and rib cage into trunk.
Salamba Shirshasana I (Head Stand)		Firm upper arm bones into shoulder sockets. Draw shoulder blades into back and broaden back into shoulder blades.	Stabilizes shoulder girdle. Strengthens back. Tones core and legs.

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Supta Virasana (Reclined Hero Pose)	Belt knees and thighs together. Support trunk as necessary.	WITHOUT lifting hips, roll tailbone to heels. Soften thighs away from navel. Roll hip bones towards chest. Broaden back ribs into support.	Stretches thighs. Tones abdominals and lower back. Releases neck.
Straight Arm Stretch I (palm up)	Place palm flat on wall, fingers up, at shoulder height. With elbow bent, connect shoulder blade into back. Without allowing shoulder blade and shoulder to lift, extend arm. Hold here. After a few breaths, turn trunk away from wall and hold.	Extend arm attempting to maintain a balanced stretch in wrist, elbow and shoulder. Lift and broaden chest. Roll breastbone away from arm as you reach arm back into wall.	Stretches entire connection of arm into front. Opens chest. Relieves stress on rotator cuff.
Straight Arm Stretch II (palm down)	Place palm flat on wall, fingers up, at shoulder height. Then turn fingers out and down. With elbow bent, connect shoulder blade into back. Without allowing shoulder blade and shoulder to lift, extend arm. Hold here. After a few breaths, turn trunk away from wall and hold.	Extend arm attempting to maintain a balanced stretch in wrist, elbow and shoulder. Lift and broaden chest. Roll breastbone away from arm as you reach arm back into wall.	Stretches entire connection of arm into front. Opens chest. Relieves stress on rotator cuff.
Bent Arm Stretch	Bent elbow and lift it to shoulder height and lean arm and chest against wall. Roll up a blanket and place it between shoulder and wall.	Connect shoulder blade into back. Inhale, roll chest away from wall. Exhale, press into blanket.	Opens chest and front of shoulder. Relieves stress on rotator cuff.
Straight Arm Stretch III (facing into wall))	Place chest against wall and extend arm out at shoulder height, palm flat. Roll up a blanket and place it between shoulder and wall.	Connect shoulder blade into back. Inhale, roll chest away from wall. Exhale, press into blanket.	Opens chest, front of shoulder and biceps. Relieves stress on rotator cuff.
Salamba Sarvangasana I (Shoulder Stand)	Fold up a mat and three blankets and stack the up. Come into pose with shoulders on blankets and head and neck off. Belt elbows with belt loop shoulder width.	Settle shoulders down into blankets. Roll back ribs up into chest. Broaden top of chest. Without slumping, settle weight towards elbows rather than neck. Stretch legs up towards ceiling.	Strengthens back, chest and arms. Opens chest. Tones core and legs.
Halasana (Plough Pose)	Fold up a mat and three blankets and stack the up. Come into pose with shoulders on blankets and head and neck off. Belt elbows with belt loop shoulder width.	Start with hands on back. Then interlock fingers and extend arm, rolling shoulder down into blankets. Roll palms down and out and hold. Roll palms up and out and hold. Repeat with other interlock of fingers.	Stretches and tones back. Strengthens arms and open shoulders. Tones and integrates legs.

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Supta Konasana (Reclined Angle Pose)	Fold up a mat and three blankets and stack the up. Come into pose with shoulders on blankets and head and neck off. Belt elbows with belt loop shoulder width.	From Plough Pose with hands on back, spread feet wide. Stretch legs.	Stretches and tones back. Strengthens arms and open shoulders. Tones and integrates legs.
Parshva Halasana (Side Plough Pose)	Fold up a mat and three blankets and stack the up. Come into pose with shoulders on blankets and head and neck off. Belt elbows with belt loop shoulder width.	From Reclined Angle Pose with hands on back, walk left foot to right and keep walking as far as you can without turning shoulders. Hold. Return to Reclined Angle Pose and do other side.	Stretches and tones back. Strengthens arms and open shoulders. Tones trunk. Tones and integrates legs.
Shavasana (Corpse Pose)	Place a bolster or folded blankets under knees. Place a blanket under head.	Soften and release entire body. Focus on releasing hips, shoulders, lower back and belly. Hold pose for at least 5 minutes.	Releases muscles and allows body to integrate the effects of the poses.
