

Focus: Basic Asana Cycle 1/Week 4

Level: Fundamentals

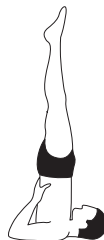
Theme: Rolling the tailbone to the heel, straightening the back leg

Asana Cycles

This sequence is the fourth in an ongoing series of 4-week pose cycles designed to work you through a basic syllabus of poses. Each cycle will take you through all the major pose categories. Though based on an overall theme, the sequencing is general in the sense that the poses themselves are designed to provide the intended effects without necessarily practicing at a high level of detail. This makes the sequences suitable for the beginning student who is still learning the basic shapes of the poses.

More advanced practitioners will still benefit from the practice of these cycles, however. It is easy to get stuck in a rut in one's own practice, working the same poses over and over. The balanced sequencing of each cycle will put you through your paces, touching on most of the important beginning poses. Each successive cycle will vary slightly, folding in progressively more challenging poses.

Beginning and intermediate students can use the sequences to tide them over when they run out of ideas or lack inspiration. Built around fundamental energetic principles, they feature all the key elements of a balanced practice session: simple opening poses to focus the mind, standing poses to energize and open the body, a short sequence of targeted floor poses and a simple inversion practice.



How To Use The Sequence

Each practice is designed to last just over an hour. Feel free to subtract poses according to your needs. If you are practicing every day, you might think of doing the full sequence at least twice in a week, breaking the list down into smaller chunks on other days and allowing yourself more time in inversions and Shavasana (Corpse Pose). If you are practicing less than that, attempt the full sequence at least once during the week. Here are some suggested guidelines based on how often you do yoga. (If you take class more than once a week, substitute one full sequence for the second class you take, one short practice for the third, and so on.)

6 times a week

Day 1: Class
Day 2: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 3: Full sequence (60-75mins)
Day 4: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 5: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 6: Full sequence (60-75mins)
Day 7: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)

4 times a week


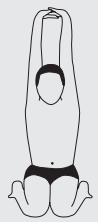


Day 1: Class
Day 2: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)
Day 3: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 4: Full sequence (60-75mins)
Day 5: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)
Day 6: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 7: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)

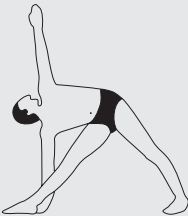
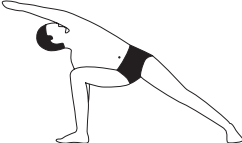
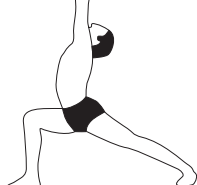
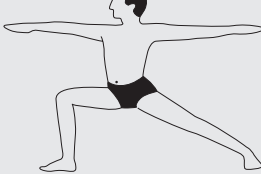
3 times a week








Day 1: Class
Day 2: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)
Day 3: Short practice (20-30mins)
Day 4: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)
Day 5: Full sequence (60-75mins)
Day 6: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)
Day 7: Rest or Shavasana (5-15mins)

The Practice

The general theme of this sequence is backward extension. The primary thing to consider when learning backward extensions is to keep the lower back broad and long so that the extension happens higher up in the spine. The major impediment to this is tightness in the thighs. A tight thigh will pull on the hip bones, causing the pelvis to tilt and the lower back to arch. Thus the focus of this practice will be stretching the thigh to free up the muscles there, coupled with rolling the tailbone towards the heels or knees to lengthen the lower back. The first part of the practice focuses on creating length in the trunk, activating the tailbone action and opening the upper back and chest. In the standing poses, the awareness is in the back leg, grounding into the heel and extending the leg fully to open up the front of the thigh. Following that are a few reclined backward extensions leading into a restorative section.

<i>pose</i>	<i>props</i>	<i>set-up</i>	<i>instructions</i>
Virasana (Hero Pose) 	Blanket Block	Fold blanket and slip behind knees. Perch on block.	Centering/Invocation Hold pose for 1-2 minutes. Either sit quietly or chant "OM" 3 times. Draw senses inwards. Become aware of state of mind and body.
Parvatasana in Virasana (Mountain Pose in Hero Pose)	Blanket Block	 Continued from above.	Hold for 20-30s for each interlock of fingers. Settle sitting bones and shins evenly down. Spread fingers and palms. Roll palms up parallel to ceiling. Lift and open chest.
Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose) 	Belt Block	Belt forearms just below elbow to support arms. Place block between thighs.	Hold for 30-60s. Extend arms fully. Pull block up and back. Stretch legs and lengthen waist.
Supta Tadasana (Reclined Mountain Pose)	Belt Block	Lie back over block with top edge under shoulder blades. Belt wrists with arms shoulder width (or even a little closer together).	Hold for 30-60s. Soften and broaden ribs over block. Broaden chest. Keep legs together and extend them strongly. Roll sacrum towards heels. Press out against belt and stretch arms. Elongate sides from heels to wrists.
Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose) 	Belt Block	Belt forearms just below elbow to support arms. Place block between thighs.	Hold for 30-60s. Extend arms fully. Pull block up and back. Stretch legs and lengthen waist. Eliminate for shorter sequence.

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Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)	Wall Block	Do pose with outer edge of back foot against wall. Place hand on block.	Hold for 20-30s each side. Press back heel down and out into wall. Fully extend back leg. Roll sacrum/tailbone to back heel. Lengthen waist. Repeat for longer sequence.
			
Utthita Parshvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)	Wall Block	Do pose with outer edge of back foot against wall. Place hand on block.	Hold for 20-30s each side. Press back heel down and out into wall. Fully extend back leg. Roll sacrum/tailbone to back heel. Lengthen waist. Repeat for longer sequence.
			
Thigh Stretch at Wall	Wall Blanket	Place blanket on floor under knee. Place shin up against wall. If unable to lift up, go forward into a lunge instead. If lunge not possible, place front shin on floor.	Hold for 20-30s each side. Roll tailbone towards standing knee. Soften thigh down into knee. Draw belly in and up. Lengthen waist. Repeat for longer sequence.
Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)	Wall	Come into pose with back heel against wall.	Hold for 20-30s each side. Press back heel down and out into wall. Fully extend back leg. Roll sacrum/tailbone to back heel. Lengthen waist. Repeat for longer sequence.
			
Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II)	Wall	Come into pose with back heel against wall.	Hold for 20-30s each side. Press back heel down and out into wall. Fully extend back leg. Roll sacrum/tailbone to back heel. Lengthen waist. Repeat for longer sequence.
			

pose	props	set-up	instructions
<p>Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)</p> 	<p>Bolster (or equivalent) Belt Blanket</p>	<p>Lie back with bolster supporting trunk, but with lower back free. Fold blanket under head.</p>	<p>Hold for 2-5 minutes. Lengthen sacrum to heels. Soften belly and groins. Soften and broaden back ribs. Lift and open chest. Release back of neck.</p>
<p>Supta Virasana (Reclined Hero Pose)</p> 	<p>Bolster (or equivalent) Belt Blanket</p>	<p>Lie back with bolster supporting trunk, but with lower back free. Belt legs so thighs do not spread. Fold blanket under head.</p>	<p>Hold for 2-5 minutes. Roll sacrum to heels without lifting thighs. Soften thighs. Lengthen waist. Broaden back ribs into bolster. Eliminate if unmanageable</p>
<p>Viparita Dandasana (Inverted Staff Pose)</p> 	<p>Chair Wall Belt Bolster (or equivalent)</p>	<p>Set up with feet at wall. Belt thighs to keep legs and feet parallel. If heels on floor is too intense, put block(s) under feet to reduce backward extension. Support head.</p>	<p>Hold for 2-5 minutes. Roll sacrum to heels. Scrub heels into wall. Roll shoulders down. Open chest. Release neck.</p>
<p>Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose)</p> 	<p>Wall 2 Blocks Belt</p>	<p>Begin with feet at wall and blocks under sacrum and heels at same height. Progressively take block under feet down as low as possible without straining lower back, eventually bringing feet to floor.</p>	<p>Hold for 2-5 minutes. Roll sacrum to heels. Scrub heels into wall. Roll shoulders down. Open chest. Soften throat. Release neck.</p>
<p>Sarvangasana on chair (Shoulder Stand)</p> 	<p>Chair Mat 2 Blankets</p>	<p>Place mat on chair seat. Fold blankets up for under shoulders. Rest back against chair. Position of back on chair will vary according to proportions.</p>	<p>Hold for 3-5 minutes. Roll shoulders down. Roll back ribs up into chest. Open chest. Soften throat. Release neck.</p>
<p>Ardha Halasana (Half Plough Pose)</p> 	<p>Chair 3 Blankets Mat</p>	<p>Fold mat up and stack blankets on top.</p>	<p>Hold for 3-5 minutes. Roll shoulders down. Roll sacrum/tailbone to heels. Soften and round back. Soften throat. Lengthen neck.</p>
<p>Shavasana (Corpse Pose)</p> 	<p>Blankets (Bolster)</p>	<p>Blanket under head. Blankets or bolster under knees.</p>	<p>Hold for 3-10 minutes. Allow entire body to release. Quietly observe breath.</p>