

# YOGA

## *Why perform yoga?*

Yoga has many positive benefits: increased flexibility, increased strength, improved posture, better body tone, and increased body awareness (Shaw, 2009, Yogafit). Yoga is about the individual. When you perform the poses, think about how you feel and the benefits you will gain from completing the movements. Do not compare your flexibility or movement to another person.

## *How do I perform the yoga poses?*

When performing a yoga pose, complete the pose using slow, steady, and controlled movements. Your breathing dictates your pace. Your breathing should be steady and you should not hold your breath. Do not feel rushed when completing the pose and know your range of motion and flexibility. Each person's flexibility range is different. It is important for each individual to "make the pose fit your body and to never force, push, or shove yourself into a pose" (Shaw, 2009, p. 20). If an individual has limited flexibility, he/she should focus on proper alignment and not worry about completing the full yoga movement. Use the modifications that are listed with the pose. (see Yoga Wall Challenges). Remember yoga is about you not what your friends can do!

When performing each pose you want to maintain proper body positioning.

1. Make sure to establish a base. A firm base is needed to maintain stability.
2. A strong core is important when completing the poses. Make sure to engage your core (abdominals, lower back, glutes, and hip flexors). You want to engage these before beginning the movement. These muscles help when you are trying to hold the pose.
3. Soften and align your knees and avoid locking your joints. Be careful not to let your knees go over your toes.
4. Relax shoulders to relieve stress and decrease tension in the upper body. When you are stressed, your shoulders may rise towards your ears. It is important when performing the poses to 'slide your shoulders toward your hip pockets'.

## *Safety with yoga*

1. Wear comfortable clothes. You don't want your clothes to hinder your movement.
2. You should feel resistance when performing a pose but not pain. Stop performing a pose if you feel pain.
3. Do not hold your breath when completing a pose. Breathe in when you increase the resistance and breathe out when you decrease the resistance.
4. Inverted poses and backbends should only be performed after a vigorous warm-up.

### *How long should yoga sessions last?*

First, complete a 3-5 minute total body warm-up (i.e. jogging, jumping rope, speed walking) before completing yoga poses. Yoga can be used in place of traditional static stretching.

Yoga poses can be practiced for longer periods of time as your comfort and strength increases. Results vary but some yoga participants will see benefits after the first session. Yoga can be performed three to five days per week for 30-60 minutes. The table below is a guide for you to create your own yoga routines.

Fitness Level	Number of Poses	Breathes or Seconds for each pose
Beginner	5-6	6-10
Intermediate	6-12	8-12
Advanced	10-16	10-20

### *How do I create a yoga sequence?*

Make sure to familiarize yourself with the poses. The yoga wall challenges contain pictures of the yoga poses and modifications for each pose. The station cards contain pictures of the different yoga poses. Try to complete the poses in isolation, this means try to perform each pose by itself before combining the poses into a routine. Some of the standing poses (mountain, warrior I, sunflower, etc.) are easier to complete than the support poses (crocodile, plank, etc.).

To begin, select five to six poses. Arrange the poses from 1 to 6. Start with the 1<sup>st</sup> pose and go through to the 6<sup>th</sup> pose and then go backwards from 6 to pose 1. The first time you complete the routine do not worry about how long you are holding each pose. When your comfort level increases, you can perform each pose for 5, 10, 15, or 20 seconds.

Here are two beginning routines to try:

- Valley I: Beginning Workout
- Standing Warm-up