

## Knowledge Article: Physical Education

# Flexibility

### Overview

Yoga is a method of exercise that increases your flexibility. It's a system of stretching and breathing techniques that originated in India more than 5,000 years ago. Each exercise consists of a series of poses intended to benefit certain parts of the body. The transition from one pose to the next often appears fluid and seamless. To some, yoga is a form of meditation that connects the body, mind, and spirit.

People of all ages can improve their flexibility by participating in yoga. To practice yoga safely, you must be aware of your body's limits. Each person's body has a different level of flexibility. A pose that one person can achieve on the first day may not be possible for another person for a very long time. To practice yoga means to follow the exercise principle of progression: increasing the difficulty level of an exercise over time. In yoga, it's all right if you can't strike a pose perfectly on the first try. If a pose is difficult, take a deep breath and try to move into the pose as you exhale.




In yoga, there is no single measure of flexibility that you must achieve. Instead, your goal should be to watch for personal improvements over time. Flexibility measurements are sometimes a helpful predictor of future injury. A high range of motion can mean fewer trips to the doctor. To reduce the risk of injury during yoga or any physical activity, read the instructions carefully or seek help from an expert before beginning.



This article outlines three different yoga sessions. Before beginning a session, check your current flexibility levels and use them as a benchmark to check your progress. For the best experience, try to find a comfortable, soothing place to practice yoga.

## Measuring Your Flexibility

There is no single measurement to quantify a person's level of flexibility. However, you can track your flexibility over time for certain muscle groups and watch for improvement. There are three tests in the table below. The President's Challenge sit-and-reach test checks the range of motion in your lower back and hamstrings. The arm lift test looks at the flexibility in your arms and chest. Finally, the knee-to-chest test is a flexibility indicator for your lower back, hamstrings, and hips.

To get started, you will need to find a partner, a ruler, tape, a microwave-sized box, and a two-foot stick. Warm up for five minutes before beginning this series of tests. A brisk walk, a jog, or jumping rope will get your body warm and increase blood flow to your muscles. Drink some water too. Once your muscles are warm, find a comfortable place to do your tests. You are ready to begin.




President's Challenge Sit-and-Reach Test		Lower Back and Hamstrings										
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tape a ruler on top of a box with the zero end of the ruler pointed toward you and the 23 cm mark at the edge of the box. In other words, the ruler overhangs the box by 23 cm.</li><li>2. Sit on the ground with your legs extended in front of you. The soles of your feet should be flat against the side of the box at the 23 cm mark.</li><li>3. Bend from the waist over your legs, reaching your hands along the ruler.</li><li>4. Record how many centimeters past zero you can reach. If you can reach past the ruler, you may need to mark your spot and measure the extra centimeters with the ruler after you are finished stretching.</li><li>5. Results will vary according to age and gender. Check the charts to the left to see how your results compare with those of adults.</li></ol>										
<b>adult men</b> <table><tr><td>&gt; 34 cm</td><td>excellent</td></tr><tr><td>28–34 cm</td><td>above average</td></tr><tr><td>23–27 cm</td><td>average</td></tr><tr><td>16–22 cm</td><td>below average</td></tr><tr><td>&lt; 16 cm</td><td>poor</td></tr></table>			> 34 cm	excellent	28–34 cm	above average	23–27 cm	average	16–22 cm	below average	< 16 cm	poor
> 34 cm	excellent											
28–34 cm	above average											
23–27 cm	average											
16–22 cm	below average											
< 16 cm	poor											
<b>adult women</b> <table><tr><td>&gt; 36 cm</td><td>excellent</td></tr><tr><td>33–36 cm</td><td>above average</td></tr><tr><td>29–32 cm</td><td>average</td></tr><tr><td>23–28 cm</td><td>below average</td></tr><tr><td>&lt; 23 cm</td><td>poor</td></tr></table>		> 36 cm	excellent	33–36 cm	above average	29–32 cm	average	23–28 cm	below average	< 23 cm	poor	
> 36 cm	excellent											
33–36 cm	above average											
29–32 cm	average											
23–28 cm	below average											
< 23 cm	poor											

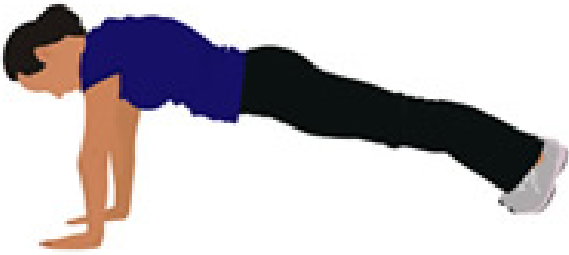

Arm Lift Test	Arms and Chest
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lie facedown on your stomach on level ground.</li> <li>2. Stretch your arms in front of your body and hold a 2-foot stick between your clenched fists.</li> <li>3. Keep your forehead on the floor as you raise your arms as high as possible.</li> <li>4. Have your partner record the height of the stick with the ruler as you hold this position. If you can lift the stick above 22 centimeters, you are above average.</li> </ol>
Knee-to-Chest Test	Hips, Hamstrings, and Lower Back
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lie on your back on level ground, extending your legs out in front of you.</li> <li>2. Bring your right knee toward your chest. Place your hands on your right knee, gently pulling the knee toward your chest.</li> <li>3. Keep your left leg straight in front of you and your head against the floor. Hold this position.</li> <li>4. Have your partner measure the distance between your left leg and the ground using a ruler. If your calf rises less than 2.5 centimeters from the floor, you are above average.</li> <li>5. Repeat steps one through four for the opposite leg.</li> </ol>




## Yoga Session I

This session introduces you to a series of yoga poses. The poses should be held from 30 to 60 seconds each. Pay attention to your body. Stop doing a pose if you start to feel pain or discomfort. Breathe deeply during the routine to gain the full benefit of the stretch.



To begin, complete a 5- to 10-minute warm-up and find a soft, comfortable surface for your session. Then proceed to the poses described in the table. The poses are presented in a recommended order, but you may change the order if you would like to repeat a pose. This session starts and ends with mountain pose.


Mountain Pose	Yoga Session I
	<p>You will often return to this position when transitioning between poses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin standing upright with your heels touching and your toes slightly apart.</li> <li>2. Be sure that your weight is evenly distributed through your feet.</li> <li>3. Push your shoulder blades back and let your arms hang at the sides of your body, with your palms open and facing outward.</li> </ol>
Standing Half-Forward Bend	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From mountain pose, bend forward at the waist.</li> <li>2. If you can, let your hands touch the floor and arch your back away from your legs.</li> <li>3. Gaze straight ahead at the floor, being sure not to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
Standing Forward Bend	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the standing half-forward bend, lower your torso completely so your head rests against your legs and your hands slide behind your calves.</li> <li>2. Hang your head loosely and do not lock your knees.</li> <li>3. If you can, touch your hands to the ground.</li> </ol>

Plank Pose	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the standing forward bend, extend your arms in front of your body until they reach the floor.</li> <li>2. Your wrists should be directly below your shoulders, and your arms should be perpendicular to the ground.</li> <li>3. Walk your feet backward until you are resting on your toes. Your thighs, hips, and back should be in a straight line.</li> </ol>
Downward-Facing Dog	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From plank pose, lower your head to the ground as you raise your hips up.</li> <li>2. Be sure not to lock your knees. Bend them as far as you need to so you're comfortable.</li> <li>3. Spread your fingers apart and press them into the floor.</li> <li>4. Keep your head between your arms. Resist the urge to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
Upward Salute	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From downward-facing dog, walk your feet forward.</li> <li>2. Raise your torso up to mountain pose. Your arms and hands should now be at your sides.</li> <li>3. Sweep your hands alongside your body until they are raised up in the air as shown.</li> </ol>

Standing Half-Forward Bend	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the upward salute, bend forward at the waist. Be sure to not roll your spine on the way down, but to bend straight from your waist.</li> <li>2. If you can, let your hands touch the floor and arch your back away from your legs.</li> <li>3. Gaze straight ahead at the floor, being sure not to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
High Lunge (both legs)	Yoga Session I
 <p>right leg forward</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the standing half-forward bend, move your right leg forward. Be sure that your right knee rests directly over your right foot.</li> <li>2. Lower your torso over your right leg while placing your hands palms down on the ground on each side of your right foot.</li> <li>3. Gaze straight ahead and breathe. Hold this pose for about 30 seconds.</li> <li>4. Repeat the same pose with the left leg, holding for another 30 seconds.</li> </ol>
Low Lunge (both legs)	Yoga Session I
 <p>right leg forward</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From high lunge, raise your torso so it is vertical. Your left leg should still be forward and bent.</li> <li>2. Lower your right knee to the ground.</li> <li>3. Sweep both arms alongside your body until they are extended vertically in the air. Hold this pose for about 30 seconds.</li> <li>4. Switch legs so your right leg is forward and bent as shown. Repeat the same pose with the right leg and hold for another 30 seconds.</li> </ol>




Warrior II (both legs)	Yoga Session I
 <p>left leg forward</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From low lunge pose, stand up and extend your left leg forward. As you exhale, move your feet about three feet apart.</li> <li>2. Turn your left foot slightly outward and keep your left leg bent at a 90-degree angle in an open stance.</li> <li>3. Raise your arms and hold them parallel to the ground, palms down.</li> <li>4. Look out over your left hand, which should be extended over your left thigh. Your right arm extends back over your right leg.</li> <li>5. Switch legs so your right leg is forward. Repeat the same pose with the right leg and hold for another 30 seconds.</li> </ol>
Warrior I (both legs)	Yoga Session I
 <p>right leg forward</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Keep your right foot forward about three feet so it is directly below your right knee.</li> <li>2. Turn your right foot in 45 degrees and turn your left foot out at a 90-degree angle. Both knees should be off the ground.</li> <li>3. When your feet are firmly planted, raise your arms directly overhead, sweeping them up along your body. Hold this pose for about 30 seconds.</li> <li>4. Repeat the same pose with the left leg forward and hold for another 30 seconds.</li> </ol>




Mountain Pose	Yoga Session I
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you are finished with warrior I, return to mountain pose.</li> <li>2. Hold the pose and take a few deep breaths. Your workout is complete.</li> </ol>


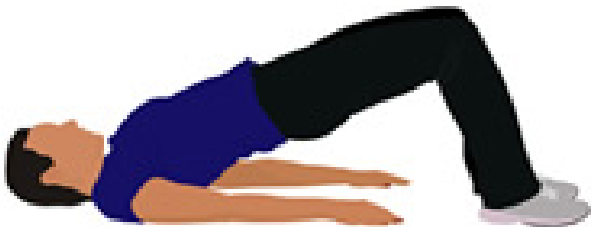

## Yoga Session II


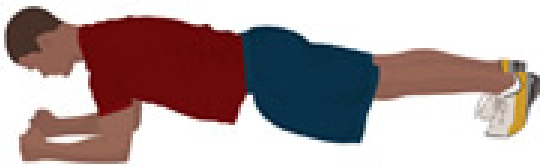

This session introduces you to a new series of yoga poses. Once again, the poses should be held from 30 to 60 seconds each. Remember to warm up for 5 to 10 minutes, find a comfortable surface for your session, and breathe deeply during the routine. This session starts and ends with mountain pose.



Mountain Pose	Yoga Session II
	<p>You will often return to this position when transitioning between poses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin standing upright with your heels touching and your toes slightly apart.</li> <li>2. Be sure that your weight is evenly distributed through your feet.</li> <li>3. Push your shoulder blades back and let your arms hang at the sides of your body, with your palms open and facing outward.</li> </ol>



Standing Half-Forward Bend	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From mountain pose, bend forward at the waist.</li> <li>2. If you can, let your hands touch the floor and arch your back away from your legs.</li> <li>3. Gaze straight ahead at the floor, being sure not to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
Cat Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From standing half-forward bend, lower yourself to the ground on your hands and knees.</li> <li>2. Place your hands palms down on the ground directly below your shoulders.</li> <li>3. Set your gaze at the ground and arch your back upward, being sure not to tuck your chin to your chest.</li> </ol>
Cow Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As you exhale, move into cow pose.</li> <li>2. Press your stomach toward the floor and arch your back in the opposite direction.</li> <li>3. Gaze up and forward, but don't bend your neck too far back.</li> <li>4. Move between cat and cow poses several times, inhaling on cow and exhaling on cat.</li> </ol>




Camel Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From cow pose, rise up onto your knees so your body is upright.</li> <li>2. Leading with your head, bend backward at the waist over the tops of your calves.</li> <li>3. Be sure that your hips do not press forward. Rest your hands on the bottoms of your feet.</li> </ol>
Bridge Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From camel pose, straighten your back and lie on your back on the floor. Rest your arms alongside your body, palms down.</li> <li>2. Place the bottoms of your feet on the ground so your knees are upright.</li> <li>3. Pushing down into the floor with your feet and arms, raise your pelvis off the ground.</li> <li>4. Press your shoulder blades under your back to support your weight.</li> <li>5. Your body should appear to form a straight line from your knees to your shoulders.</li> <li>6. To come out of this pose, lower your hips down to the ground and extend your legs fully.</li> </ol>
Upward-Facing Dog	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Once out of bridge pose, roll over onto your stomach.</li> <li>2. Place your hands palms down next to your shoulders, and point your toes away from your body.</li> <li>3. With your arms, push up so that your torso is upright.</li> <li>4. Gaze straight ahead or slightly upward, but do not strain your neck.</li> </ol>



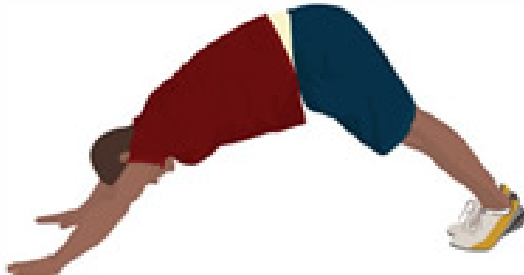
Downward-Facing Dog	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From upward-facing dog, raise your hips using your arms while keeping your hands planted.</li> <li>2. Be sure not to lock your knees. Bend them as far as you need to so you're comfortable.</li> <li>3. Spread your fingers apart and press them into the floor.</li> <li>4. Keep your head between your arms. Resist the urge to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
Plank Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From downward-facing dog, lower your torso but be sure it is still suspended above the ground.</li> <li>2. Your wrists should be directly below your shoulders, and your arms should be perpendicular to the ground.</li> <li>3. Walk your feet backward until you are resting on your toes. Your thighs, hips, and back should be in a straight line.</li> </ol>
Dolphin Plank	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From plank pose, lower your body toward the floor, maintaining a flat back and straight legs.</li> <li>2. Come to rest on your forearms, and use your core muscles to support your body.</li> <li>3. Be sure to not let your hips sink toward the floor.</li> </ol>
Dolphin Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From dolphin plank, place your palms together, spread your fingers, and firmly plant your forearms on the ground.</li> <li>2. Raise your hips in the air while planting your feet on the ground.</li> <li>3. Attempt to straighten your knees as far as is comfortable.</li> </ol>

Standing Forward Bend	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From dolphin pose, walk your hands back until they reach your legs.</li> <li>2. Your torso will be bent over at the waist, with your head resting against your legs.</li> <li>3. If you can, place your hands on the floor.</li> <li>4. Hang your head loosely, and do not lock your knees.</li> </ol>
Mountain Pose	Yoga Session II
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you are finished with standing forward bend, return to mountain pose. Be sure not to bend your back on the way up.</li> <li>2. Hold the pose and take a few deep breaths. Your workout is complete.</li> </ol>




### Yoga Session III



This session introduces you to a new series of yoga poses. Once again, the poses should be held from 30 to 60 seconds each. Remember to warm up for 5 to 10 minutes, find a comfortable surface for your session, and breathe deeply during the routine. This session starts and ends with mountain pose.


Mountain Pose	Yoga Session III
	<p>You will often return to this position when transitioning between poses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin standing upright with your heels touching and your toes slightly apart.</li> <li>2. Be sure that your weight is evenly distributed through your feet.</li> <li>3. Push your shoulder blades back and let your arms hang at the sides of your body, with your palms open and facing outward.</li> </ol>
Standing Half-Forward Bend	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From mountain pose, bend forward at the waist.</li> <li>2. If you can, let your hands touch the floor and arch your back away from your legs.</li> <li>3. Gaze straight ahead at the floor, being sure not to let your head hang.</li> </ol>
Plank Pose	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From standing half-forward bend, extend your arms in front of your body until they reach the floor.</li> <li>2. Your wrists should be directly below your shoulders, and your arms should be perpendicular to the ground.</li> <li>3. Walk your feet backward until you are resting on your toes. Your thighs, hips, and back should be in a straight line.</li> </ol>

Sphinx Pose	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From plank pose, lower your body to the floor.</li> <li>2. Rest your forearms on the ground. Your elbows should be directly beneath your shoulders.</li> <li>3. Lift your chest up from the ground and gaze forward.</li> </ol>
Cobra Pose	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From sphinx pose, plant your palms on the ground directly beneath your shoulders.</li> <li>2. Use your arms to raise your chest while pushing your shoulders back.</li> <li>3. Look upward, but be sure that your head does not tilt back too far.</li> </ol>
Downward-Facing Dog	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From cobra pose, lower your head to the ground as you raise your hips.</li> <li>2. Be sure not to lock your knees. Bend them as far as you need to so you're comfortable.</li> <li>3. Spread your fingers apart and press them into the floor.</li> <li>4. Keep your head between your arms. Resist the urge to let your head hang.</li> </ol>



Upward Salute	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From downward-facing dog, walk your feet forward.</li> <li>2. Raise your torso up to mountain pose. Your arms and hands should now be at your sides.</li> <li>3. Sweep your hands alongside your body until they are raised in the air as shown.</li> </ol>
Intense Side Stretch (both legs)	Yoga Session III
 <p>right leg forward</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From upward salute, place your right leg forward about three feet, planting it firmly on the ground.</li> <li>2. Bend at the waist over your right leg. Be sure to not roll your back on the way down.</li> <li>3. Try to rest your hands on the floor and be sure that your hips remain pointed forward.</li> <li>4. After holding this pose for one minute, lift your torso from the waist. Be sure not to roll your back on the way up.</li> <li>5. Bring your right foot back to meet your left, and extend your left foot in front. Repeat the pose for your left leg.</li> </ol>
Wide-Legged Forward Bend	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the intense side stretch, lift your torso back to a standing position.</li> <li>2. Spread your feet apart and bend forward at the waist, slowly reaching for the ground.</li> <li>3. Touch your hands to the ground, and your head too, if it will reach.</li> </ol>

Extended Triangle Pose (both sides)	Yoga Session III
 <p>right side</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From wide-legged forward bend, lift your torso to an upright position.</li> <li>2. Rotate your right foot outward at a 90-degree angle.</li> <li>3. Bending at the waist, lean over your right leg. Be sure your hips remain aligned with your body.</li> <li>4. Sweep your right arm alongside your body until it is perpendicular to the ground. Your left arm rises into the air.</li> <li>5. Gaze at your hand in the air. Hold this pose for 30 seconds. Then reverse your legs and arms and repeat on the left side.</li> </ol>
Extended Side Angle Pose (both sides)	Yoga Session III
 <p>right side</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From extended triangle pose, slowly lower your arm and lift your torso to an upright position.</li> <li>2. Rotate your left foot inward and your right foot out to a 90-degree angle. Bend your right knee, aligning the knee over the foot</li> <li>3. Bending at the waist, lean over your right leg. Be sure your hips remain aligned with your body.</li> <li>4. Sweep your right arm alongside your body until it is perpendicular to the ground. Your left arm rises into the air.</li> <li>5. Gaze at your hand in the air. Hold this pose for 30 seconds. Then reverse your legs and arms and repeat on the left side.</li> </ol>

Mountain Pose	Yoga Session III
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When you are finished with the extended side angle pose, return to mountain pose. Be sure not to bend your back on the way up.</li> <li>2. Hold the pose and take a few deep breaths. Your workout is complete.</li> </ol>