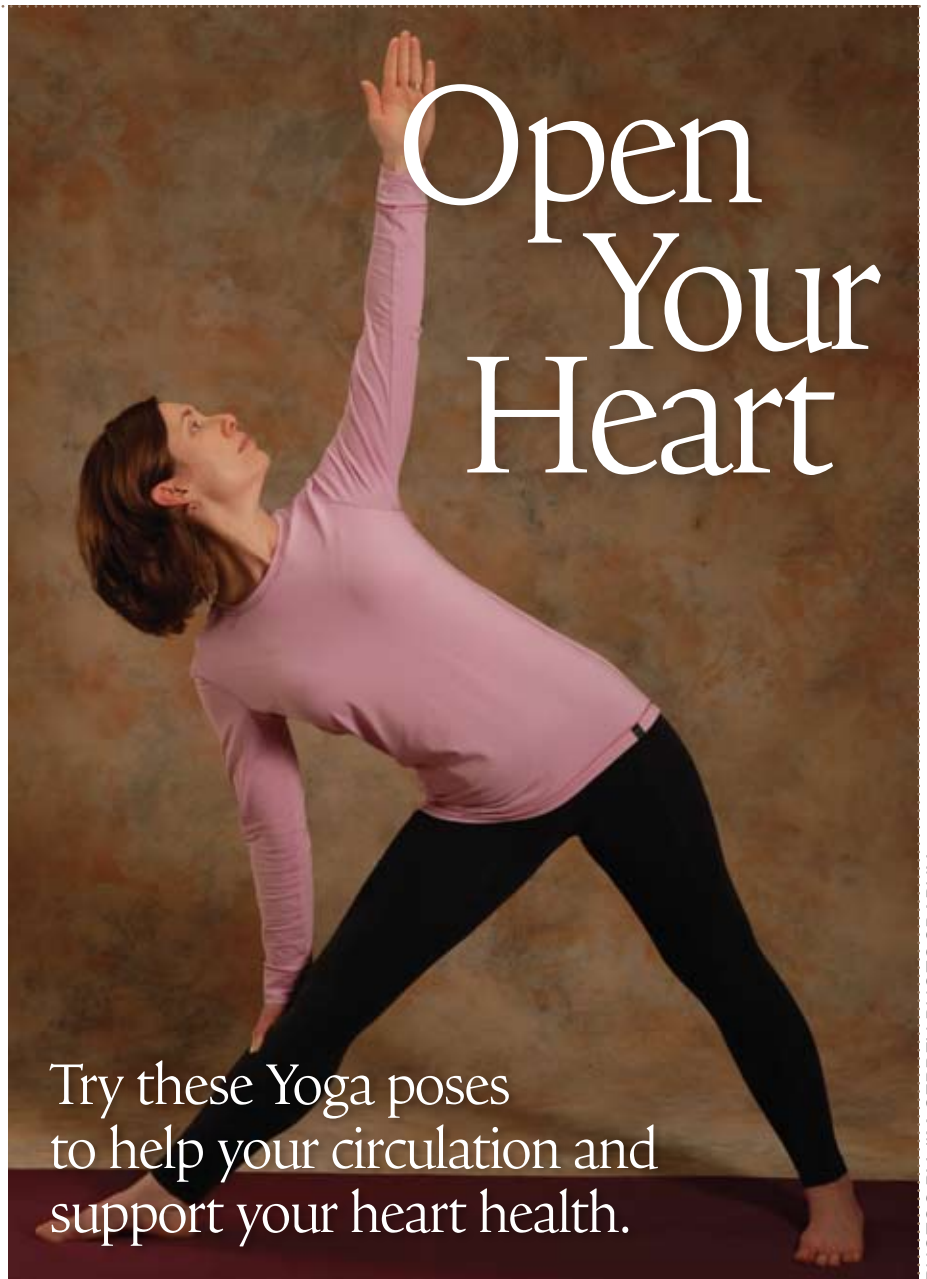


inner balance

Building stronger mind-body connections

Iyengar Yoga was founded by B. K. S. Iyengar of India and focuses on body alignment and is known for its use of props to accommodate students of all abilities, promote deeper understanding of poses and allow for longer holds in poses for restorative work. Kat McKinney is co-owner of The Yoga Studio in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is a licensed physical therapist assistant and a yoga instructor currently seeking certification in the Iyengar tradition. In 1998 she started practicing yoga to rehabilitate from a serious illness, and made yoga a permanent part of her life because of the numerous physical and mental benefits she experienced. Kat says: "This is a basic sequence that is accessible to anybody and focuses on opening up your chest and heart. Read through the full instructions before trying each pose, and throughout the sequence, keep your breath full and soft with your face relaxed." The entire sequence should last for 20 to 40 minutes, and can help improve circulation in the chest and slow your heart rate to bring about a sense of calm. Kat collaborated with Sue Salaniuk of The Yoga Space in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who is her mentoring teacher and is certified at the Junior Intermediate III level in the Iyengar tradition.



PHOTOS BY JIM GEBBEN PHOTOGRAPHY

Try these Yoga poses to help your circulation and support your heart health.

What you will need:

- » Sticky or yoga mat (or non slip floor surface like vinyl or hardwood)
- » Bolster (or 2-3 firm blankets folded to approximately 12 x 26 x 6 inches)
- » 2 to 3 firm cotton or wool blankets
- » Wide cotton belt
- » Chair
- » Table, kitchen counter, or wall



1. Reclining Easy pose (Supta Sukhasana)

Lay a sticky or yoga mat out on the floor in a quiet area. Be sure there is enough room for you to stretch out on the floor without obstruction. Sit on the center of the mat and place a bolster on the mat behind you orientated the long way, a couple of inches from your tailbone and extending to the edge of the mat. Place a folded blanket over the bolster, then turn to face the opposite end of the mat, crossing your legs at the mid-shin point. Lean back onto your arms, lift your chest, and lower your torso evenly on the bolster. If you experience strain in the low back, place a folded blanket under your hips. Pull the blanket under the head for support. Rest your arms on the floor with your palms facing up. Close your eyes. Let your chest and abdomen relax, allowing yourself to spread long and wide over the support of the bolster. Pay attention to how each inhalation opens the chest and abdomen, and each exhalation encourages the body to relax further. Remain in this pose for two to four minutes. Straighten your legs and reverse the direction of the cross. Remain for an even amount of time with your legs crossed the opposite way, being sure to focus on your breath. To come out of the pose, uncross your legs, place both feet on the floor, and roll to the right side off the bolster. Use your left arm to push yourself up to a seated position.



2. Mountain pose (Tadasana)

Standing in the center of the mat, place your feet parallel to each other and hip-width apart. Spread the soles of your feet and balance the weight of your body evenly. Tighten your thighs and pull your kneecaps up. Extend the crown of your head up to the ceiling and lift your chest. Straighten your elbows and extend your fingers to the floor. Roll your shoulders back and gaze straight ahead. Remain in this position for three to five complete breaths.

**To make sure you are in correct alignment in Mountain pose, practice this position with your back and hips against a wall. Lengthen your spine up the wall and roll your shoulders back to touch the wall.*



3. Mountain pose with Bound Arms (Baddha Hasta Tadasana)

From Mountain pose, bring your arms behind your torso and grasp your elbows with the opposite hands. Lift your chest and strongly roll your shoulders back. Notice the sideways expansion of your chest. If you are unable to grasp your elbows, hold one wrist with the opposite hand. Remain in this pose for two to three breaths. Release your elbows and proceed to Extended Arm pose described on page 57. Then, repeat Mountain pose with Bound Arms with the opposite clasp of the elbows or wrist.

“Iyengar Yoga focuses intently on body alignment.”



4. Mountain pose with Extended Arms (Parsva Hasta Tadasana)

From the Mountain pose with Bound Arms, straighten your elbows and extend the arms straight from the shoulders with your palms open and facing the floor. Continue to lift and spread your chest while keeping your shoulders down. Remain in this pose for two to three breaths. Lower your arms and return to the previous pose.

Switch between the Mountain pose with Bound Arms and the Mountain pose with Extended Arms three to four times, breathing evenly and without strain.



5. Half Downward-Facing Dog pose (Ardha Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Place the hands shoulder width apart on a sturdy table or counter. Place your feet parallel to each other and hip-width apart. Step backward, keeping your legs vertical, then bend at the hips. Straighten the legs, elbows and spine. Press your thighs back and evenly extend the full length of your spine. Keep your head aligned between your arms and hold this position for three to five breaths. Step forward and lift your torso into a vertical position to exit the pose. Repeat this pose two to three times. If tightness on the back of your thighs prevents you from fully extending your spine, take the pose at a wall instead. To do this, place both hands flat on a wall at shoulder height—instead of a table—and follow all remaining steps the same as above.



6. Triangle pose (Trikonasana)

Stand in Mountain pose on a your mat. Step to the side with your feet approximately 4 feet apart, keeping them parallel. Press the feet down through the mat, balancing the weight of your body evenly across the soles. Tighten your thighs and pull the knee caps up. Extend the spine up through the crown of your head, and lift the chest and extend the arms straight out from the shoulders. Turn your left foot in slightly toward the other; turn the right leg out at 90 degrees. On an exhalation, extend the torso to the right and place your right hand on your right leg. Extend the left arm up in line with your shoulder and turn your head to look up to the left hand. Hold this pose for two to three breaths. On an inhalation, lift the torso up. Turn the feet parallel to each other, then repeat the pose to the left side. To exit the pose, step your legs together into Mountain pose.

Keep your breath full and soft
with your face relaxed.



7. Seated Twist on chair (Bharadvajasana)

Sit sideways on a chair with your right hip next to the chair's back. Place your feet hip width apart and directly below your knees. Lift the chest up and roll your shoulders back. Upon exhalation, smoothly turn our torso to the right so that it faces the back of the chair. Bring the arms around to grasp the chair's back and assist with the twist. Keep your spine extending up evenly with your shoulders parallel to the floor. Hold this pose for three to five breaths, then release the twist on an exhalation. Sit tall for a few moments before switching to the opposite side of the chair and performing the pose to the left. Repeat the twist in each direction three times.



9. Seated Twist on blankets (Parsva Sukhasana)

Move the two folded blankets from the end of the mat to just off of the center. Sit cross-legged on the blankets and lift your chest up while rolling your shoulders back. On an exhalation, smoothly turn the torso to the right, placing your left hand on your right knee, and your right hand on the blankets behind you. Extend the spine up evenly, and keep your shoulders parallel to the floor. Hold this pose for three to five breaths, then release the twist on an exhalation. Sit tall for a few moments before performing the twist to the left.



8. Upward Facing Forward Bend (Urdhva Mukha Pashchimottanasana)

Place two folded blankets near the end of your mat. Sit on the blankets with your legs extended toward the opposite end of the mat. Place a wide cotton belt around the balls of your feet and hold the ends taugth with extended arms. Extend the crown of your head up to the ceiling and lift your chest, just as in Mountain pose. Roll your shoulders back. Exhaling, bend forward from the hips as you continue to lift and spread the chest. Hold this pose for three to five breaths. Exit the pose on an inhalation, bringing the torso back to vertical. If your back rounds as you attempt to bend forward, sit on extra height (by adding another folded blanket), bring the feet hip width apart, and try again. Repeat this pose two to three times.

☞ This will reduce your heart rate to bring about a sense of calm. ☞



10. Supported Relaxation pose (Savasana)

Sit on the center of the mat and place a bolster on the mat behind you orientated the long way, a couple of inches from your tailbone and extending to the edge of the mat. Place a folded blanket over the far end of the bolster, then turn to face the opposite end of the mat with your feet out in front of you. Lean back onto your arms, lift the chest and place your torso evenly on the bolster with the blanket under your head for support. If you feel strain in the low back, remove the bolster and place the back flat on the floor with the blanket under your head, then move the bolster under your knees. Rest the arms on the floor with your palms facing up. Slightly separate your legs, about hip-width apart and relax your muscles so your feet tilt out to the sides on their own. Close your eyes. Let your entire body relax and be still. Remain in this pose for five to 10 minutes, breathing softly and without strain. To come out of the pose, bend your knees (remove the bolster if it was placed below your knees), place both feet on the floor, and roll to the right side and off the bolster. Use your left arm to push yourself up to a seated position. ■



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