

HOME PRACTICE: YOGA FOR THE CORE

This practice is intended to help you tune into and tune up your deep core muscles. You can do the Core Practice segment on its own or you can do a full practice that includes the warm up, sun salutations, and savasana. Always move through your pain-free range of motion. Your breath is your guide – if your breath feels forced or tight that is your body's signal to ease out of the pose until you can breath freely.

PREPARE

Take 3-5 minutes to focus on your breath. Sit comfortably, letting your shoulders relax and the skin of your face soften. Notice the natural rhythm of your breath. Become sensitive to the feel of the air in and out of your nostrils. Without trying to change or control your breathing, bring your awareness to the path of prana as it flows in and out of your body. See if you can simultaneously stay sensitive to the feel of your skin and the flow of your breath. Integrate the whole.

Disclaimer & Warning:

Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone and this or any exercise program may result in injury. Consult with your doctor before embarking on this or any other exercise program. The instruction and advice presented herein are in no way intended to be a substitute for medical counseling. Never force or strain. Jennifer Houghton disclaims any and all liability for injuries that may occur from and in connection with these exercises.

WARM UP

Seated Side stretches – take your left arm up and over the body as you stretch your right waist, hold for 3-5 breaths. Repeat on other side.

Seated Twist – hold 3-5 breaths, invite your abs over into the twist. Repeat twice on each side.

Seated Tailbone Roll – Start with small movements. Begin in Bound Angle Pose (soles of feet together, knees out to side) or sitting in a chair. Bring your awareness to your lower back. Inhale - Sit up tall, lengthening your lower back and pressing your sternum forward while the top of your pelvis rolls forward and your belly extends. Exhale - Contract your front body as you round out your back and roll your tailbone under and your chin comes down. Keep flowing through these two motions slowly and gently 5-7 times. For an excellent video of this movement, click on this link or type these exact characters into your browser: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Hglc8qFz-4 or go to www.youtube.com and search for *Kira Ryder tailbone*. Kira adds a squat and some other movements which are optional. Do not do the squat if you have knee problems.

Cat & Cow – 5 times each way

Slow Motion Puppy – while on all fours, shift torso from side to side to stretch the side waist, like a puppy wagging its tail. 5-6 times.

Childs Pose – 7 breaths

Come up to standing tall by rolling slowly up your spine with your knees bent.

SUN SALUTATIONS/VINYASA FLOW – Repeat sequence 3-5 times to warm the body. Hold each pose 3-5 breaths.

1) Mountain Pose – feet placed a comfortable distance apart. Stand tall and dignified. Let the shoulders relax. Sensitize to the feel of your breath and skin at the same time. Integrate. Pause and feel.

- 2) **Forward Fold** – exhale to slowly bend forward. Keep your knees bent at first. Feel your hips widen, lift your abdominals up away from your thighs.
- 3) **Plank Pose** – body in a straight line, either prop up on your toes or your knees. Hands on the floor with arms straight or forearms on the floor with elbows bent – either way keep your elbows below your shoulders. Without moving your back lift your belly up towards your spine. Avoid sagging through the hips.
- 4) **Lunge your left foot forward** – Left knee bent to 90 degrees, right leg straight, right knee off the floor, one hand on either side of left foot, fingertips on the floor.
- 5) **Drop your back knee** – pause and hold
- 6) **Crescent Lunge or take arms straight overhead** – (in Crescent Lunge there is a slight back bend in the top part of your back.) Lift your belly up away from your thighs. Lengthen your front body and feel the stretch in your hip flexors, quadriceps and belly. Relax your shoulders.
- 7) **Downward Dog**
- 8) **Lunge right foot forward** – Right knee bent to 90 degrees, left leg straight, left knee off the floor, one hand on either side of your right foot, fingertips on the floor.
- 9) **Drop your back knee** – pause and hold
- 10) **Crescent Lunge or take arms straight overhead**
- 11) **Forward Fold**
- 12) **Mountain Pose**

CORE PRACTICE

You can do all of these as your practice or you can just try a few to start. In between the exercises, take a resting pose of your choice and let the body and breath soften for a moment.

Finding your Transverse Abdominals (TA) – these are the deeper muscles that do the stabilizing work. Find your TA by putting two fingers on each frontal hipbone. Move your fingers one inch inwards towards navel. Slowly pull belly to the floor and release a few times – this is TA working. Practice relaxing your face, neck, shoulders and lower back while you contract your TA. This will build muscle memory – letting your abs do some more of the stabilizing work in your day-to-day activities instead of the muscles that chronically and unnecessarily contract as a result of tension. Practicing relaxing the face can be helpful in social situations☺.

Snakey Side Shifter – spread a blanket on a slippery floor. Lie on your back, knees bent into your chest, feet off the floor. Head rests on hands, hands stay on floor. Keep back, hips and shoulders ON the floor as you shift your body from side to side – lengthen your right waist while you contract your left waist. In other words, pull your right hip toward your right armpit, then your left hip towards your left armpit. This works the oblique abdominals – side abs. Shift from side to side 10-20 times.

Slow Motion Heel Slider – Lie on your back, hands relaxed by your sides, soles of feet on floor, knees bent and pointing up. Engage your TA the entire time. Focus on engaging the abdominal muscles in the triangular space that spans from your belly button

to your frontal hip bones down to your pubis. Either keep your spine neutral or slightly press your lower back into the floor. Relax your shoulders. Slowly straighten your left leg with your heel staying one inch off the floor. Keep the heel just barely off the floor the whole time you are extending and bending your knee. Slowly bring foot back to where it started while brushing the floor with your heel. Repeat on other leg. Keep abs engaged to prevent movement of pelvis. 10-20 reps. Pause and feel your breath.

Cannonball – (your body kind of looks like you are jumping off a diving board in cannonball position to make the biggest splash) Lie on your back, feet off the floor, knees into your chest. With your fingers pointing up, press the heels of your palms against your thighs close to the knees. Keep your elbows straight. Press your thighs against your hands while your hands press into your thighs. Keep pulling your belly into the floor. Hold for 5 breaths. Release and breathe. Repeat 3-5 times. If you like, you can do one session adding movement by letting your hands and legs “have an argument” – legs start to win as knees come closer to chest, hands start to win and press legs away from chest – this will have the feeling of arm wrestling.



Happy Baby Abs (Ananda Balasana) – Lie on your back, place your legs in “Happy Baby” position. Place your hands behind your head to support your head, lift hips, head, and shoulders off floor. Powerfully press your knees towards the earth while your tailbone lifts up and belly pulls to floor. Hold 5 breaths. Repeat 2-3 times.

Block Squeeze & Lift – Lie on back with legs together, lift legs to sky with block between thighs. Legs can be straight or slightly bent. Then hold your head in your hands and lift head, shoulder blades and hips off floor. Keep squeezing the block to you’re your inner thighs active. Exhale and draw your belly towards the floor as you lift hips and shoulders. Inhale as you let them down. Repeat as many lifts as you can.



Boat (Navasana) – sit on the floor, legs together, bend your knees to 90 degrees and lift your legs off the floor so that your shins are horizontal. Roll back so that you are sitting slightly behind your tailbone. Keep your back straight while the chest stays proud and belly pulls to spine. Avoid rounding your spine. You can either hold on to your legs behind your thighs or extend your arms straight out front or out to the side. Relax your neck and shoulders. Avoid rounding your spine. These photos are from YogaJournal.com: picture 1 is for beginners, picture 2 (yellow shirt) is advanced. Hold 3-5 breaths or longer if you can. Repeat 2-3 times.

Locust - lie on your belly, arms by your sides, legs long. Pull your belly button up to your spine and imagine scooping out the space between the floor and your belly. Lift

chest and legs off floor. Keep spine long. Avoid jamming or crunching into your lower back. Lengthen your legs and head away from each other. Hold 3-5 breaths. Lower down – pause and breathe into your lower back. Repeat 3-5 times. Take **Child's Pose** as long as you need – hold and wait for your breath.



Figure 4 Stretch
Hold Stretch 30 seconds
2-3 times, each leg

Figure 4 Abs – lie on your back, place your legs in the “Figure 4 stretch” position (see picture for leg position). Place your hands behind your head, and simultaneously lift hips, head and shoulder blades off floor – hold for a few breaths while you pull your belly to the floor. Repeat 3-5 times each side.

Side Plank – hold 3-7 breaths or longer if you can

Variations

- 1) Lie on your left side, bend your knees keeping your legs stacked on top of each other. Prop yourself up on your left elbow and the side of your left knee while you lift your hips off the floor to keep your body in a straight line. Pull your lower abs up towards the sky. Repeat on right.
- 2) Lie on your left side with your legs stacked on top of each other. Place the sole of your right foot on the floor in front of your left knee while you lift your hips off the floor and prop yourself up onto your left hand. Keep left arm straight. Keep left elbow and wrist directly under left shoulder. Keep your body in a straight line. Pull your lower abs up towards the sky. Repeat on right.
- 3) Lie on your left side with your legs stacked on top of each other. Place the inside edge of right foot on the floor slightly in front of your left foot. Lift your hips and prop yourself up onto your left hand. Keep left arm straight. Keep left elbow and wrist directly under left shoulder. Pull your lower abs up towards the sky. More advanced can take their right arm up to the sky and/or lift the right leg off the floor to look like a starfish. Repeat on other side.

COOL DOWN

Child's Pose

Reclining Spinal Twist – Lie on your back, bring your knees to your chest, drop both knees to one side, let hips come off floor, extend opposite arm on the floor. Hold as long as you like. Perform some “aaahhhhh” breaths – make the aaaahhhh sound as you exhale and relax your midsection. Relax the circumference of your ribcage. Repeat other side.

Rack Stretch – just like you're on a rack, aaaaahhhhhh. Let your belly puff out – soft and marshmallowy.

SAVASANA

10-15 minutes of reclining relaxation. Listen to music or guided relaxation or lie in silence being mindful of the state of your body, your breath, and the shape & quality of your energy.