

Healthy Living: Yoga for Kids

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Introduction

Yoga for children is increasing in popularity. Many different types of yoga exist, but all types of yoga combine breathing, controlled postures and mental focus to improve fitness and decrease stress.

Specific yoga exercises are referred to as poses. Poses are commonly grouped together and performed in a sequence. Incorporation of yoga poses or sequences into an exercise routine is generally referred to as the “practice” of yoga. The phrase “yoga practice” simply refers to one person’s experience of performing yoga.

Health Benefits

Practicing yoga can help improve flexibility, strengthen muscles and improve balance. Children need at least one hour of physical activity daily. Only about half of children are active at this level. Practicing yoga can help children incorporate more physical activity into each day. Healthy habits established in childhood are likely to endure into adulthood. The practice of yoga at young ages can help children develop life-long healthy habits that will be sustained long-term.

Research showing the behavioral benefits of yoga for children is limited, but some suggest that this type of exercise can improve children’s attention, relationships, self-esteem and listening skills. Studies suggest that yoga can improve symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity

disorder (ADHD) in children with this condition. Other studies suggest yoga may reduce anxiety and negative behaviors.

Yoga for Kids

Yoga is noncompetitive and individually focused. Children who lack interest in competitive team sports may enjoy yoga as a form of physical activity. There are no winners or losers and everyone participates. Yoga also has benefits for youth athletes, in that it helps with development of balance, coordination and focus. Yoga is inexpensive, requiring no special equipment, and can be performed nearly anywhere.

Practicing yoga with children should be different from yoga practice with adults. Instead of the quiet and calming yoga many adults enjoy, yoga for kids can be noisy and fun. Yoga poses do not have to be perfect. The purpose of kids’ yoga is to increase fitness, decrease stress and improve mental focus.

The routines outlined here provide simple exercises that can be performed in a variety of settings, including classrooms, camps and at home. Choose a few of the poses to relax and focus, or use all the poses for a longer session. Before trying the yoga poses, be sure to warm up with some light stretching. Stay in each pose for several breaths before transitioning to the next. Some poses, such as the Warrior series (I, II and III) work one side of the body. Be sure to perform the sequence of poses on both sides of the body.



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Sample Standing Pose Routine

The following ten standing yoga poses do not require sitting or lying on the floor. No yoga mat is needed!

Mountain Pose

1. Stand tall, feet hip-width apart, shoulders relaxed, chest lifted.
2. Flex your toes up to engage your legs.
3. You can either let your arms hang down at your sides or press your palms together at the chest.



Tree Pose

1. Stand in Mountain Pose.
2. With palms together at the chest, tuck one foot inside the opposite leg. Place your foot above or below, but not directly on, your knee.
3. Stretch your arms out like branches.
4. Bring your hands together above your head.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Warrior I

1. From Mountain Pose, take a big step forward with one foot into a high lunge position.
2. Press the heel of your back foot down into the floor.
3. Bring your hands to your thighs.
4. If your strength allows, sink into a Deep Lunge, making sure that the knee does not bend past the ankle as you reach both arms up to the sky.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Warrior II

1. From Mountain Pose, take a large step back with your left foot (or move from Warrior I into Warrior II by lowering arms).
2. Turn your left leg/foot out and the heel in. Keep your right leg and foot forward. Position the left leg and foot so that the arch of the left foot lines up with the heel of the right foot.
3. Raise your arms so your right arm is pointing in front of you and your left arm is pointing behind you, holding them parallel to the floor.
4. Turn your head to the right and bend your right knee. Try to bend your knee into a right angle so your thigh is almost parallel to the floor. Do not move the right knee forward past the ankle. If the knee moves past the ankle, walk the foot forward until the knee is directly over the ankle.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Warrior III

1. From Mountain Pose, take a step back with one foot so that your toes are resting lightly on the floor.
2. Hinge forward at the waist and raise your back leg off the floor. Try to make your torso and raised leg parallel to the floor.
3. Keep both legs as straight as possible.
4. Stretch your arms forward. To make the pose less challenging, stretch your arms out to the side like a "T", or bring the arms back and close to the body, with the hands at hip level.
5. Repeat on the other side.



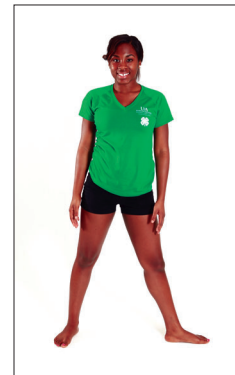
Rag Doll

1. From Mountain Pose, bend forward from the hips; be sure not to lock your knees.
2. Loosen your neck and let your neck, head and arms hang down.
3. Slowly straighten back up to standing.



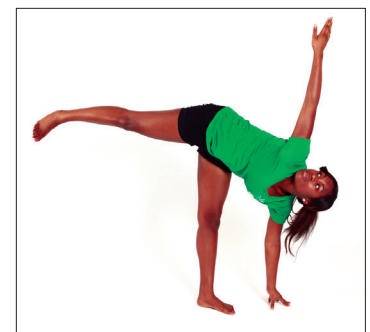
Triangle Pose

1. From Mountain Pose, take a big step back with your left foot into Warrior II.
2. Bend sideways at the waist, reaching your right hand toward your right ankle.
3. Raise your left hand toward the ceiling so that your arms form a straight line. Both palms should be facing forward.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Half Moon Pose

1. From Mountain Pose, shift your weight to your right leg.
2. Bend sideways at the waist and place your right hand on the floor next to your right foot.
3. Raise your left leg so that it is parallel to the floor and raise your left arm straight up so that your arms form a straight line.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Dancer Pose

1. Stand tall in Mountain Pose.
2. Reach behind you with your right hand and hold the top of your right foot.
3. Bend forward as you press your leg up and back. Try to get the upper part of your right leg parallel to the floor.
4. Arch your back as you lift and extend your arms and leg.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Frog Pose

1. Stand with your feet hip-width apart.
2. Balancing on your feet, squat to the ground. Place your palms on the floor between your feet.
3. You can press your knees out to the sides with your elbows to increase the stretch in your hips. Hold briefly.
4. Leap as high in the air as you can, like a frog. Repeat the position several times, seeing how high you can jump.



Sample Floor Pose Routine

This series of nine exercises requires getting on the floor. Use a mat or towel for cushion when performing these poses.

Tabletop

1. Come onto the floor on your hands and knees.
2. Make sure your hands are directly below your shoulders, your knees are directly below your hips and hip-width apart, and your back is flat.



Plank

1. Come onto the floor and get into Tabletop.
2. Walk both feet backwards until your body is parallel to the floor. Be sure to keep your hips down.
3. Your arms should be straight, with your hands directly below your shoulders.
4. Tighten your abdominal muscles to help keep your back from swaying.



Cobra*

1. Lay down on your stomach, face down with your hands placed under your shoulders.
2. Gently press your shoulders up and off the floor by lightly pushing your hands into the floor.
3. Bend your elbows and lower back to the starting position.

**For a more challenging pose, try Up Dog. From Cobra Pose, engage your core muscles, and push through the hands and tops of the feet to slightly lift the knees from the floor. Your legs should be parallel to the floor, raised just an inch or two.*



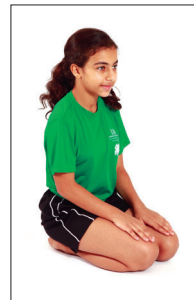
Down Dog

1. Come onto the floor into Tabletop.
2. Spread your palms and turn your toes under. Press your hips up into the air and back, and lift your knees away from the floor.
3. At first, keep your knees slightly bent and your heels lifted away from the floor.
4. Then stretch your legs straight and push your heels down toward the floor. Keep your arms strong. Straighten knees, but be sure not to lock them.
5. Keep your head between your upper arms; don't let it hang.
6. Jump or walk your feet toward your hands and roll up to standing position OR lower your body into Cobra Pose.



Hero Pose

1. Come onto the floor and stand on your knees.
2. Sit back on your heels and place your hands on your thighs.



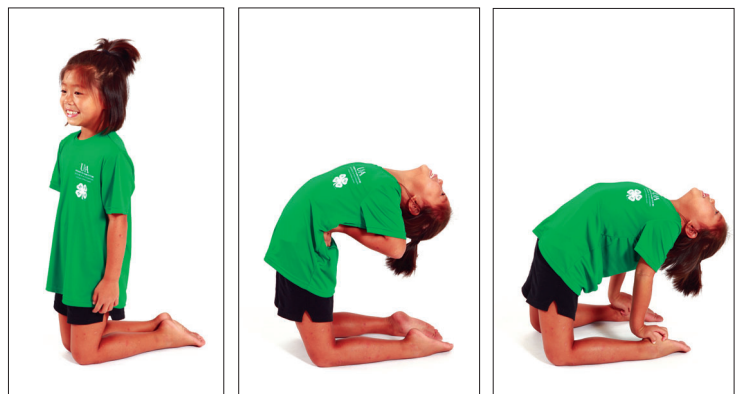
Extended Child's Pose

1. Sit on the floor in Hero.
2. Bend forward at the hips and fold forward, extending your arms in front of you with palms facing down.



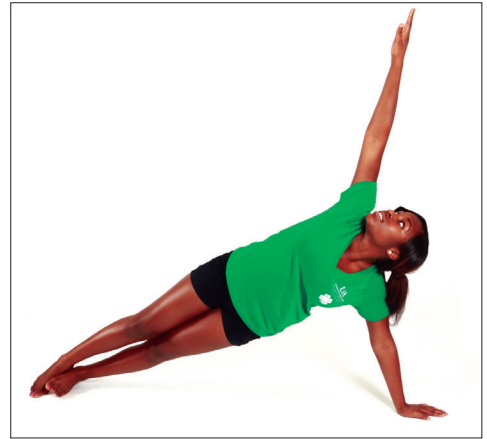
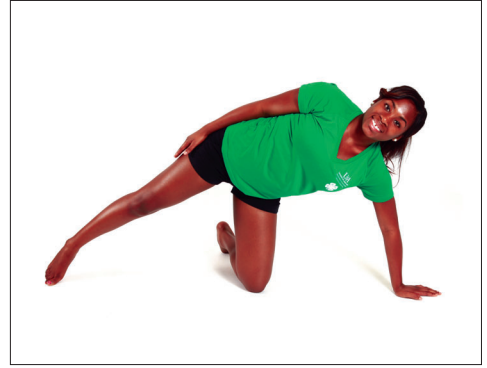
Camel Pose

1. Stand on your knees with your legs and knees hip-width apart.
2. Press the tops of your feet into the floor, push your thighs forward, bring your hands to your lower back and lift your chest.
3. Keep lifting your chest and bring your hands to your heels.
4. Let your head drop back into a comfortable position.



Side Plank

1. Stand on your knees.
2. Extend your left leg straight out to the left. Place your right hand under the right shoulder and stretch your left arm up toward the ceiling.
3. Press down into your hand and foot. Slide the right foot under the left.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Bridge

1. Start by lying on your back with your knees bent.
2. Place feet hip-width apart and press them into the floor.
3. Bring your elbows close to your sides and place the palms of your hands on the floor.
4. Raise your hips until your body is in a straight line from your knees to your shoulders, pressing down into your arms.
5. To lower, move your hands to your sides and slowly lower your back, starting from your chest and rolling down.



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