

YOGA

The following easy poses, which take about 15 minutes to perform, are considered the basic yoga exercises. What follows is a specific sequence that begins with toning and warming up the body. The set continues with seated and forward bends, standing postures, inverted poses, backbending postures, twists, and a resting pose. Each of the postures in this sequence has a specific therapeutic effect which will be explained after each posture. A sequence of postures is important because it first prepares the body in order to warm it up and remove stiffness. It progresses to invigorate, strengthen, and stretch the entire body. This is why it is valuable to practice in an orderly sequence. Perform the postures slowly, making sure you inhale and exhale, without holding the breath or controlling it in any way. Breathing should be easy, fluid, and continuous. Below are a few guidelines to follow before practicing:

- No pain gives the most gain. If you can't touch your toes without excruciating effort, do not push. Let the knees soften or bend freely.
- **Never strain or push the body in these exercises.** Hold the postures for a few seconds and then gently release them. Movements should be performed slowly and comfortably. Never move in and out of the postures abruptly or bounce up and down. Use the breath to gently facilitate the movement. You should not feel any pain at any point when doing these exercises.
- How far should you reach? In each pose, go to the point where you feel the stretch. Just move as far as you easily can without effort. Allow your awareness to naturally go to the area of the body that is being stretched. Don't overextend, force, or overstretch. Sometimes it helps to release or back off completely from the stretch, then easily stretch it again. *Don't forget to breathe!*
- If you do these exercises regularly, you'll notice increased flexibility. So it is not necessary to push the body to reach a desired goal. In fact, these postures are not designed to impose a specific structure on your body, and there is no "ideal" pose. Rather, your progress comes from the integrated functioning of awareness, movement, and breath.
- In each exercise, a particular area is stretched. Allow your awareness to naturally go to that area. The gentle release of accumulated stress is said to come from letting the attention be on the area of the stretch. For that reason, allow the exercises to have your full attention. Don't play the radio, television, or even soft music in the background. Just let the mind be aware of the body.
- Wear comfortable, loose clothing. Use a flat, nonslippery surface, but avoid performing these exercises on a bare floor. Rather, use a yoga mat, exercise mat, folded wool blanket, rug, or other semisoft surface.
- All of these postures need to be adapted to the needs of each individual. In certain situations such as acute illness, pregnancy, or specific structural problems, the posture may be adjusted or changed in order to be more effective and serve one's particular requirements. In any of these special cases, or if you are having difficulty with any of the postures, please check with a qualified yoga instructor who can help you. [Click here for the basic yoga routine.](#)