

Heart-Opening Yoga

The essence of yoga is the union of all the layers of life – physical, emotional, and spiritual. It is a practice for going beyond the illusion of separation. If we go deep enough, we realize that everything is interdependent and that we are all inter-beings who inter-arise in the inter-isness.

This sequence of heart-opening yoga poses will help you experience the bliss of union and enhance the flow of intelligence throughout your entire physiology.



1. Sky to Earth Pose

It is best to perform this pose in a standing position, but you may choose to do it from a seated position if necessary. Begin by bringing your palms and fingers together in “prayer” position, feeling your thumbs gently touching the area of your heart. Close your eyes and take several slow, deep

breaths.

Very gradually, begin moving both hands upwards. When they reach about forehead level, interlace your fingers while continuing to raise your hands over your head. When your arms are fully extended, rotate your wrists outward while your fingers remain entwined.

Continue extending with your arms, shoulders, and spine, arching up and backwards, feeling the stretch in your chest and abdomen. Look up at your interlaced fingers. If you feel you can maintain your balance, rise up onto your toes to complete the full extension.

While slowly exhaling, begin flexing your body as you fold forward, bringing your arms down and relaxing your neck. Gradually collapse through your upper, middle, and lower back, walking your hands down your thighs, moving your outstretched hands towards your feet. It is not important whether or not you can touch your feet.

When you have flexed forward as far as you can, close your eyes and relax into this position, slowly inhaling and exhaling for several breaths. With each outflow of your breath, soften through your neck, back, shoulders, and hips.

As you inhale, gently raise yourself upright, again lifting both arms over your head, stretching as far upwards as you comfortably can. Again, rise up onto your toes if you feel you can maintain your balance. Complete the pose by slowly returning your hands to the level of your heart.



2. Swaying Palm Pose

Begin this second posture in the same manner as the Sky to Earthpose, with both of your hands together at the level of your heart. Again stretch upwards until you are fully extended. Slowly begin to arch your body to the left, stretching through your arms, shoulder, side, and hip. Hold the arch, breathing into the stretch with slow, deep breaths, lengthening with each exhalation.

Slowly return to an upright position, and then gradually arch your body to the right, stretching through your left shoulder, side, and hip. Inhale and exhale, gently lengthening your stretch with each outflow of your breath. Slowly return to an upright position and then slowly lower your arms.



3. Pelvis-Opening Pose

This next pose enlivens awareness in the body's second energy center or chakra. This site is classically associated with primitive emotions, sexuality, and creativity. Because of the powerful messages many young girls often receive about "keeping their legs together," this pose can sometimes awaken strong feelings and images. Perform it in a safe setting where you can explore the emotions and pieces of information that emerge.

Lying on your back, place both hands over your heart. Bring your knees up so the soles of your feet are on the floor. Now slowly lower your knees toward the floor, opening at your hips. Open to the point where you feel tension, then gently pull your ankles towards your groin. Breathe deeply into your pelvic region while maintaining your awareness in your hips. Without straining, relax and release with each exhalation.

Repeat this process several times, gently releasing further with each opening. Then, slowly extend your knees and rest on your back.



4. Pelvic Lift Pose

Lying on your back, bend your knees and plant your feet on the floor. Reach with outstretched arms towards your feet, holding your ankles with your hands. If you cannot reach your ankles, place your palms on the floor with your fingers pointing towards your heels. Keeping the back of your head on the floor, lift your pelvis up in the air, stretching through your chest and abdomen. Take several slow, deep breaths in and out through your nose.

Slowly lower your bottom to the floor and then repeat the movement, lifting up your hips while stretching through your midsection. After several more slow deep breaths, lower yourself to the floor and extend your legs.



5. Cobra Pose

Lying on your stomach, place your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Predominantly using your back muscles, lift your chest off the floor. Use your hands to provide support while you inhale. Stretch and extend through your neck, even raising your eyes upwards as if trying to see the top of your head. Take several slow, deep breaths, then gradually lower your chest to the floor. Repeat this pose several times.



6. Open Twist Pose

Lying on your back, stretch out both arms to your sides at right angles to your body. Bend your left knee and bring your left foot over your right leg, placing it on the floor next to your right knee. While your lower spine and pelvis are twisting to the right, turn your head and neck to the left, feeling the stretch through your spine. Take several slow breaths, releasing further

into the pose with each exhalation.

Return to midline, with both legs on the floor. Then, bending your right knee, place your right foot across your left leg next to your left knee. While rotating your lower body to the left, turn your head to the right, again feeling the stretch throughout the spine while taking slow, deep breaths. Return to resting position with both legs extended on the floor.



7. Child's Pose

This final pose promotes safety and centering in preparation for inner exploration. Beginning on your belly, bring your knees up with your legs and ankles together. Leaning forward, slowly flex at the waist until your chest is resting on your thighs and your forehead is on the floor.

Stretch your arms over your head in front of you and take several slow, deep breaths. Then bring your arms back towards your ankles until they are resting alongside your legs. Feel the movement of your chest on your knees as you slowly inhale and exhale with awareness. Remain in this position for several minutes, noticing your thoughts and sensations.

Here is how to perform ujjayi breath:

- Take an inhalation that is slightly deeper than normal. With your mouth closed, exhale through your nose while constricting your throat muscles. If you are doing this correctly, you should sound like Darth Vader from the movie Star Wars.
- Another way to get the hang of this practice is to try exhaling the sound

“haaaaah” with your mouth open. Now make a similar sound with your mouth closed, feeling the outflow of air through your nasal passages. Once you have mastered this on the outflow, use the same method for the inflow breath, gently constricting your throat as you inhale.

Each day this week, practice ujjayi breath for a few minutes each morning, and whenever you find yourself becoming aggravated or stressed. Ujjayi has a balancing influence on the entire cardiorespiratory system, and you should notice a prompt soothing effect.

Take some time to follow your breath, and you will be amazed where it will take you. The breathing room you were looking for was inside of you all along!