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**THE
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OF ASHTANGA**

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THE BENEFITS OF *Ashtanga Yoga* POSTURE PRACTICE

Ashtanga yoga is a style of yoga asana practice, which was taught by Sri K Pattabhi Jois in Mysore, India. Ashtanga yoga is a vinyasa based yoga posture practice. Vinyasa or 'breath initiated movements' connect one posture to the next. Ashtanga yoga consists of a primary, intermediate and advanced series of yoga postures. Each series begins with two types of Sun Salutations, which are practised five times each. The Sun Salutations are followed by a sequence of standing postures. Then the postures unique to each series are practised.



The Ashtanga yoga practice is completed with Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Facing Bow posture) and the finishing sequence, which includes Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand), Matsyasana (Fish posture), Sirsasana (Headstand), Padmasana (Lotus posture) and Shavasana (Corpse posture). Ashtanga yoga also includes a pranayama sequence, which is taught after the practice of the primary, intermediate and advanced series are mastered. Beginners to Ashtanga yoga start with the practice of the primary series.

Sri K Pattabhi Jois was a student of Sri Krishnamacharya, who was a student of Guru Rama Mohan Brahmachari. T Krishnamacharya travelled to Tibet in his youth and learned hundreds of yoga postures from Guru Rama Mohan. Krishnamacharya returned to South India and taught yoga in Mysore to Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar, Indra Devi and others.

The Ashtanga vinyasa method and sequence of postures are outlined in an ancient text, called the 'Yoga Korunta'. In the Yoga Korunta it is advised not to practise asana without vinyasa.


The practice of vinyasa heats up the body, improves blood circulation and induces deep breathing. Vinyasa increases the effectiveness of Ashtanga yoga and reduces the chance of injury.

Ashtanga vinyasa yoga is a dynamic style of yoga posture practice which quickly builds strength, increases flexibility and improves cardiovascular fitness. Ashtanga yoga is to be practised 5 or 6 days a week. Practice is suspended on Saturdays and on the full moon and new moon days each month.

For women, three additional rest days are taken for ladies' holiday during menstruation. Pattabhi Jois also advised women not to practise during the first trimester of pregnancy and three months postpartum.

The Ashtanga yoga sequences are a pathway into the practice of hundreds of yoga postures. T Krishnamacharya advised to begin yoga posture practice with forward bends. The primary series of Ashtanga yoga focuses on forward bends and seated postures. Practitioners of the primary series can look forward to a comfortable Padmasana (Lotus posture), a deep forward bend and reaching the legs behind the head. The primary series includes over 70 yoga postures. The primary series is known as 'yoga chikitsa' or 'yoga therapy' and is said to eliminate disease from the body. The postures of the primary series are mastered, by practising for regularly for several years. Then the postures of the intermediate series are added one at a time.





The intermediate series, known as 'nadi shodhana', purification of the nadies, is an energising practice. The intermediate series, includes a sequence of backbends, inverted postures as well as arm balances. The backbends includes Ustrasana (Camel posture), Dhanurasana (Bow posture) and Kapotasana (Pigeon pose). After practising the intermediate series for several years, Ashtanga yoga practitioners continue by beginning the advanced series of yoga postures.

The advanced series are known as 'sthira bhaga', stabilising radiance. The advanced series include backbends, twists, inversions, arm balances and a variety of seated postures. Ashtanga yoga is a wonderful style of yoga posture practice, which is a gateway into the practice of hundreds of yoga postures.

Ustrasana (CAMEL POSTURE)

Ustrasana is a back bending yoga posture in the second series of Ashtanga yoga. The posture is entered from the Downward Facing Dog posture, by hopping forward between the hands onto the knees. Place the hands on the hips and inhale and lift the ribcage. Exhaling drop the shoulders back, arch the spine back and place the palms of the hands onto the bottoms of the feet, with the fingertips pointing in the direction of the toes. Reach the chin up and back and practise Brumadya dristi, by looking up into the forehead. Breathe deeply in Ustrasana for 5 to 10 breaths. Then inhaling reach the ribcage forward and up, raising the head last. Hop back into Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff posture). Inhale into Urdhva Mukha Shvanasana (Upward Facing Dog pose) and exhale into Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward Facing Dog pose). Enjoy the Camel posture!



Pashasana

(NOOSE POSTURE)

Pashasana is the first posture of the intermediate series of Ashtanga yoga. Pashasana is a wonderful posture, but requires open hips and flexibility in the spine and shoulders. The practice of the postures of the primary series, prepare the practitioner of Ashtanga yoga for pashasana. Enter Pashasana by hopping forward between the hands from Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward Facing Dog pose). Place the feet close together. Twist to the left and reach the right arm around the bent knees. Reach the right arm behind the body and clasp the hands. Then rotate the head to the left and look to the left. Breathe deeply for five deep breaths. Then practise pashasana by twisting to the right. Enjoy Pashasana!

Krounchasana

(HERON POSTURE)

Krounchasana is the second posture of the intermediate series of Ashtanga yoga. The practice of Krounchasana necessitates a deep forward bend as well as open hips. The primary series of Ashtanga yoga, prepares the yoga practitioner for the practice of Krounchasana. Krounchasana is entered from Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward Facing Dog posture). Hop forward between the hands into the posture, with the left leg bent and the left toes pointing back, next to the left hip. Keeping the right leg straight and raise the leg up. Raise the arms and clasp the left wrist with the right hand around the sole of the right foot. Point the right toes. Inhale, lift the chest to straighten the spine. Exhale raise the leg until it is perpendicular to the floor and draw the chest into the leg with the arms. Place the chin on the shin. Remain in Krounchasana for five deep breaths. Then place the hands on the floor next to the hips and exhaling hop back into Chaturanga Dandasana, four limbed staff posture. Inhale urdhva mukha shvanasana, upward facing dog posture. Exhale adho mukha shvanasana, downward facing dog posture. Then practice krounchasana on the left side. Enjoy the Heron pose!

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PHOTOS BY NINA WESSEL

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