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Yoga Solutions for Personal Trainers

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What is yoga? Should we do yoga with our clients? How do we learn yoga movements? What poses should we choose, and why? How should we introduce yoga into workouts? These questions, and many others, are on the minds of personal trainers wishing to bring this 5,000-year-old practice to their profession.

What is Yoga?

Hatha (pronounced ha-*tah*) yoga is the 'physical fitness' part of the yogic path, or lifestyle. Anytime you are doing yoga poses or asana (*ah-sana*), you are doing hatha yoga. For the purposes of this article, any reference to yoga will mean hatha yoga, or yoga poses.

Should I do Yoga with my Clients?

Yes. The benefits of yoga are probably not unfamiliar to you:

- Increased body awareness
- Decreased stress-related hormones
- Increased lymphatic system drainage
- Increased muscle tone
- Decreased joint stiffness
- Increased flexibility
- Increased sense of well-being
- Better sleep... and the list goes on

Not only is yoga beneficial, but it is also gaining popularity! According to the Superstudy® of Sports Participation conducted by American Sports Data, Inc. (ASD), since 1998 yoga has been in the top four growth activities in the US. While participation in simple 'stretching' by club members' (on their own, in classes or with their trainers) has increased by 9% over a four-year period from 1998-2002, ASD tells us *participation in yoga is up by a whopping 95%!*

Personal Training and Yoga

Personal training is an ideal vehicle to deliver yoga. Being a yoga teacher and personal trainer, as well as having many years in the group exercise arena, I know that being able to work one-on-one with someone as they learn something new or improve their abilities in an existing practice, is a win/win for both parties.

Job satisfaction is very important, but the news gets better! Making a comfortable living as a fitness professional is a goal many of us have. One of the best ways you can ensure that your talents are in demand is to stay current with your knowledge and skill set.

“The bottom line is: you are more marketable if you can include yoga as an area of skill on your brochure, résumé, or business card...”

Learning Yoga Movements

If you are not among the many fitness professionals who already practice yoga, there are numerous workshops, books, videos and web sites available to help you learn some basic skills. Contrary to what you may assume, basic yoga is easy to learn and teach if you already teach movement skills (which we all do as trainers)! A few basic poses can fit well into a traditional workout session and have excellent value and purpose!



1. Mountain Pose

The Mountain Pose is ideal for developing:

- Mental focus
- Postural Alignment Awareness/Correction
- Mindful Breathing
- Rest

From a standing position, balance your weight evenly across both feet. Draw the kneecaps upward while keeping the pelvis in neutral alignment. Make sure the rib cage is relaxed and not pushing forward as the shoulders ease down away from the ears.

Arms are positioned at the sides with the palms forward, and the ears are back, over the shoulders. Have your client hold this pose for a couple of breaths or a couple of minutes, depending on your goals.

2. Warrior II Pose

Benefits from this pose include:

- Leg strength
- Hip flexibility
- Core strength
- Balance
- Concentration

In a wide stance, point the right foot forward. Keeping the pelvis neutral and level with the floor, reach out with both arms parallel to the ground. Ears are back and in line with the spine. Have clients keep their front knee over the front ankle, and tracking in line with the second and third toe of their front foot. Beginners will probably not be able to hold this pose for long periods. Keeping the feet a bit closer together can make this pose less challenging.



3. Forearm Plank Pose

This pose is suitable for the development of:

- Core strength
- Arm strength
- Quad strength
- Shoulder stabilization
- Postural alignment

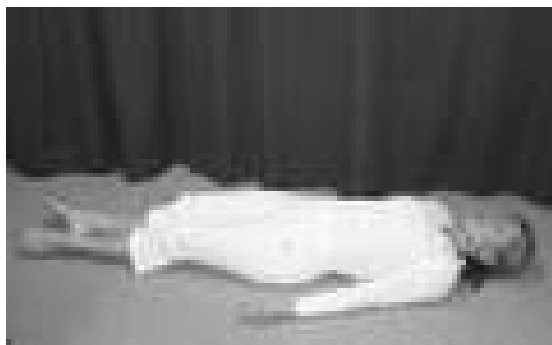
From a forearm prone position, with shoulders over the elbows, stretch the heels back while reaching the crown of the head forward. Engage the 'core' musculature of the abs and back, along with the quadriceps muscles of the legs. Make sure there is no sagging (like a hammock) and no 'Harbor Bridge' positioning with the tailbone up in the air! Hold for a few breaths, or to make this pose more challenging, do a series of 'push ups' while holding straight alignment. For less work, the client can keep the knees on the floor. To make the pose more difficult, have the client do the pose on their **hands and toes instead of forearms and toes**.

4. Bridge pose

This pose is ideal for enhancing:

- Core/back strength
- Hamstring/gluteal strength
- Shoulder flexibility
- Hip stabilization

Once in a supine position on the floor, bend the knees, placing the feet about hip-width apart with the heels about 15 to 25 centimeters from the hips. Bringing the arms down to the sides, raise the hips upward as far as they can comfortably move. Be sure to keep the cervical spine (neck area) from pressing completely flat. Make sure the knees are staying over the ankles, and the shoulders are away from the ears. Keep the breath smooth while holding the pose for several breaths. This pose is also done dynamically, by moving the hips up and down slowly with the breath.



5. Relaxation pose

The relaxation pose is useful for:

- Rest
- Visualization
- Relaxation/stress relief
- Mindful breathing

This is everyone's favorite yoga pose! Have the client relax and remain very still. Let the arms and legs become heavy, the chest, belly, and throat soften and the eyes gently close. Allow

the client to stay here as long as time will permit, or as long as they can tolerate without becoming restless. The knees can be bent in this pose to ease tension in the lower back.

Generally Speaking...

Aimed at the general population, these poses can work effectively when performed all at once; separately throughout the workout; at the beginning (after the initial warm up); or end of a session. Alternatively, you may add five to ten additional poses to comprise an entire yoga workout.