



Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups

By Nancy Wile, Ed.D. (E-RYT 500)

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

The Importance of Doing Warm-Ups

You have a busy day, but want to spend sometime practicing yoga. Wait. Before you jump right into practicing your yoga postures, spend a few minutes to warm up your muscles.

Warm ups are valuable because they reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during a yoga practice by increasing circulation and loosening up the major muscle groups. Warm-ups prepare our bodies for the stress of activity. They help prevent or reduce muscle soreness, muscle strains, and the tearing of muscle fibers or tendons. It's important to warm up each major muscle group before beginning a yoga practice, since you use all your major muscle groups in a well-conceived yoga program.

Warm-ups get the muscles ready for the action by increasing the speed at which they contract and relax and by mobilizing a greater number of motor units within the muscles. Warming up the body raises the body temperature which improves the oxygen supply to the muscles, making muscles more elastic and flexible.

Warm-ups are low level dynamic exercises, which should be completed prior to stretching and more strenuous exercise. The objective of the warm-up is to raise total body temperature and muscle temperature to prepare the entire body for more strenuous activity. The warm-up period prepares the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, nervous system and the musculoskeletal system by gradually increasing the demand on those systems so that they are able to accommodate the demands of more strenuous activity.

Experts agree that the main purpose of a warm-up is to increase the blood circulation in order to raise both the general body and the deep muscle temperatures. This in turn helps to heat up the muscles, ligaments and tendons in preparation for more vigorous activity. A proper warm-up provides many benefits due to the elevated temperatures associated with it. After warming up, the likelihood of injury is reduced, muscle efficiency is increased, the potential for muscle pulls is reduced and ease of movement improves. Proper warm-ups can also help reduce the severity of post-exercise muscle soreness. The higher temperatures and increased blood flow resulting from warm-up are important for delivery of oxygen to the muscles and for prevention of build-up of unwanted waste products which can lead to muscle soreness.

Besides preparing you physically for yoga, warm-ups can also help you prepare mentally for your yoga practice. To get the mental benefits of warm-ups, first start by taking a few moments to focus on your breath, breathing slowly and deeply through your nose. Then, begin your warm-up exercises, focusing on your breath and on your movements and connecting the two together. Done with mindful awareness, warm-up exercises provide you with rhythmic movements that helps to focus your attention on your body and your breath, letting go of the thoughts or concerns from your daily life. It helps you shift gears and bring your thoughts more fully to your yoga practice. The illustrated warm-up exercises in this section explain in detail how to breathe with your movements.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Warm-ups improve range of motion, so you can more easily move your arms and legs into proper position for yoga postures. If muscles are cold, they won't work as efficiently and move into place as easily, as they will if they are warm. Warm joints are more mobile and have greater range of motion. Joints are held together by ligaments and tendons. Ligaments in particular have very poor blood supply compared to muscles, so they are difficult to warm up. Muscles can help take the strain off the ligaments and tendons - but only if they are warmed up sufficiently.

In yoga, since we want to work and stretch all major muscle groups, it is important to include specific warm-up exercises that involve each part of the body. Also, once you are warmed up, it is important to begin a major activity while still warmed-up, so you reap the benefits of warm muscles.

The Difference Between Warm-Ups and Stretching

There is an important difference between warm-up and stretching. Many people stretch and call it warm-up. This is incorrect. Unlike stretching, in warm-ups the position is not held. Students flow from one gentle movement to the next in order to increase circulation and gently warm the muscles. It is important to warm-up before beginning a yoga practice and to practice most of the deep stretching positions towards the middle or end of the practice when your body is most warm. Stretching (in yoga and otherwise) is a static activity in which the position is held for a period of time. In yoga, stretching also involves focusing on the breath and using the breath to help you go more deeply into the stretch. If you stretch your muscles without prior warm-up, the muscles are cold and are more prone to injury, such as muscle tear or strain. Before yoga, begin with a warm-up period to raise the body temperature and loosen muscles in every major muscle group.

Warm-ups are valuable in two important ways. First, postures are more easily attained when the joints have been loosened and the muscles warmed by stretching and by the increased circulation of blood. Secondly, warm-ups reduce the risk of pulling a muscle or injuring a joint during the main practice. They also reduce the likelihood of stiffness in the muscles and joints following a yoga session.

Try all of the warm-ups listed in the following pages. Then determine your own head-to-toe warm up plan.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Warm-Up Exercises

Stretching Breaths



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Ankles
- Torso

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position) with legs extended
- Place hands on floor next to sides with palms down
- Inhale, reach arms overhead (palms up) and flex feet
- Exhale, press hands back down next to sides (palms down) and point toes
- Continue moving arms and feet back and forth, moving with your breath
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their abdominal muscles engaged, so the back doesn't become overly arched as the arms are stretched overhead. Encourage students to focus on stretching long, stretching as far as they can in two opposite directions. Have students flex their feet as their arms come overhead, then point their toes as their arms come back to their sides. This helps to warm-up the ankles and legs as well as the arms and shoulders.

Instruct students to connect their breath with their movement by inhaling until their arms are all the way overhead and exhaling until their arms are at their sides. Encourage them to focus completely on their breath and the movement, letting go of any other thoughts.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Bridge Flow



Warms Up:

- Thighs
- Hips
- Back
- Shoulders

Steps:

- Begin lying on back with hands at sides, palms down, and knees bent, feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel.
- Inhale, press down with arms and feet and lift hips up towards the ceiling
- Exhale, slowly roll back down, bringing hips back to the floor.
- Repeat 5-8 times, moving with the breath

Variation:

As you inhale, raise your arms overhead as you lift your hips up

Exhale, bring your arms back to your sides as you roll your hips back to the floor

Teaching Points:

Have students to slightly tuck their tailbone as they lift their hips, so they can better feel each vertebrae press down and lift up from the floor as they roll up and down. Remind students to connect their breath with the movement (inhaling on lift and exhaling as they roll down). This helps to slow down the movement and helps students to move with more body awareness, bringing their focus to what they are doing.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Windshield Wipers



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Quadriceps
- Low back

Steps:

- Start lying on back with knees bent and feet on floor, a little wider than hip width apart.
- Place arms out in T position with palms down
- Drop knees to the right, back to center, then to the left and back to center
- Repeat 8-10 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their feet a little wider than hip width apart. This helps to better warm up the hip flexor muscles as well as the low back. Check that students are keeping their back flat on the floor, so that spinal rotation is achieved, rather than simply leaning onto one side of the body and then the other.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Knees to Chest



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Low Back

Steps:

- From supine (back lying) position, bring knees to chest
- Place hands just below knees and hug knees into chest
- Rock side to side, catching self with elbows
- Feel massage across sacrum

Knee Circles

Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs, Knees
- Low Back

Steps:

- From knees to chest, place hands on knee caps (right hand on right knee cap and left hand on left knee cap)
- Begin making opposing circles with knees by drawing knees to chest, then apart, then pressing knees away and back together.
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way
- Then, make opposing knee circles in the opposite direction (starting with knees together at chest, then pressing knees away, then apart, then back towards chest and together)
- Make 5-8 knee circles this way

Variation:

Knee Circles with Knees Together:

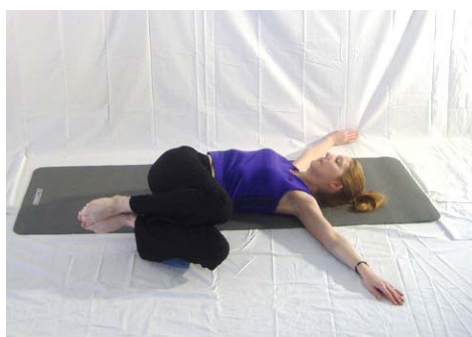
Knee circles can also be practiced by keeping knees together. First create circles with knees in a clockwise direction, then in a counter clockwise direction.

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep the movement smooth and easy (not going to fast or jerky). Remind students to focus on their breath, keeping it long and relaxed.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Knees side to side



Warms Up:

- Spine
- Back
- Hips
- Abdomen

Steps:

- Start lying on back
- Bring knees to chest
- Place arms out in T position with palms down
- Drop knees to right, back to center, then to the left and back to center

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to keep both shoulder blades on the floor, rather than rolling onto their side as they drop their knees to the side. This helps to warm up many of the deep spinal muscles and some of the anterior torso muscles (especially obliques).

Variation:



Feet can be lifted higher and knees pressed slightly away from chest before dropping knees side to side. This will place more demand on obliques and abdominal muscles, so make sure that this variation is not the first warm-up of the set.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Leg Pumps



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Hamstring Muscles
- Abdominal Muscles

Steps:

- Lie on back
- Bring right knee to chest and extend left leg on floor (head is relaxed on the floor)
- Switch legs, bringing left knee to chest and extending right leg on floor
- Repeat 6-10 times
- Students can keep head and shoulders on floor, or lift head and shoulders to engage abdominal muscles

Variation:

Students can also do this warm-up with their head and neck lifted. This places more work on the abdominal muscles, so it's best to start with the head and neck relaxed.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to start with head and neck relaxed and to raise the head only when they are ready. Remind students to connect their breath with their movement (inhale, right knee in to chest, exhale, switching sides). This helps students move with more awareness, as they must focus on what they are doing to connect breath with movement.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Rock and Roll



Warms Up:

- Back
- Neck
- Spine
- Legs

Steps:

- Begin lying on back
- Bring knees to chest with hands under thighs and tuck chin to chest
- Begin rocking back and forth, bending knees as you come forward and straightening legs as you roll back
- Exhale as you rock back and inhale as you come forward
- Continue rolling back and forth for 6-10 times
- Come all the way up to sitting

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students may find this exercise uncomfortable on their back, especially if they are only using a thin mat on a hard wood floor. Encourage students to go slow, only rocking a few inches back and forth to start and to pay close attention to the feeling of the exercise, so they can rock a little further, as they become more comfortable with the exercise. As they go further, they can begin connecting their breath with their movement, exhaling as they rock back and inhaling as they come forward.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Neck Stretches



Warms Up:

- Neck
- Upper Back

Steps:

- Start in seated position (cross legged)
- Sit up tall, reaching up through the top of the head
- Draw shoulders back
- Exhale, drop chin towards chest, keeping elbows and shoulders pulled back
- Inhale, raise the head back to center
- Do this five times, then on the last exhale, drop the chin and stay in this position for three breaths, breathing through the nose
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Exhale, slowly drop right ear towards right shoulder
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Do this five times, then on the last exhale, drop the ear towards the right shoulder and stay in this position for 3 breaths
- Inhale, raise head back to center
- Repeat on left side

Teaching Points:

Never have students do neck circles. The neck is not a ball and socket joint and is not meant to move around in circles. Half circles in the front can be done instead. To do this, drop the chin to the chest then move the chin towards the right shoulder, then back to the chest, then move the chin towards the left shoulder and back towards the chest. Repeat this movement three to five times.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Seated flowing twist



Warms Up:

- Muscles that rotate the spine
- Abdominals and muscles of low back
- Shoulders and upper back
- Neck

Steps:

- Start sitting in a cross legged position with hands on knees
- Exhale, turn looking over right shoulder, bringing left hand to right knee
- Inhale back to center
- Exhale, turn looking over left shoulder, bringing right hand to left knee
- Continue turning from side to side, moving with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep their arms and shoulders relaxed and loose, so they can more easily flow from side to side. Remind students to rotate through their entire spine by not just turning their back, but also looking over the shoulder, stretching through the neck.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Seated arms side to side



Warms Up:

- Sides of body/torso
- Shoulders and upper back
- Arms

Steps:

- Start sitting in a cross legged position with hands on knees
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop your left hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the left with right hand
- Inhale, reach both arms overhead
- Exhale, drop right hand to the floor, as you reach up and to the right with your left hand
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching both arms overhead
- Continue moving from the center to one side then back to center and to the other side
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to stretch both arms up overhead as they inhale before dropping to the other side and not to simply move back and forth from one side to the other.

Some students with limited hip flexibility may find it uncomfortable sitting in a cross legged position. Have these students sit on a block or rolled blanket, with their sitting bones on the block/rolled blanket and their legs on the floor. Raising the hips while the legs remain crossed on the floor requires less hip flexibility than sitting on the floor with legs crossed. Eventually students can reduce the height of the prop (block/rolled blanket) and then eliminate it completely.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Chest and Shoulder Stretch



Warms Up:

- Muscles of the shoulder girdle (shoulder joints, shoulder blades)
- Chest
- Upper back
- Arms
- Neck

Steps:

- Start sitting cross legged or with legs out in front of you
- Inhale, bring arms back, keeping arms lower than shoulder height and look up
- Exhale, clasp hands in front of chest at shoulder height and tuck chin to chest
- Continue bringing arms forward and back (horizontal adduction and horizontal abduction)
- Repeat 6-9 times

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to drop their head and round their back as much as possible as they clasp their hands in front of their chest, and to look up, letting their head fall back, as they bring their arms back. This helps to warm up the neck and upper back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Seated Swaying Palm Tree



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Wrists
- Sides of the body

Steps:

- Start sitting in cross legged position
- Inhale, reach arms overhead and interlace fingers
- Turn palms away and up towards the ceiling
- Inhale, stretch up through your palms, keeping your shoulders relaxed
- Exhale, reach your palms to the side
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching straight up
- Exhale, reach your palms to the other side
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching straight up
- Continue this pattern of movement, moving to the side and back to center
- Repeat 5-8 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Students often have a tendency to hunch their shoulders in this warm-up. Instruct students to press down through their shoulder blades as they reach up through the palms of their hands.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Worshipper



Warms Up:

- Breathing (lungs)
- Shoulders
- Upper Back
- Neck
- Chest
- Wrists

Steps:

- From chest and shoulder stretch exercise, bring hands behind back with fingers pointing back
- Inhale, lift up through chest and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Exhale, allow head to fall back
- Continue breathing deeply through nose and squeezing shoulder blades together for 4-5 breaths

Variation:

From Sun Worshipper, on inhale, lift hips up to open chest more, on exhale lower hips back to floor. Continue lifting hips with each inhale and lowering with each exhale. Repeat 5-6 times.

Teaching Points:

For people who have trouble with their neck, instruct them to look forward, but to keep lifting up through their chest and squeeze their shoulder blades together.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Spinal Flexes



Warms Up:

- Back
- Abdomen
- Entire Spinal Column

Steps:

- Start on all fours with knees about hip width apart and hands about shoulder width apart
- Check that wrists are placed directly under shoulders and knees are directly under hips
- On exhale, round your back, lifting up through abdomen and tuck chin to chest
- Inhale, drop belly, look up and draw shoulders back
- Repeat 6-8 times

Variation:

Students can also do this warm-up by creating the movement from the head to the tail and then from the tail to the head. To do this, as students exhale, have them first drop their head, then round the upper back, then bring that rounding motion through the entire back, and finally tuck and squeeze in their tailbone. As they inhale, have them first release their tailbone and drop their hips, then drop their belly, lift their chest, draw their shoulders back and finally raise their head. This creates a wave of motion and a flow to the warm-up.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to really stretch through their back by having them imagine they are trying to reach the ceiling with their back as they round it. As students look up and arch their backs, remind them to draw their shoulders back and squeeze their shoulder blades together, so they can better warm up the muscles of their chest and upper back.

Students should do their best to slow down their breath and move with their breath. This helps to bring their focus to the movement and to bring the movement to every part of their back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Spinal Balance Flow



Warms Up:

- Back and Spine
- Hips and Legs
- Arms and Shoulders

Steps:

- Start on all fours with wrists directly under shoulders and knees about hip width apart
- Look towards floor, keeping neck long
- Inhale, extend right arm and left leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Inhale, extend left arm and right leg out
- Exhale, back to all fours
- Continue extending opposite arm and leg, 4-7 times on each side
- Keep extended arm and leg parallel to the floor, lengthening through the spine (not arching)
- After completing the flowing spinal balance, students can also hold the pose, breathing softly for 3-4 breaths while extending opposite arm and leg.

Teaching Points:

Students often raise their leg too high when extending it and arch their back. Remind students to stretch long and lengthen the spine, rather than kicking up. Also encourage students to breathe slowly and really move with their breath, so they can fully feel the extension of their spine and notice if they begin to arch through their back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Cross Foot Behind



Warms Up:

- Low Back
- Hips
- Legs
- Sides of the body

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Inhale, extend right leg back (parallel to the floor)
- Exhale, cross right leg over left leg and look over left shoulder towards right foot
- Inhale, extend right leg straight back again (parallel over the floor)
- Exhale, cross right leg over left leg and look over left shoulder towards right foot
- Repeat 4-6 times
- Change sides and repeat with left leg 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

When students cross their foot over the other leg, encourage them to press their hips to the other side. This helps to increase the stretch along the sides of the body.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Extended Child's Pose



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Hips
- Back
- Knees

Steps:

- From all fours, sit back on heels, drop belly towards thighs and head towards mat
- Place forehead on floor
- Keep arms extended, stretching hands forward
- Breathe into back, feeling back stretch and expand on inhale and relax on exhale

Teaching Points:

Some students, especially heavier students, may find it becomes more difficult to breathe with their belly pressed against their thighs. Have these students spread their knees apart, making more room for their belly.

Variation:

Tuck chin to chest more, bringing top of head towards floor. This will help to better stretch the neck and upper back.

Instead of breathing into the back, breathe into your belly, feeling it press against your thighs as you inhale, and relax on exhale. This helps to exercise the diaphragm and gently massage the internal organs.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Hip Hinges



Warms Up:

- Back
- Hips
- Shoulders
- Knees
- Wrists

Steps:

- From extended child's pose, lift head looking forward
- Inhale, bring hips forward, then drop them down as you bring chest forward and shoulders back
- Exhale, press hips back, as you bend knees, coming back into extended child's pose
- Continue moving back and forth, flowing with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their elbows straight throughout the movement. This will help to better warm up their shoulders. Also, many students may find it difficult to drop their hips to the floor, while keeping their arms straight. Encourage them to drop their hips only as much as is comfortable, while keeping their arms straight.

Students should move slowly, connecting their movement with their slow, deep breath. This helps students become more mindful of their movement and notice when they may feel some tension. Paying attention to the signals of their body helps students avoid injury.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Serpent Stretch

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Back
- Hips
- Knees
- Wrists

Steps:

- From extended child's pose, lift head and turn hands inward, so finger tips point towards each other
- Inhale, bend elbows out to the sides, as you bring hips forward, keeping chest as close to the floor as possible, while hips are raised
- Continue pressing chest forward and up as you drop hips to the floor and straighten arms
- Exhale, press hips back, as you bend knees, coming back into extended child's pose
- Repeat 4-6 times

Teaching Points

If a student has problems with their shoulders, have them practice hip hinges instead. Hip hinges provide a more gentle warm-up to the shoulder joints.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Down Dog (Warm Up Version)



Warms up:

- Legs
- Ankles
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Back

Steps:

- Start in all fours (on hands and knees with hands directly under shoulders and knees directly under hips)
- Spread fingers wide, curl toes under and press hips up and back
- Press hips up and back and begin straightening knees (knees don't need to be fully extended – good to have some bend to the knees in the warm-up)
- Relax head and neck, looking back towards feet
- Pump heels one at a time towards the floor
- Shift hips from side to side

Variation:

Have students lift one leg up at a time (inhaling as they raise their right leg, exhaling as their foot comes back to the floor, then inhaling as they raise their left leg and exhaling as their left foot comes back to the floor). Repeat 4-6 times on each side.

Teaching Points:

Many students keep their head lifted, remind them to look towards their feet and shake their head from side to side. This will help loosen the muscles of the neck and upper back. Many students are not able to straighten their knees much at all. Encourage them to keep their knees bent, as they work on pressing their chest towards their feet. It's better to have bent knees than a rounded back. As students press down through one heel at a time, encourage them to slowly pump their heels. Moving more slowly will help students focus on the feel of the warm-up and on loosening the muscles in their calves. Finally, bend and straighten knees together. As students bend their knees, have them press their chest towards their feet, and relax their chest as they straighten their knees. This will help warm-up the back, shoulders and chest, along with the legs.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Up Dog/Down Dog



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Back
- Shoulders
- Wrists

Steps:

- Start in down dog
- Inhale, bring chest forward and drop hips, drawing shoulders back (Up Dog with toes curled under)
- Exhale, press hips up and back to Down Dog
- Continue moving back and forth, moving with breath
- Repeat 6-8 times

Teaching Points:

Remind students to move slowly and mindfully, moving with their breath and engaging the abdominal muscles. Encourage students to move with control rather than swinging back and forth. This will help students tune into their bodies more and more fully engage their core muscles.

Instruct students to pull their shoulders back and open through their chest as they come into up dog. This will help warm-up their shoulders and chest a little more.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Lunge/Runner's Stretch



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs (Hamstrings and Quadriceps)

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees - shoulders over wrists and hips over knees) or start in down dog
- Bring right foot forward, placing right foot between your hands
- Check that right knee is directly over right ankle
- Scoot left foot back until gentle stretch is felt
- Inhale, straighten right leg as you bring hips back towards back foot (keeping hips raised)
- Exhale, come forward again, bending front knee and dropping down into lunge
- Continue moving back and forth 4-6 times

Teaching Points:

Have students move slowly and only drop hips or press back until they feel a gentle stretch. This exercise is to warm up the muscles in the legs, not stretch them too deeply, so it's important that students move slowly and simply focus on maintaining the back and forth movement, only going to the point where they feel a very gentle stretch. This warm-up is best used towards the end of the warm-up sequence, once students have already been moving their bodies through a few warm-ups.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Easy Forward Fold



Warms Up:

- Legs
- Back
- Shoulders
- Neck

Steps:

- From down dog, walk feet forward, placing feet between hands (about hip width apart and parallel)
- Keep knees slightly bent
- Drop head down, looking towards knees behind you
- Hold onto opposite elbows
- Shake head from side to side to loosen neck and upper back
- Stay in this position for 4-5 long breaths (breathing through the nose)
- On next inhale, bend knees more and lift head and chest, using the strength of the legs to come back to standing

Teaching Points:

Many students keep their head and neck slightly lifted during the forward fold. Remind them to look back towards their knees and shake their head from side to side. This helps to relax and warm up the muscles in the neck and upper back.

Encourage students to keep their knees slightly bent in this first forward fold to get their legs ready for this stretch and to prevent any strain in their low back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Straddle – Lunge side to side



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Arms

Steps:

- From easy forward fold, step left foot back and turn to the left, coming into a straddle position
- Walk hands to the middle of the straddle, keeping hands about hip width apart
- Look at a point on the floor a few feet in front of you (this will keep the head raised, but not over extended)
- Turn feet out so that the knee can bend over the ankle as you move from side to side
- Exhale, bend your right knee, bringing your hips to the right
- Inhale, straighten your knee, coming back to center
- Exhale, bend your left knee, bringing your hips to the left
- Inhale, straighten your knee, coming back to center

Teaching Points:

Remind students to turn their feet out. This will allow the knee to bend directly over the ankle as they move from side to side. Instruct students to press back through their hips and reach forward with their head to lengthen through the spine and keep the back from rounding. If students have difficulty keeping their backs flat as they straighten their knees coming back to center, encourage them to keep their knees a little bent when in the center position. This will help them keep their back from rounding.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Straddle – Windmill arms



Warms Up:

- Arms
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Back
- Hips
- Legs

Steps:

- Start in straddle forward fold (standing straddle with hands on floor)
- Bring feet into a forward/parallel position (not turned out)
- Place right hand in the middle of the straddle
- Inhale, sweep left hand up
- Exhale, lower left hand to floor (next to right hand)
- Inhale, sweep right hand up
- Exhale, lower right hand to floor
- Continue moving arms one at a time up and down, moving with breath
- Repeat 4-6 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to turn feet in, so they are parallel (not turned out). This helps engage and warm up the muscles in the fronts of the thighs. Instruct students to press back through their hips and reach forward with their head to help lengthen the spine and keep the back from rounding. If students have a difficult time reaching the floor with their hands, encourage them to bend their knees, rather than round their back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Sun Flower



Warms Up:

- Hips
- Legs
- Arms
- Shoulders

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping hands towards the floor then crossing arms
- Inhale, come back up, stretching arms out
- Exhale, squat down, sweeping arms down and across
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Many students bend forward as they squat down. Remind them to keep their head and chest lifted, so they are using their leg muscles and not placing any strain on their back.

Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Star/Moon God



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Upper Back
- Legs
- Hips

Steps:

- Start in standing position
- Step feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Turn feet out (no more than 45 degrees)
- Inhale, stretch arms diagonally up and out with palms facing forward
- Exhale, squat down, drawing elbows down and back (towards bottom ribs)
- Inhale, stand up, stretching arms up
- Exhale, squat down, bringing elbows down and back
- Repeat 5-8 times

Teaching Points:

Check that students turn their feet out rather than keeping them facing forward. This helps ensure that their knees stay in the same direction and bend over their ankles, so there is no strain on the knee or ankle joint. Remind students to squeeze their shoulder blades together as they bring their elbows down and back. This will help to better warm up their shoulders and upper back.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Swaying Palm Tree (Standing)



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Sides of Body
- Wrists/Hands

Steps:

- Start standing
- Place feet a few inches apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Inhale, reach arms overhead, interlacing fingers and turning palms up towards the ceiling
- Exhale, reach to the right
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching up through the palms of the hands
- Exhale, reach to the left
- Inhale, come back to center, stretching up
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep their shoulders relaxed as they stretch up through their hands. This will help keep the shoulders from hunching and becoming tense. Remind students to keep their arms next to their ears and to keep their chest open to the front. This will help warm up the shoulders and keep the chest from dropping towards the floor.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Flowing Crescent Stretch



Warms Up:

- Back
- Sides of body
- Belly
- Shoulders
- Arms

Steps:

- Start in standing position (feet hip width apart and parallel)
- Inhale, reach arms overhead, interlacing fingers
- Exhale, reach arms to the right, while pressing hips to the left
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching arms straight up
- Exhale, reach arms to the left, pressing hips to the right
- Inhale, come back to center, reaching arms straight up
- Repeat 3-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to keep arms next to ears and to keep chest open to the front, not dropped towards the floor. This will help to warm up the shoulders and chest.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Shoulder Stretch



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Arms
- Upper Back

Steps:

- Start standing with feet about hip width apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Bring arms up to shoulder height
- Bend elbows, holding onto opposite elbows, so forearms are directly in front of chest
- Exhale, pull elbows to the left
- Inhale, bring elbows back to center
- Exhale, pull elbows to the right
- Inhale, bring elbows back to center
- Repeat 4-5 times on each side

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep elbows raised to shoulder height. This will help to better warm up the arms.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Tadasana



Warms Up:

- Breathing
- Focus and concentration (brings attention to the body before beginning the practice)

Steps:

- Start standing
- Bring feet a few inches apart and parallel (not turned out)
- Evenly distribute weight on feet (not having more weight on toes, heels or edges of feet)
- Lift up through the top of the head
- Draw shoulders back and down
- Engage abdominal muscles and drop tailbone down (brings pelvis into neutral position)
- Bring chin parallel to the floor

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students may have poor posture and not even realize it due to years of standing in a particular way. Tadasana helps students become aware of their posture and to self correct any problems they may have with posture. It's also a useful exercise to help students become more focused on what they are doing and more focused on their yoga practice before they begin the actual practice.

Part 3 – Teaching and Practicing Warm-Ups and Sun Salutations

Four easy warm-up routines

The following warm-up routines take 5-10 minutes and will warm up the major muscle groups for your students. Below is a summary of the sample warm-up routines using the warm-ups previously discussed.

Warm Up Routine #1:

Seated flowing twist
Seated arms side to side
Sun Worshipper
Down Dog
Flowing lunge
Straddle Windmill Arms
Sun Flower
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #2

Bridge Flow
Windshield Wipers
Knees side to side
Leg Pumps
Rock and Roll
Down Dog (pumping heels)
Easy Forward Fold
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #3

Spinal Flexes
Spinal Balance Flow
Cross Foot Behind
Child's Pose
Hip Hinges
Down Dog
Lunge Side to Side
Star/Moon God
Tadasana

Warm Up Routine #4

Swaying Palm Tree (seated)
Chest and shoulder stretch
Spinal Flexes
Spinal Balance
Child's Pose – walk hands side to side
Serpent Stretch
Down Dog – pump heels
Easy Forward Fold
Flowing Crescent Stretch
Tadasana