

**THE RUNNER'S
YOGA BOOK**

**A BALANCED APPROACH
TO FITNESS**

By Jean Couch



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I EASTERN YOGA FOR THE WESTERN ATHLETE

The specialized ways of the Western world have so thoroughly dissected the human being that it is common to accept false divisions of the human being into body, mind, and spirit. The emphasis on intellectual pursuits accompanied by neglect of both body and spirit are manifestations of the assumption that happiness can be accomplished through the head alone. But signs of dissatisfaction with this situation are everywhere visible. Self-help and consciousness-raising groups that nurture the spirit are flourishing. The importance of physical fitness has come to be more and more appreciated. These new waves of enthusiasm reflect an attempt to more thoroughly integrate the body with the mind and the spirit. The East has dealt with this issue for centuries. Those who wish to realize their own wholeness can turn to yoga.

The word *yoga* means "union" or "joining." There are numerous systems of yoga, each providing different ways to unify the various aspects of the human being. The yoga system this book deals with is Hatha Yoga. In the simplest terms Hatha Yoga means "yoga for health"; it is the physical aspect of yoga. The Sanskrit word *hatha* implies balance: *ha* means "sun" and *tha* means "moon." This system of yoga aims to balance—to join—different energy flows within the human body.

Hatha Yoga is the system most familiar to the Westerner. It works through the concreteness of the body. Hatha Yoga uses physical poses (asanas) to explore the inner structures of the body, the mind, and the spirit. It is a path, a guide, a step-by-step method that can lead you to greater self-knowledge. Each pose is a means to feel inwardly, to discover where you are strong, tight, weak, or dull. Thus, Hatha Yoga provides a framework for the experiences of physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness.

Within the system of Hatha Yoga there are numerous approaches. The poses in this book are based, for the most part, on the teaching of B.K.S. Iyengar, author of the classic text, *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken, 1979), *Light on Pranayama* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), and *The Tree of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989). Now in his seventies, Iyengar teaches primarily at his institute, The Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, in Pune, India. He has spent more than fifty years practicing and developing the art of yoga. His approach emphasizes precise and careful body alignment, muscular balance, and maximum spinal extension.

The Iyengar method of yoga is based on a central principle of balance. Physiologically balance means several things:

- Each individual muscle is capable of contracting, lengthening, and relaxing.
- Corresponding muscle groups (for example, hamstrings and quadriceps) are equally strengthened and stretched.
- The joints, when surrounded by balanced muscle tissues, are free to move in their full range of motion.
- Alignment of the body makes it possible to accommodate a full breath.
- Energy flows equally to all parts of the body.

Therefore, the Iyengar approach to yoga is a science of postural work highly useful to the Western athlete.

When the body is balanced, flesh feels like flesh; it is neither too hard (and susceptible to injury) nor too soft (and incapable of supporting the skeleton properly). When the body is balanced, the musculoskeletal system facilitates movement, rather than hinders it. The body is designed for nothing if not for movement, and balanced movement is self-perpetuating: the more freely you move, the more you can move.

In my opinion Iyengar's approach to Hatha Yoga promotes this balance better than any other school of Hatha Yoga or any fitness program presently available. His system teaches how to move the spine to preserve and strengthen its natural integrity. And what's most helpful is that the work is individual: no matter what your particular imbalances or problems are, Iyengar yoga will teach you how to move in the way most appropriate for you.

And the marvel of it all is that it works through the concreteness of the body. You don't have to change your religious beliefs to experience the benefits of Hatha Yoga. The one thing you must do is practice the poses. The means to physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness are your own body in the poses and your own willingness to observe closely how you feel. Athletes are already working with their bodies; what many need to do is learn a new way to look and to feel in order to bring about a more satisfying harmony that comes not only from physical equilibrium but from mental and spiritual balance as well.

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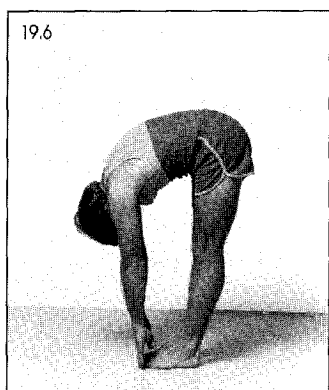
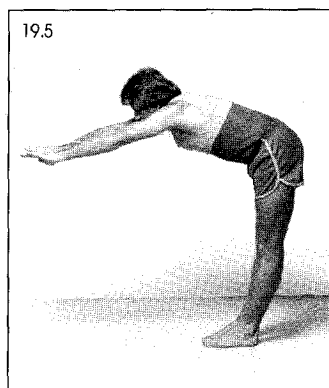
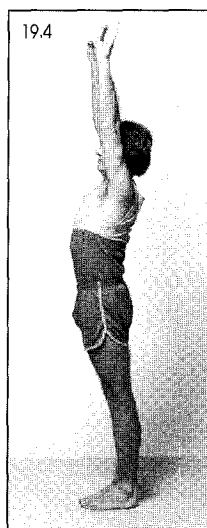
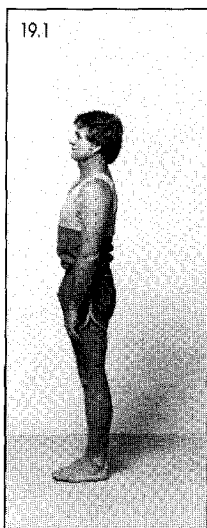
WAKE UP

SUN SALUTATION

The Sun Salutation (Surya Namaskar) is a combination of poses done by moving smoothly from one to the other while coordinating breath with movement (vinyasa). There are many combinations possible; the first version given here is to be practiced in the early stages of learning yoga, the second version is for later on, when you have increased spinal elongation and overall strength.

Before doing Sun Salutation, be sure to practice each of the poses as they were presented earlier. Once you have some understanding of each individual pose in the series, you may wish to use Sun Salutation as a morning warm-up, as its name implies, or as a general warm-up before any athletic activity.

If you look at the poses you can see why Sun Salutation is an excellent warm-up for the total body. The series begins in Mountain Pose, so alignment is established. This is followed by forward bending, groin stretches, and backbending. The arms and wrists are strengthened and stretched in Yoga Push-Up and Upward-Facing Dog Pose. The back is lengthened, the chest opened. By coordinating the inhalation and exhalation with the movement in the poses, awareness is directed to the breath. Practicing the series until it flows



- 19.1 Mountain Pose
 19.2 Mountain Pose—palms out
 19.3 Mountain Pose—prayer position
 19.4 Mountain Pose—arms overhead
 19.5 Standing Forward Bend—coming forward
 19.6 Standing Forward Bend

smoothly increases flexibility, strength, and coordination.

Because these versions of Sun Salutation concentrate on one side of the body at a time, you must always balance the body by doing the series twice, first stepping back with one leg, and then for the second time stepping back with your other leg. Also, although the series is meant to be done by moving from one pose to the next with each breath, you can do Sun Salutation more slowly by holding each posture. Use the breath to move into the pose, and then breathe evenly as you hold. It may help you to remember when to inhale and when to exhale if you know, in general, to inhale on backbending movements and exhale on forward bending movements.

SURYA NAMASKAR

SUN SALUTATION I

1. Mountain Pose (Tadasana). Align your body and breathe evenly. Take the time to notice inner sensations.

2. Mountain Pose (Tadasana)—Palms Out. Inhale and turn your palms out. Roll the upper arms out, stretch the fingers down, and lengthen the spine.

3. Prayer Position (Namaste). Exhale and place your palms together in front of your sternum, with your chest broad and your shoulders low.

4. Mountain Pose (Tadasana)—Arms Overhead. Inhale and stretch your arms overhead, with your palms forward. Lengthen from the heels to the fingertips.

5. Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana). Exhale slowly as you bend forward from your hips, keeping your arms in line with your torso.

6. Complete Forward Bend (Uttanasana). Lifting your buttocks, let your back soften as your hands stretch gently toward the floor.

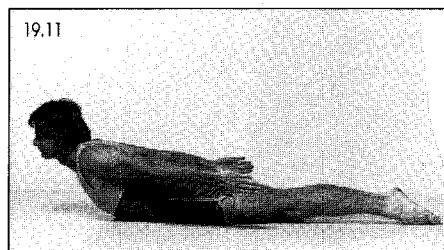
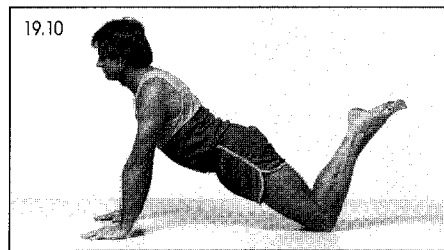
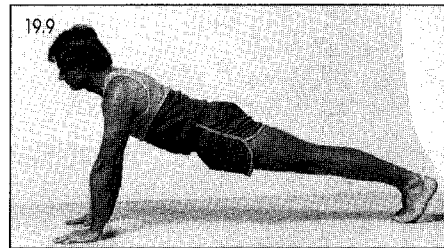
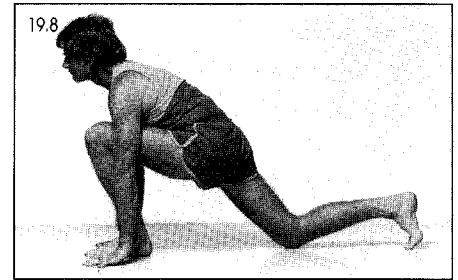
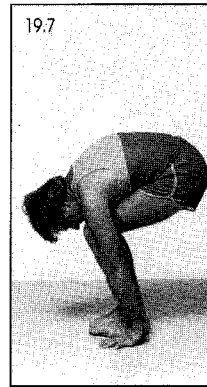
7. Preparation for Lunge Position. Bend your knees and place your hands on either side of your feet.

8. Lunge Position. Inhale and step your right foot back, turning your toes under as you bend your left leg to form a right angle. Let the right knee come down to the floor as you lengthen the torso out on the left thigh.

9. Plank Position (Chaturanga Dandasana). Check that both hands point directly forward. Breathe evenly. Step your left foot back so you are in a plank position. Stretching out through your heels, activate both thighs. Push the floor away with your hands. Stretch out through the crown of the head and keep the shoulders low, away from the ears.

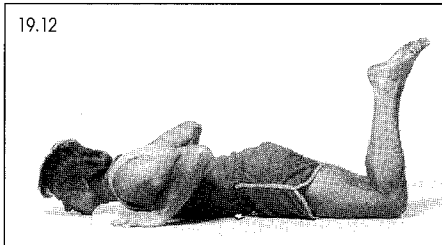
10. Bent-Knee Push-Up (Chaturanga Dandasana). On an exhalation bend your knees to the floor, and take your feet off the floor. Bending your elbows, lower your torso down with control. Then lie on the floor, straighten your legs, and bring your arms down to your sides.

11. Preparation for Cobra Pose (Bhujangasana). Inhale and lift your head, shoulders, and hands off the floor. Activate your thighs and stretch out through the crown of your head. Do not allow your eyes to roll up toward the ceiling, but keep your gaze soft and look forward.

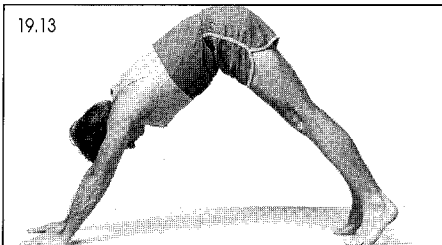


- 19.7 Lunge Position-preparation
- 19.8 Lunge Position
- 19.9 Push-Up Position
- 19.10 Bent-Knee Push-Up
- 19.11 Preparation for Cobra Pose

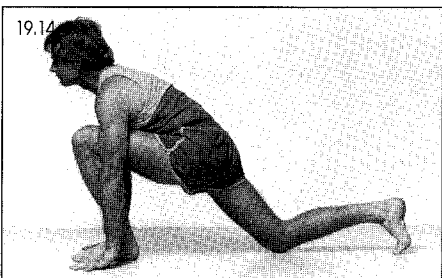
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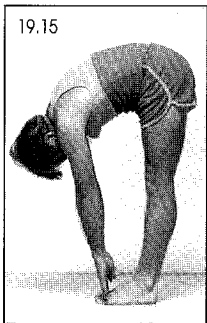
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19.14



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19.16



19.17



12. Bent-Knee Push-Up (Chaturanga Dandasana). Breathe evenly and place your hands next to your chest. Bend your knees and lift your feet off the floor. Exhale and straighten your arms, lifting your torso off the floor. Inhale and bring your feet back to the floor and curl your toes under.

13. Downward-Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana). Exhale, straighten your legs, and lift your buttocks so you are in an inverted V. Stay high up on the toes to get more lift in the sitting bones.

14. Lunge Position. Inhale, bend the right leg, and step the right foot forward, placing the foot between the hands. Let your left knee rest on the floor, and lengthen your torso out on your right thigh.

15. Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana). Exhale, straighten the right leg, and bring the left foot next to the right. Lift your buttocks high, and activate your thighs. Allow your back to lengthen down.

16. Prayer Position (Namaste). Inhale and, with your hands on your hips, lift your torso as a single unit to return to Mountain Pose (Tadasana). Exhale and bring your palms together in front of your sternum. Breathe evenly.

17. Mountain Pose (Tadasana). Lower your arms to your sides. Realign your body and breathe softly and evenly.

Repeat the entire series, moving into and out of the lunges with your left leg first.

- 19.12 Bent-Knee Push-Up
- 19.13 Downward-Facing Dog Pose
- 19.14 Lunge Position
- 19.15 Standing Forward Bend
- 19.16 Mountain Pose-prayer position
- 19.17 Mountain Pose