

Energy Flow Sequence

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Photos: **Ali Wardle** www.aliwardlephotography.co.uk

With summer (hopefully here!) it's time to give your training sessions an edge with a vibrant yoga sequence they will energise, strengthen and help get you into great warm weather shape.

All the asana in my Energy Flow Sequence are big and strong movements - they aim to work all the major joints. To maximise the benefits, do make sure that you are fully warmed up and focus on your breathing throughout.



Utkatasana (Chair Pose)

Great for warming up the entire body and increasing heart rate

From a basic standing position, bend the knees so you are in a squat position with feet together. At the same time sweep the arms up so they are in-line with the ears.

The hands are slightly wider than shoulder-width apart so the shoulder blades can stay down. Press the thighs together firmly and contract the quadriceps strongly. Lengthen the spine upward with the sternum almost perpendicular to the ground and the chin parallel to the ground. Stretch into the hands and spread the fingers whilst contacting the abdominal muscles. Hold for five breaths.

Anjaneyasana (Crescent Lunge) modified version

Is effective in increasing hip flexibility

From Utkatasana, slowly take a big step back (approximately 1.5m) with the right leg and at the same time bend the left knee to a 90-degree angle. Keep this transition slow so the stabilisers of the pelvis and the left knee and ankle have to really engage. With the arms still reaching up as in Utkatasana, slowly drop the right knee to the floor. Now un-tuck the right toes and allow the hips to sink forwards a little to stretch the hip flexors and lift the sternum upward to create a slight back bend. Contract the abdomen to help support the lumbar spine, breathe deeply and feel the rib cage expand. Hold for five breaths.



Kumbhakasana (Plank)

From Anjaneyasana, lean forwards and place the hands either side of the left foot, tuck the right toes under and straighten the right leg. Now move into Plank by extending the left leg backwards to join the right leg. Have the feet hip-width apart and ensure the body feels strong by contracting the arms, legs and abdomen. Keep the neck long and draw the shoulder blades down and away from the ears to engage the rhomboids. Neutral alignment of the lumbar spine and pelvis must be maintained throughout to support the lower back. Hold for five breaths.





Uthita Balasana (Extended Child's Pose)

Stretches the front of the spine and the anterior deltoids and pectorals

From a Plank position drop the knees to the floor and keeping the hips lined up over the knees, extend the arms and upper body forward so the chest sinks to the ground. Press the heels of the hands firmly into the ground keeping the arms straight to increase the stretch through the upper body. Hold for five breaths before returning to a Plank position.

Runners' Lunge

Great for maintaining full range of movement of the hips

From Plank position, lift the right foot and lunge the right leg forward so the foot is in-between the hands. Align the right knee over the right ankle and really engage the back leg by extending the heel away from you so it feels strong. Lift and extend the spine away from the right thigh slightly. Hold for five breaths.



Anjaneyasana - Crescent Lunge

From Runners' Lunge return to Anjaneyasana (see above) but this time keep the right leg as straight as possible to increase the stretch in the hip flexors and strongly contract the quadriceps, keeping the heel off the ground. Hold for five breaths.



Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)

Is an effective strength move that also increases energy levels

From Crescent Lunge, turn the left heel in towards the centre of the yoga mat and press the foot down into the mat. Open the arms so they are parallel to the floor with the right arm reaching forwards and the left arm reaching backwards. The feet should be aligned directly under the hands with the left foot turned in 45-degrees and your right foot turned out to the 90-degrees. Align the left heel with the right heel. Exhale and bend your right knee over the right ankle, so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor. Lower the right thigh parallel to the floor if possible. Hold for five breaths.

Garudasana (Eagle)

Is great for improving balance and joint stability

From Virabhadrasana II return to standing before sweeping the right arm under the left and bend your elbows so the forearms are perpendicular to the floor. Now press the palms together and lift your elbows upwards a little, keeping the shoulders drawing downwards. Bend your knees so you are in a squat position. Lift your right leg and cross it over the left. Point your right toes toward the floor and press the thighs together, strongly contracting the quadriceps. Ensure the knees and elbows are in the centre line of the body and engage the abdomen strongly too. Hold for five breaths.



Ensure the knees and elbows are in the centre line of the body and engage the abdomen

Matsyendrasana (Lord of the Fishes)

Is a seated twist that increases the rotation of the thoracic (mid) spine and ribcage

From Garudasana, unwrap the right leg and start to tuck it behind the left leg. At the same time deeply bend the left knee and lower the hips all the way to the floor. The right leg is now under your left leg and the left foot is pressing firmly into the ground. The left knee will point directly upwards. Exhale and twist the torso toward the inside of the left thigh. Press the left hand against the floor just behind the sacrum and press your right upper arm on the outside of your left thigh. Lengthen the torso upward and rotate more to the left as you exhale. If the sitting bones start to lift up on one side you have twisted the torso too far. Hold for five breaths.



Navasana (Boat Pose) with 'lift up'

This asana is effective for building strength in the triceps and the transverse abdominal muscles



From Matsyendrasana, bring the upper body back to centre and place both feet on the ground in front of you. Lean back slightly so body weight transfers to the back sitting bones. The spine will now be on a straight diagonal. Keeping the chin parallel to the floor, reach the arms forwards so they are also level to the floor. At the same time, lift and extend the legs upwards so the feet are level with your eye-line or slightly higher.

Keep the abdomen strong and the chest lifted so the lumbar spine stays straight and does not round at all. Hold this for five breaths before crossing the shins and placing your hands onto a yoga brick either side of the hips.

Tuck the pelvis under a little, press into the hands and extend the arms so the body lifts from the floor. Hold for five breaths before releasing back down to the ground. Repeat the 'lift up' five times.

Now come up to standing and repeat the above sequence on the left side. Then move into a calming seated forward bend, Paschimottanasana, for ten breaths.

Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

Is a calming yoga posture that also stretches the lower back and hamstrings

Extend the legs in front of you and sit with the spine as straight as possible (sit on a yoga block if the spine is rounding at all). Now exhale and lean the upper body forwards, extending from the lower back, so that the upper body moves towards the thighs. To maximise the stretch of the hamstrings and calf muscles, either hold the feet and gently pull the feet back towards you, or if you are unable to reach the feet, place a yoga belt or similar around the feet and gently pull the belt towards you. Hold for ten deep slow breaths.



To find out more about Sally go to:
www.sallyparkesyoga.com