

## **Bikram Yoga Guidelines**

### **First-Timers**

- Do not eat before going
- Drink water en-route; no need to super-hydrate, but not good to show up parched or deficient
- Stretch shy of what you perceive to be your limits; the heat facilitates a much greater range of motion but it is best to ease into this
- BREATHE! Do not hold your breath. There should not be a loud expulsion of air when you come out of a difficult pose, for this means that you were holding your breath---bad.
- Stretch shy of what you perceive to be your limits; yes this is the same as the previous bullet
- For standing poses, focus on maintaining balance before moving into more advanced forms of the poses
- Also for standing poses, remain shy of what you perceive to be your limits
- Remember that Bikram yoga is not a competition
- Go into and out of poses with attention to detail

### **Tips & Observations for Runners, Cyclists, Swimmers, Triathletes**

When I first began this practice in December of 2000, I was one very inflexible person and was thus greatly limited in my execution of the various postures and movements. Improvement came quickly though, almost with every class. Some poses improved more than others, but my body was definitely changing and I could feel the positive effects in my other sports activities.

Basically, swimming, biking, and running all felt easier because I was so much looser. In the swim fly and backstroke were now much easier because I was not so bound up in the shoulders. On the bike my pedal stroke felt much more comfortable and was reflected by a more efficient Spinscan # on the Computrainer. Running felt easier too as my knees seemed to magically rise without undue exertion.

Yoga would also tire me out, particularly in the beginning. The pattern was not always easy to detect as sometimes I would be fine the next day, yet other days I would notice that my biking legs were definitely feeling the effects of the previous day's yoga session.

Gradually my body adapted to the new stress and the tiring impact on my other training became less, and instead made for better swim/bike/run workouts that followed.

I generally do yoga 2-3x week. There are days when I arrive at the studio fatigued from a long bike or run and I moderate the yoga session by easing up on the extent to which I work or hold the standing poses. Yoga is not a competition or a practice that has to be the same each time, so I am happy to flow with how my body feels that particular day.

Feeling tired, work more on the meditative and stretching aspects of the class. Feeling energized, then use the last 10-15" of various poses to stretch your limits to new frontiers. In short, listen to your body.

### **General**

Breathe, breathe, breathe! You will stretch better, hold poses longer, and greatly enhance your class participation and benefits by remembering to use your breath to relax.

### **Half Moon Pose**

Great swimming stretch. Think of using your bottom hand to pull the other hand outward and upward. Think of effecting the half moon by moving your hips in the opposite direction.

### **Awkward Pose (Squat)**

Keep knees over the ankles and you get a better stretch in the hips. People tend to get into a deeper squat by thrusting their knees forward, but this compromises the stretch in the hips that will help you in your cycling and running.

### Leg Lift while lying face down and hands underneath

Reach your leg to the back of the room at the same time you lift it and this gives a much greater stretch/strengthening of the hip flexor. Do not lift hip off of the floor as so many people do.

### Sit-Up

Follow the instructions and keep arms in line with the head; too few people do this. Also, follow instructions by holding breath momentarily and exhaling as you reach down for your feet. This breathing step will give you a much deeper stretch in your hamstrings and back.

### Camel Pose

When I began Bikram, I could not wrap either leg, not even close. Within 2 months, I could wrap one leg, and shortly thereafter both legs. Key is flexibility in the hips; when I have taken time off from yoga or am recovering from a long run/ride, I always use this pose to measure my hip flexibility.

### Fixed Firm Pose (sitting with butt between the legs)

Many of you will have difficulty reaching the floor with your butt. It takes me until the 2<sup>nd</sup> or gratuitous 3<sup>rd</sup> set that I add myself to reach the floor. I find this pose is improved by varying the angle of your knees and that this also facilitates a deeper final stretch.

Start the pose with your knees slightly flared outwards remembering to exhale on the stretch. Inhale, adjust knees slightly more inward and stretch on the exhale. Repeat this process such that you fan legs in to where they touch and then you can gradually fan them back out.

Ultimately, this modification gives you a much broader stretch and will also invite you more deeply into the standard version of this posture than if you remained stuck with the same knee angle throughout.

### Standing Head to Knee Pose

Rather than separate your hands and use them to support yourself on the floor, keep them in prayer position in front of your foot. This will greatly enhance the strength and stabilizer muscles in the hip.

### Tortoise Pose (sitting Japanese style and then extending hands in prayer on mat)

Try and line up your feet with your legs rather than having them inverted pigeon-toed. This gives you a better stretch of the ankle.

Continually work on stretching out the arms (swimming benefit) and sitting back with the hips.

### Rabbit

Once again concentrate on lining up your feet with your legs to get a better ankle stretch. I also use my grip to massage/stretch the ankles further still.

### Final Breathing Exercises

Note that the stomach is drawn in on the exhale. Hence, a reminder that a proper breathing pattern for cycling and running sees you pushing the stomach/diaphragm out on the inhale.

### End of Class

I use this period to do some extra stretching on areas that need special attention. After 90 minutes in a warm room the muscles are very supple and it is a great opportunity to lengthen them and make them healthier.