

## Explore Your Core: Strengthen and “Sculpt” with Yoga

by Tony Bishop, E-RYT

What does a crow have in common with a crocodile, a dog, a plank and a dolphin? Well, besides being some rather fun things to find in a kids’ picture puzzle, they are some of the best core strengthening techniques in the world. Welcome to the variety of yoga!

One of the coolest things about practicing yoga is discovery — not simply discovery of new and more advanced postures, but those “ah ha!” moments when you suddenly feel a part of your anatomy engaging or responding as you’ve never felt before. That’s an area in the learning process of which we never tire. Every time you feel you’ve reached a plateau, there’s always more and better just ahead.

Most importantly, almost anyone can practice yoga and benefit from its vast array of resources. So many knowledgeable and creative people have been and now are involved in yoga, this avenue of wellness has established itself as the one to which all others look for excellence. Is it any wonder that virtually every other form of physical movement, including physical therapy, dance, martial arts, exercise routines and workouts, running and even cycling use yoga and yoga techniques? It all goes back to basics, and improving the body and mind as the early yogis did some 5,000 years ago.

Everyone talks about the “core” now, and for good reasons. The core (“power house”) as to many exercise gurus refer is actually the area of the body from the solar plexus area/xyphoid process (just under the breastbone) wrapping around the body and extending through the sacrum and to the top area of the hips and thighs. It’s all connected by muscle, tendons, ligaments, bones, internal organs and fascia so as to be the foundation of movement of the body. In layman’s terms, your middle — which includes the abdominals and the obliques.

As we enter early spring, many of us want that long and lean look with a nice waistline and the ever-popular six-pack. Now, the six-pack is another story, since it’s about 85 percent diet choice, but we can sculpt that area to perfection with yoga. Remember that even if you don’t want the perfect physique, nor ever aspire to have a beach body, you can benefit greatly from simply trying yoga techniques and going only as far as you can. Trying and moving are 90 percent of the positives in yoga and exercise!

You can do these at home, or in an organized yoga class. Just do what you can, as often and as well as you can at the time:

--- First, use your breath. Always breathe through your movements... generally



inhaling upon preparation and exhaling upon execution/flexion. NEVER totally hold the breath. Breathing is the most basic and important foundation of yoga.

--- As you strengthen your core, your entire back becomes stronger and more flexible, as the erector spinae and lats lengthen and engage. The thoracic (middle) and lumbar (lower) back are actually a part of your core. They are simply overused by most people, as most of us allow the belly area to simply hang and let go during physical movement such as lifting.

- 1) Stand straight with the feet about four inches apart. Shoulders are back, flex the glutes, the quads (thighs), abdominals, lengthen the neck with chin neutral. Breathe, and spread the toes out on the floor, locking them down. Concentrate on your belly and keeping it tight. This is “mountain.”
- 2) Lie down on a yoga mat on your back. Knees bent 90 degrees, straighten the left leg out/low. With fingertips next to the ears and elbows out, use your abs to lift the body and float the left elbow to right knee — turning enough to look at your right elbow. Keep the tailbone as connected to the floor as possible and the navel pulled deeply in. Repeat on each side for as many reps as you can at the time. Breathe. This is “elbow to knee,” the No. 1 ab exercise in the world.
- 3) Prone position, hands on the floor — shoulder-width apart, feet four inches apart with toes curled under. Elbows are straight with the entire body off the floor, you are gazing at the floor with straight neck. Squeeze the glutes, flex the thigh muscles, calves, push heels back, flex chest and arms. Here is the focus: Flex the abdominals as deeply as possible by pulling the navel in, and keep breathing! Keep this position, periodically tightening the abs more until you must release. This is “plank,” or dandasana. Affects virtually every muscle group.

These are just a few of the many postures which can effectively sculpt and strengthen your core while positively energizing the entire body and mind. Start slowly, ALWAYS BREATHE, and methodically, carefully add and/or adjust as you need. Just move... You can DO it! Be safe and be well.

Now here is our “core-oriented”

### March Pause for a Pose:

Garudasana (Supine) or supine eagle.

Lie down on a yoga mat face up, bend the knees to almost 90 degrees. Spread arms widely and swing the right arm under the left, crossing the elbows, forearms and wrists. Palms together with the thumbs toward your face. Right leg raises over left, taking right foot behind the left calf and hook the right toes behind the left leg just above the left heel. Relax the muscles for a few seconds and get everything together as well as possible. Now

flatten your lower back to the floor, pushing the hip bones toward the sky with tailbone flat. Pull navel in, breathe and squeeze every muscle tightly as a tourniquet. Advance this by really focusing upon the abs, and then exhaling and raising the upper body, touching knee area with the elbow, creating an “eagle” crunch effect. Go for 25 reps, and repeat on the other side. This also a great cardio pose! Until next month, God bless and Namaste!

### About the Author:

Tony Bishop, E-RYT/RYT/CYT, is director and chief instructor with Hot Yoga Bowling Green. He is certified in Hatha Yoga instruction, yoga teacher training, yoga personal training, yoga coaching, PowerHouse Pilates instruction, Spinning, Sil lum Kung Fu, and is experienced in many other forms of exercise training. He is registered with the Yoga Alliance, is a graduate of Sunstone Yoga Schools teacher training programs and has some 2,500 hours of yoga teaching experience. For more information, visit [www.hotyogabowlinggreen.com](http://www.hotyogabowlinggreen.com), email [hotyogabg@yahoo.com](mailto:hotyogabg@yahoo.com), or contact Tony at (270) 793-0011, 730 Fairview Ave., Suite C-2, Bowling Green.

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