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# Yoga After 50

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and overall well-being

Practice gentle Yoga  
and relieve stress

View step-by-step  
photos of key poses

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*Founding President, International  
Association of Yoga Therapists*

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## Yoga After 50 For Dummies®

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# Introduction

There is an old adage that says, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” For almost four decades, I’ve dedicated my life to being such a teacher to anyone eager to learn more about Yoga. I know firsthand that the right teacher, at the right time, can make all the difference. And I also know that Yoga can profoundly reshape your life, if you want it to.

When it comes to practicing Yoga, the key is to discover a personal approach that addresses your specific needs. Whether you use this book in addition to Yoga at your neighborhood studio, with online sessions, or on your own, I wrote *Yoga After 50 for Dummies* specifically to address your needs — if you happen to be over 50.

## About This Book

Yoga is about so much more than postures or movements. In fact, the idea of focusing on poses is a relatively modern approach. Yoga, in fact, offers a philosophy for living and attaining joy — a philosophy for living that guides almost all aspects of our life.

Of course, postures and movements, combined with proper breathing, can have a significant impact on your health. In no way do I want to diminish both the physical and mental boost that a regular Yoga practice has to offer. Certainly, the concept of Yoga therapy is based on just that. What I am suggesting, however, is that Yoga offers a lot more than exercise.

In this book, I address the physical aspects of Yoga and beyond:

» **Physical Yoga practice:** I spend a good portion of this book talking to you about the physical and mental benefits of Yoga, including instructions for postures, movements, and breath work. But, more precisely, I talk to you about practicing Yoga when you’re over 50. I think it’s critical to adjust your routines to fit your body. And it’s equally important to know that such adjustments in no way diminish the fundamental concepts of Yoga practice or philosophy.

» **Yoga beyond the poses:** How you live your life, the choices you make, can all be guided by Yoga principles. I share those ideas with you and suggest they just may be good for you, too!

As a matter of fact, Yoga in general should feel good to you and be good for you. If it doesn't, and if it leads to some kind of discomfort, you may not be recognizing what your body is telling you.

Before you listen to me or any other Yoga teacher, talk to your doctor about beginning or continuing a Yoga practice (this is especially important for all of us). And, most importantly, pay attention to how you are feeling. Nobody truly knows except you.

## Foolish Assumptions

Although anyone new to Yoga or anyone who wants to practice Yoga in a more user-friendly way can benefit from this book, I'm definitely focusing my attention on a segment of the population that doesn't get enough attention in the Yoga community: people 50 and up.

As a Yoga therapist who's been working with clients for decades, I know firsthand that people benefit from simple movement and easy breathing. You don't have to do the hardest poses or the most rigorous routines to receive the health benefits from Yoga. I want you to start with what feels good for your body and your mind, and you should make that your ongoing goal as your Yoga practice evolves.

While writing this book, I assumed that you fall into one of the following categories:

- » Yoga is something you're only thinking about trying. You've heard of the numerous health benefits a regular Yoga routine can provide but are reluctant to start because you think you're not flexible enough or that maybe Yoga is something for the younger generation. Neither of these things is true, and such concerns are actually the very reason you should jump in.
- » Yoga is something that has been a part of your life for a while. But just like professional athletes discover their body changes as they age (usually, about age 40), you're also experiencing some physical changes that require you to alter your Yoga practice to still reap the benefits.

With that in mind, my objective is to show you ways that Yoga can benefit you at any age. So, if you haven't started practicing Yoga, now is a perfect time to start. If Yoga has been a part of your life for a while, you can keep practicing, even as your body changes. In both cases, I want to help.

If you want a more comprehensive view of Yoga and many of its traditional principles, you can also check out my previous book, *Yoga For Dummies* (Wiley).

## Icons Used in This Book

Several icons are used throughout the margins of this book:



TIP

This icon identifies special tips that you would typically get from your Yoga teacher.



REMEMBER

You should keep in mind certain things whenever you're doing a particular pose or activity.



WARNING

Yoga should not lead to injury. Pay attention to the warnings, which are intended to keep you safe.

## Beyond the Book

If you like to get your information in slightly smaller bites, be sure to check out my access-anywhere articles on the web. I take some of the most important concepts from this book and include them in these stand-alone articles that will hopefully reinforce some of my messages and also make important information even more accessible. You can find these cheat sheets online at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com). To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for "Yoga After 50 For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box.

# Where to Go from Here

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Keep in mind that when it comes to Yoga, there's no simple story to tell with a beginning and an end. In fact, the reason it's called a Yoga *practice* is because that is exactly what we all do . . . we practice. Although I do outline some basic principles in the first few chapters of this book that should be important to anyone, you should view this book as a guide that you can refer to again and again.

Within the chapters of this book, I have interwoven a series of general Yoga routines that, from my almost-40 years of teaching and training, I've discovered to be particularly beneficial to the 50 and over Yogi. You'll also find routines that are directed toward certain conditions common to the 50 and up crowd.

If you're already experienced in the basics, you may want to jump to one of the chapters that holds particular relevance to you — perhaps even to the routines toward the end of the book.

In any case, remember that making modifications is the key to practicing Yoga year after year. Even the greatest of Yoga masters practiced differently as they aged. And, in many cases, it's only when we practice as older adults that we discover for ourselves that Yoga is more than just another form of exercise.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Practicing Yoga when you have five minutes
- » Getting into each pose
- » Discovering three routine options

## Chapter **19**

# Five-Minute Routines for Home

If you have only five minutes to practice, this chapter contains three routine options. I have given these sequences a lot of consideration, especially because it's such a limited period of time.

## What You Need to Know

In each pose, I provide you with the steps to get into the pose, but I may also point you to other places in this book that talk about a certain pose.



REMEMBER

It may take you additional time to complete the sequence as you read the instructions next to each pose. The sequence will go much quicker once you learn how to get into each pose.

Finally, if a particular pose seems too challenging or causes pain, modify it in a way that works for you or skip it entirely. Knowing what's good for your body and what isn't is truly a sign of being an advanced Yoga practitioner.



# Routine 1



Corpse pose

1. Lie flat on your back, with your arms stretched out and relaxed by your sides, palms up (or whatever feels most comfortable). You can place a small pillow or folded blanket under your head and another large one under your knees for added comfort. Bend your knees if it feels better on your back.

Inhale and exhale only through your nose (unless you have a cold or allergies or some other reason your nasal passages are blocked). Take 8 to 12 breaths. (Try the Belly breathing technique with a long exhale described in Chapter 3.)



Knee to chest

2. Lie on your back with both legs straight. As you exhale, draw one knee into your chest and hold on to it with both hands, just below the knee cap. Bring your toes back toward you. Stay for six to eight breaths. (Keep the other leg straight or place your foot on the ground with your knee bent if it feels better on your back.) *Note:* If you are having knee problems, you can use both hands to hold underneath the knee.

Repeat with the other leg.



Bent leg arm raise

3. Lie on your back with one leg bent and one leg straight. Start with your arms at your side, palms down. As you inhale, bring both arms overhead. As you exhale, bring your arms back to your sides. Repeat two more times.

Next, on an inhalation, bring both arms overhead again, but this time keep your arms overhead as you exhale and then inhale. Try to stretch your arms even further. On your next exhalation, bring your arms back down. Do the same sequence on the other side.



Windshield wiper

4. Lie on your back with both knees bent and feet on the ground, wide apart. Your arms are at your sides, palms down. As you exhale, drop both knees to the right. As you inhale, bring both knees back up. As you exhale, let both knees fall to the left.

Repeat three times on each side and then stay on the right for four to five breaths. Repeat, leaving your knees down on the other side.



Knee to chest

5. Lie on your back and bend your knees in toward your chest. Hold your shins just below the knees. If you have any knee problems, hold the backs of your thighs instead.

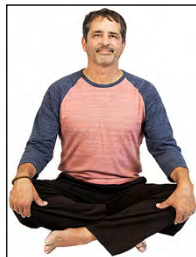


Corpse with left nostril breathing

6. Lie on your back with your knees bent or straight, feet on the ground, and palms up. Breathe in and out through the nose, 4 to 6 times. Try to be in the moment, linking your body, breath, and mind.

Use your right thumb to gently block off your right nostril. Breathe in and out through just the left nostril for 12 to 15 slow breaths. (For more information on left nostril breathing, see Chapter 3.)

## Routine 2



Easy pose

1. Sit on your mat with your legs straight out in front of you and place your hands on the floor beside your hips with your palms down and fingers pointing forward. Shake your legs up and down a few times to get the kinks out.

Bend your knees and cross your ankles in front of you, sitting comfortably.

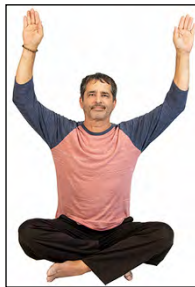
Rest your hands on your knees with your arms relaxed and palms down. Lengthen your spine by stretching your back in an upward motion, balance your head over your torso, and look straight ahead.

Stay for six to eight breaths, using Focus breathing (see Chapter 3).

*Note:* To help you sit straighter and lessen the strain on your back, sit on a bolster or folded blanket.



The single arm raise



Arm raises



Seated cross-legged forward bend

2. While in a comfortable seated position (stay in easy pose), raise your right arm from the front over head on an inhalation; lower your arm on the exhalation.

Still in a comfortable seated position, raise your left arm on your next inhalation; lower your arm on the exhalation.

Raise both arms (like in the photo) from the front overhead on your next inhalation; lower both arms on the exhalation.

Repeat this sequence one time.

3. Still in your seated position (easy pose), take a big inhale. As you exhale, put both hands in front of you on your mat (palms down) and slide out as far as your body wants to go. Inhale back up.

Repeat two more times and hold the stretch for four to six breaths.



Seated side bend

4. Continue sitting comfortably in a cross-legged position. Place your left palm on the floor, near your left hip.

As you inhale, raise your right arm out to the side and up above your head beside your right ear. As you exhale, slide your left hand across the floor out to the left, letting your torso, head, and right arm follow as you bend to the left. *Note:* Don't let your buttocks come off the floor as you bend.

Inhale back to the upright position. Repeat two more times and hold the stretch for four to six breaths.

Repeat on the other side.



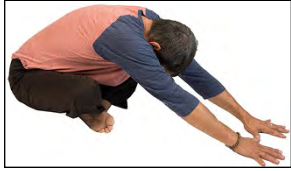
Seated twist

5. Still in a comfortable cross-legged position, place your left hand palm down on top of your right knee. Put your right hand down behind your right hip.

As you inhale, extend your spine upward. As you exhale, twist your torso and head to the right.

Repeat this movement for two more breaths, gradually twisting farther with each exhalation, but don't force it. Hold the twist for six to eight breaths.

Repeat on the other side.



Seated cross-legged forward bend

6. From this seated position, try sliding forward just to see whether your range of motion has increased.

Hold the stretch for four to six breaths. Finish the routine in the seated position, taking 8 to 10 breaths (using Focus breathing).

## Routine 3



Mountain pose (with chest-to-Belly breathing)

1. Stand tall but relaxed with your feet at hip width; hang your arms at your sides, palms turned toward your legs. Visualize a vertical line connecting your ear, your shoulder, and the sides of your hip, knee, and ankle.

While in this pose, employ the chest-to-Belly breathing technique described in Chapter 3, taking six to eight breaths.



Standing arm raises

2. Still in mountain pose, inhale as you slowly raise both arms overhead, from the front. Slowly bring them back down as you exhale.

Keeping your tall posture, repeat this movement four to six more times.



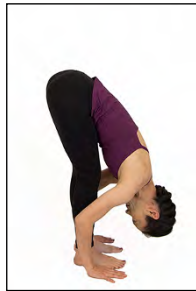
Rejuvenation sequence

3. Stand in the mountain posture with your feet at hip width and arms at your sides.



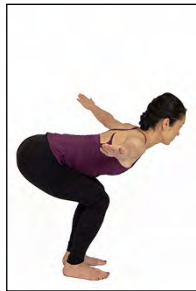
Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you inhale, slowly raise your arms out from the sides and up overhead.



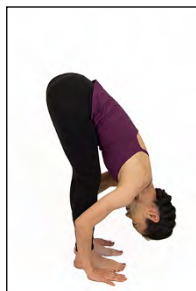
Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you exhale, bend forward from the waist and bring your head toward your knees and your hands forward and down toward the floor in the standing forward bend.



Rejuvenation  
sequence

Bend your knees quite a bit and as you inhale, sweep your arms out from the sides, but only come halfway up with your arms in a T (half forward bend).



Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you exhale, fold all the way down again and hang your arms in the standing forward bend.



Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you inhale, sweep your arms from the sides like wings and bring your torso all the way up again, standing with your arms overhead in the standing arm raise.



Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you exhale, bend your knees and squat halfway to the floor.



Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you inhale, bring your torso all the way up again, standing with your arms overhead in the standing arm raise.



Rejuvenation  
sequence

As you exhale, bring your arms back to your sides as in Step 1.

Repeat this sequence four to six times.

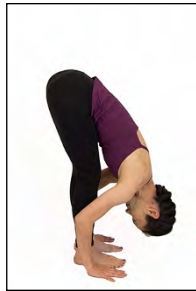


Standing twist

4. Step out wide on your mat and make sure your toes are pointing forward. As you inhale, bring your arms into a T (parallel to the floor) and lengthen your spine. As you exhale, bend forward from your hips, bring your left hand to the floor, and lift your right arm and your head up as high as it feels comfortable. Please, soften or bend your knees if you are stiff or feel any discomfort in your lower back. Remember, in Yoga, you may hold a pose, but never hold your breath.

As you inhale, return to the starting position. Repeat this movement on the same side and, on the third time, hold your left hand down and your right hand reaching up. Your head can be looking up, in the middle, or down. Stay for four to six breaths. If you want to make it more challenging, move your left hand, which is on the ground, closer to your right foot.

After holding for four to six breaths, repeat the same sequence on the other side.



Wide stance forward fold

5. Still folding forward, come back to the middle, bringing your hands to the floor for support or maybe clasping the opposite elbow.

Stay for four to five breaths.





Mountain pose (with chest-to-Belly breath)

6. Stand tall but relaxed with your feet at hip width; hang your arms at your sides, palms turned toward your legs. Visualize a vertical line connecting your ear, your shoulder, and the sides of your hip, knee, and ankle.

While in this pose, perform the chest-to-Belly breathing exercise described in Chapter 3. Try to do 10 to 15 breaths.