

Power Yoga

Practicing a simple sequence of high-powered yoga poses can help your clients improve postural alignment.

Repetitive sports training, long hours of sitting at work, the activities of daily living or just a sedentary lifestyle. . . . All these can cause our bodies to become structurally and muscularly imbalanced. If chronic strain and imbalance continue unopposed, the body's systems start to break down and injuries begin to pile up. As the saying goes, "If you do what you *did*, you get what you *got*." To fix what is broken you may need a paradigm shift, which will enable you to think and act on a different plane. For many clients who suffer from back problems, that paradigm shift may be undertaking a power yoga class.

Defining Fitness Today

Before writing about yoga's place in the American fitness scene and how yoga can be applied to enhance an individual's structural integrity, I am first moved to question what it means to be "fit." I have a clear memory of one client I worked with in Los Angeles. A doctor, wife and mother of three children, she was suffering from back spasms that prevented her from doing daily activities as simple as bending over and putting on her shoes. At our first session she told me, "My body has frozen up. I feel like I've been in a car accident! But I haven't done anything extreme with my body. I'm just a normal person, doing normal things: I run, lift weights, play tennis on the weekends. It doesn't make any sense that I should feel this way."

This woman spoke for an entire generation of active Americans who are finding that "doing normal things" can produce poor results. Power yoga may be the way to produce better results for many of your clients.

What Is Power Yoga?

Power yoga differs from other, more traditional, forms of yoga in that it is tailored to today's Western exerciser. The format was developed to address a conundrum faced by many accustomed to standard workouts: Yoga classes were perceived to be either too easy or too difficult for the average exerciser. What was needed was a style of yoga that appealed to American bodies and American interests but didn't compromise the essence of this 5,000-year-old discipline.

Over the 20 years I have been teaching power yoga, I have refined the format by drawing on the best aspects of the major schools of

Created with



download the free trial online at nitropdf.com/professional

yoga in the United States. The result is a **powerful, nonstop flow of energetic postures woven together** to provide a well-designed workout that provides harmony, flexibility and strength for the body as well as the mind.

Power yoga differs from other forms of yoga in that it is a quicker-paced, nonstop format that focuses on strength, endurance and stamina. It is based on the premise that you can strengthen and develop a muscle by placing demands on it. This energetic yoga style is meant to be more difficult than other forms of yoga and requires continuous movement from one pose to the next for the duration of the class—usually an hour—although the last 10 minutes involve a cool-down composed of relaxation and breathing exercises. Power yoga is typically performed in a heated room to ensure that participants achieve

the relaxed state that facilitates muscle lengthening. The heat also stimulates sweating, one of the body's primary methods of detoxifying impurities.

In addition to being palatable to consumers, power yoga can help clients reprogram and retrain old movement patterns. The training goal is a smooth, orchestrated performance by the entire body. And with special focus on coordinated movement, proper alignment and a supple and stabilized core, power yoga can also help clients achieve better posture.

Getting Started

How can you integrate power yoga into the work you already do to address postural or structural imbalances in your clients? You can try introducing the power yoga sequence shown here into your clients' current fitness program. To counteract the

disconnected nature of clients' daily movements, this sequence is designed to utilize numerous muscles and movements through a combination of planes and angles. The benefits of these poses include fostering healthy posture, encouraging greater ease and range of movement, and counterbalancing other training modalities.

The six poses presented in this article (beginning with "Cat Tilt Pose") are shown in order of increasing difficulty and should be taught in the sequence indicated. Following these poses, participants can engage in a short cool-down comprising relaxation and breathing exercises.

Educating Clients

As they progress through the poses shown in this article, your clients may feel some of these stretches more on one side of the body than on the other. In fact, the *longer*

Exercises

Cat Tilt Pose

The purpose of this pose is to teach neutral alignment and stabilization. The origin of the movement is in the hips. Roll from the hips and feel the spine flowing up and down on each breath. On the downward movement, make sure there is no force, as this can compress the lumbar spine.

Upward Dog Pose

The purpose of this pose is to enhance posture, open the chest, build a strong back and stretch the hip flexors. With the hands placed beneath the shoulders, roll the shoulders back and move the chest forward and up. Press down on the tops of the feet and engage the thighs and hips to lift the thighs off the floor.

Plank Pose

The purpose of this pose is improve upper-body stabilization and strength. The hands are placed beneath the shoulders, and the thighs and abdominals are engaged to provide stability.

Downward Facing Dog Pose

The purpose of this pose is to simultaneously stretch and strengthen muscles in the legs, back, shoulders and torso. With the hands shoulder width apart and the feet hip width apart, the body forms an inverted V. Press through the centers of the palms to lengthen the torso, and push down through the heels to draw the hips and back up so the spine and the backs of the legs lengthen.

Created with



download the free trial online at nitropdf.com/professional

your clients practice yoga, the more they will become aware of the differences between one side of their body and the other. One benefit of becoming more aware of these imbalances is that clients can start to correct them through conscious physical conditioning modalities like yoga.

Take the time to explain to clients that one side of the body is typically more flexible than the other; the tight side is shorter and stronger, whereas the flexible side is longer and weaker. One way to address this imbalance is to have clients spend more time stretching the tight side and more time holding the strength-building postures on the weaker side. With regular practice your clients will notice that their bodies feel far more comfortable doing the poses and they will see a progressive increase in both structural stability and general range of motion.

In Closing

Introducing power yoga poses into your classes or personal training sessions will benefit your clients and reward you with the satisfaction of having been a catalyst for change in their lives. As an example, three weeks after working with the woman physician from Los Angeles, she was able to bend forward without strain; by her 10th session, she could put on her shoes effortlessly. She went out of her way to thank me on several occasions. “Thank yourself,” I replied. “You made the pain go away. You took the responsibility for adding some balance to your life—not me.”

This story is representative of the millions of baby boomers who are now using yoga as a tool to counterbalance the stresses of life or athletic training. I invite you to try some of these power yoga poses

with your clients and join me in what amounts to a nationwide movement toward greater health and personal power.

Baron Baptiste is the owner of the Power Yoga Institutes in Philadelphia and Cambridge, Massachusetts, and author of the “Awakened Athlete” column that appears in Yoga Journal. He has worked with several football teams, including the Philadelphia Eagles, Denver Broncos and Minnesota Vikings, employing his power yoga program to foster peak athletic performance.

© 2000 by IDEA Health & Fitness Inc. All rights reserved.
Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.

Triangle Pose

The purpose of this pose is to strengthen the feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hip joints, shoulders and neck; the pose also stretches the spine. Place the heels on line. With the lower hand resting on the shin or ankle, ensure that the feet, hips and shoulders are all on the same plane (as if you were wedged between two planes of glass).

Warrior One Pose

The purpose of this pose is to strengthen the feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hip joints, shoulders and neck; the pose also reinforces proper alignment of the hips. Place the heels “on line” by lining them up one in front of the other as though you were walking on a tightrope; ensure the knee of the bent leg stays in line with the ankle and the hips and shoulders are squared to the front of the mat. Keep the arms shoulder width apart with hands extended upward.

Created with



nitroPDF professional

download the free trial online at nitropdf.com/professional