

MAINTAIN YOUR POSITION

Think yoga's something your wife does to get an hour out of the house and away from you on a Tuesday night? Think again - It could stave off those running injuries that can so often stop you in your tracks

Older than your great-grandfather and busy to make a lot more sense, the philosophy of yoga can be traced back over 5,000 years. Dedicated forms of yoga practice include Vinyasa, which dates back to the 19th century and was created by Yogi Swamiarama, who compiled a series of body positions (postures or "asanas") that aim to purify the physical body and ultimately lead to the purification of the mind. We know that sounds like an ad for bottled water, but bear with us.

Hatha Yoga is how most of us experience yoga today, basically old, getting on lots of weird positions and holding them for a while (you know, like you in the first three months of a relationship). Yoga classes used to be filled with girls who understood the power of a fulfilling stretch, but now, thankfully, attitudes are changing in the West. I lived in Asia as a cross-fitter and all the fitters did yoga as part of their warm-up. Now it's pretty standard for athletes in the West to use yoga-routines to aid flexibility.

There are many ways of stretching. PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation), active, passive, dynamic and static. It's hard to always know what the best one is. The truth is they all help. Generally, pre-race you should be doing some dynamic stretching as

this warms up and stretches at the same time. However, if you want to work on pre-habilitation (which helps prevent rehabilitation), static stretches held for 30 seconds or longer make more of a difference. No wonder, then, that coaches have looked east to yoga, which has over 900 static poses that stretch the whole body.

For runners, Hatha Yoga offers loads of poses (positions where you hold a stretch) for the hips, calves, hamstrings, glutes and hip flexors. There are literally hundreds of these that will directly help open up and stretch parts of the body that likely lead to messed-up biomechanics and injury while running.

The six exercises opposite are classed as beginner or intermediate poses. They'll take 20 minutes to complete in total. Hold each pose for three sets of 45 seconds and breathe in a normal way. A more advanced way is to breathe in and focus on where you're feeling the stretch. Then as you breathe out, push through it an extra 10 per cent.

Breathing correctly is a major aspect of correct yoga exercise. The key thing is to stay relaxed or you'll tense up and the stretch will be too painful. Remember your body wants to bend - a little bit of pain is okay.

All you need is space - so no excuses. Bear with it, as it takes two weeks of daily practice to really feel the benefits.

Right: Comfortable, although for newbies the more planks, more flexion that really do yourself an



6 HATHA YOGA POSES DESIGNED WITH THE RUNNER IN MIND

Hold the pose for three sets of 45 seconds and whatever you do, don't forget to breathe

1 PYRAMID POSE (Parsvotthanana)

Technique

- Place your front heel in line with the middle of your back foot.
- Ty and keep hips facing forward as much as possible.

Benefits to runners

- Intensifies hamstring and calf stretch.



3 PIGEON POSE (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana)

Technique

- Ty and keep your front foot away from the rear foot - for most men it will try and slip back towards the hips.
- Body upright and relaxed.

Benefits to runners

- Opens out hip flexors and hip rotators.



5 YOGA PLOW POSE (Hala-asana)

Technique

- Relax, relax, relax - if it feels a bit claustrophobic then place your feet on a chair.
- Adjust a wider arm stance for more stability.

Benefits to runners

- Stretches calves, hamstrings, lower back and neck.



2 LIZARD POSE (Uttan Pristhasana)

Technique

- Push your hips down as low as possible.
- Rest weight evenly on your forearms.
- Keep stretched-out leg off the floor to maximize benefits.

Benefits to runners

- Hips flexors stretched and it opens up the hips.



4 YOGA HEART SQUAT PRAYER POSE (Namaskarasana)

Technique

- Feet out - 45 like a sumo squat. Keep your body upright and sink your butt into the space.
- Use your elbows to push out your knees/legs for a more intense stretch.

Benefits to runners

- Opens hips and stretches groin.



6 HALF FORWARD BEND (Urdha Uttasana)

Technique

- Keep your back as flat as possible. It's harder than it looks.

Benefits to runners

- Stretches the spine, hamstrings and calves and improves posture.

