

# Yoga

BODY & MIND

by Amber Woods

photography: Amy Jones

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How can this age old practice benefit you?

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model

Zonna

hair & makeup

Kim Reyes

for MAKE UP FOR EVER

location

Liriiodendron Mansion



## Dancer's Pose (Natarajanasana)

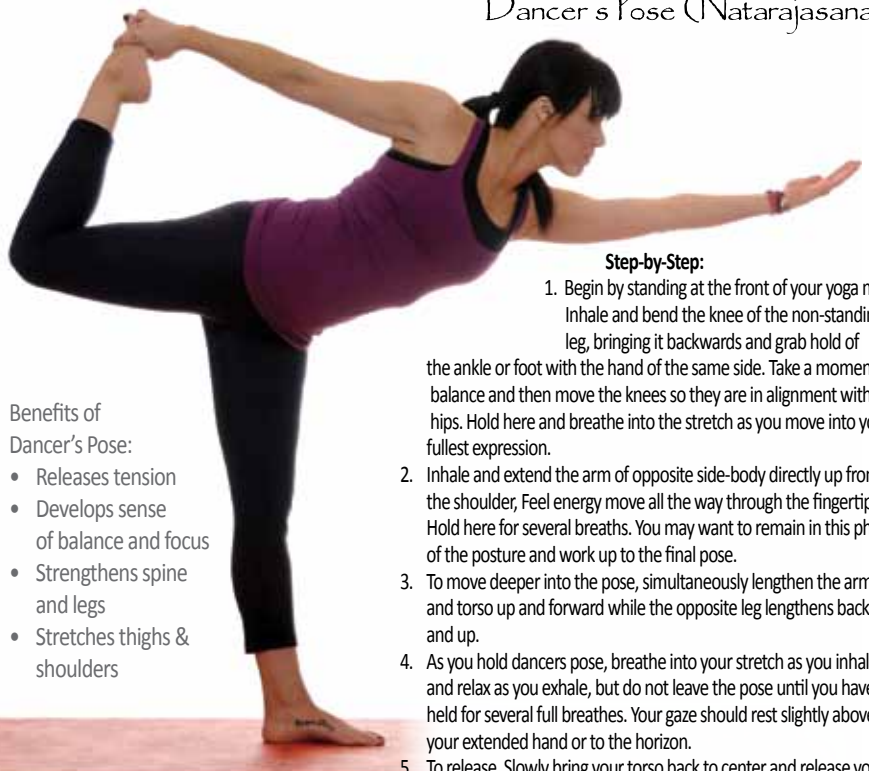
"Yoga is a practice of breath," Isabelle Cameron, a lean and sculpted yoga instructor at The Arena Club in Bel Air softly says to her students at the beginning of every class. And for the brave students who take to the 96-degree room on the basement level of the fitness facility for "Transformation Power Hot Yoga", a 90-minutes class, instructors (oftentimes Isabelle, known to her students as "Izzy") lead them from one yoga pose or "asana" to the next. That sometimes means students are twisted from the torso upward, sometimes balanced on one foot, and sometimes you find yourself staring at your toes. No matter the pose, Izzy is right. In yoga, breathing is of utmost importance.

Those who attempt the postures for the duration of a class, without also focusing on when they inhale and exhale, are likely to stop breathing all together in an effort to focus on what their body is doing now or going to be doing next. And yoga breathing is slightly different than the breathing we do every second or so throughout the day. In fact, most of us never take a "yoga breath" all day long. The most fundamental practice in yoga is deep belly breathing, exhaling and inhaling through the nose.

With students simultaneously balanced on one foot, with another stretched behind them in Dancer's Pose, Izzy reminds them, "You look beautiful. You are perfect, just as you are".

Sure, accolades like those are great for any yogi's self esteem, but the practice of yoga (which is more than 5,000 years old) is beneficial for much more than a person's self confidence. Healthcare professionals are known to tout the benefits of regular yoga practice. Yoga is credited with cleaning blood of waste materials, by stimulating the body's lymphatic system. Regular yoga practice allows for more body awareness, balance, flexibility and a better focus on how we move and use our body in daily life. Sun Salutations (a series of yoga poses strung together and repeated) are used to get the blood flowing, and to help build lean muscle and bone strength. And more than just physical benefits, many people believe yoga sharpens and frees the mind. More traditional yoga practices include meditation, while more Westernized yoga classes tend to focus on physical fitness.

So what kind of yoga is best for you? That depends on what you would like to get out of your practice. There are yoga classes that are specialized for just about anyone, from "Yoga for Athletes" which oftentimes focuses on stretching often-used muscle groups, to prenatal yoga which consists of modified poses which are safe for pregnant women.



### Benefits of Dancer's Pose:

- Releases tension
- Develops sense of balance and focus
- Strengthens spine and legs
- Stretches thighs & shoulders

### Step-by-Step:

1. Begin by standing at the front of your yoga mat. Inhale and bend the knee of the non-standing leg, bringing it backwards and grab hold of the ankle or foot with the hand of the same side. Take a moment to balance and then move the knees so they are in alignment with the hips. Hold here and breathe into the stretch as you move into your fullest expression.
2. Inhale and extend the arm of opposite side-body directly up from the shoulder, Feel energy move all the way through the fingertips. Hold here for several breaths. You may want to remain in this phase of the posture and work up to the final pose.
3. To move deeper into the pose, simultaneously lengthen the arm and torso up and forward while the opposite leg lengthens back and up.
4. As you hold dancers pose, breathe into your stretch as you inhale and relax as you exhale, but do not leave the pose until you have held for several full breathes. Your gaze should rest slightly above your extended hand or to the horizon.
5. To release, Slowly bring your torso back to center and release your bent knee, returning to standing position. Reverse and practice pose on the other side of your body for the same length of time.

## Warrior II (Virabhadrasana II)

### Step-by-Step:

1. Stand at front of your yoga mat. With an exhalation, step your feet 3.5-4 feet apart. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides, shoulder blades down, palms down.
2. Turn your right foot slightly to the right and your left foot out to the left about 90 degrees, as shown. Align your left heel with the right heel, both heels down on your yoga mat. Firm your thighs and turn your left thigh outward so that the center of your left knee is in line with the center of your left ankle.
3. Stretch arms away from the space between your shoulder blades, parallel to the floor. Do not lean your torso over your left knee; keep it directly over your pelvis.
4. Stay for 30 seconds to a minute, as you breathe. Inhale before straightening your knee to release. Reverse feet and repeat for the same time on opposite side of body.

### Benefits of Warrior II:

- Strengthen and stretch legs
- Stretch groin muscles, chest and lungs, shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases physical stamina
- Relieves backaches, especially through second trimester of pregnancy for women
- Used to treat physical discomfort related to Carpel tunnel syndrome, flat feet, and osteoporosis

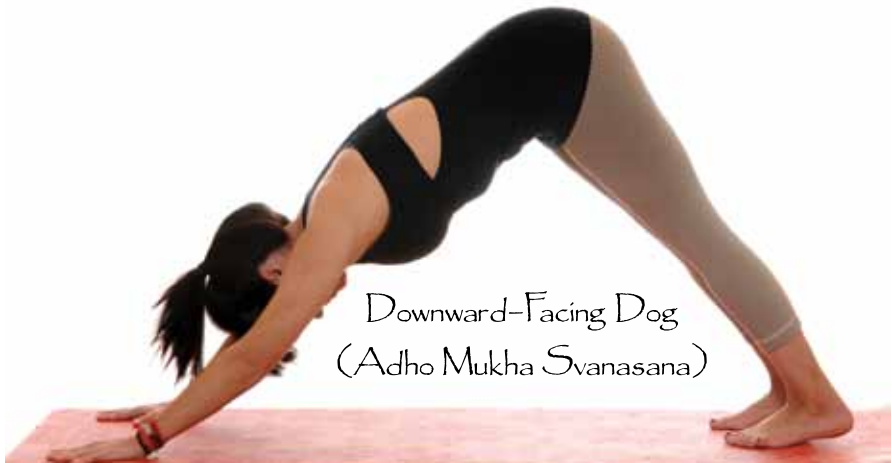


Peat Puro, who owns Fluid Earth Yoga in Bel Air focuses on personalized and private yoga classes at students' homes. He believes bringing a personalized yoga practice to a person's residence offers them the privacy and comfort of practicing in their own space, while receiving one-on-one instruction. Peat teaches several different types of yoga including Therapeutic, Hatha and Vinyasa and when not teaching private lessons, he is also a regular instructor at Peace Yoga in Bel Air where classes vary from "Yoga Basics" to "Hot Vinyasa" to "Mommy & Me" where students actually bring their babies to class and marry parent-and-child bonding with gentle stress-relieving yoga poses.

Since January is a time for change and renewing and identifying personal goals, it's also a great time to begin your personal yoga journey (or reintroduce yourself to your practice). If an enviable lean and toned body isn't enough motivation to get started, take a deep yoga breath and close your eyes: now envision yourself with increased flexibility, less stress and less anxiety and better nights of sleep.

Visit a local studio and find a practice that benefits your mind and body and fits into your life. Namaste!

*Yoga Studios Referenced Above:*  
*The Arena Club Hot Transformation Yoga:*  
 410-734-7300  
*Peace Yoga:* 410-937-5026  
*Fluid Earth Yoga:* 410-652-7235



Downward-Facing Dog  
 (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

**Step-by-Step:**

1. Come onto your yoga mat, on your hands and knees. Set your knees directly below your hips and your hands slightly forward of your shoulders. Spread your fingers on both hands, index fingers should be parallel and toes turned under.
2. Press spread fingers actively to your mat, and lift along your inner arms from the wrists to the shoulders, pushing your shoulder blades together as you rise, drawing them toward your tailbone. Keep your head between your upper arms as to not strain your neck by letting it hang loosely.
3. Push back into feet that are firmly planted about 6-8 inches apart near the back of your yoga mat. Press your heels as close to the ground as comfortable, and settle into your fullest expression of the pose as your shoulder blades are actively being pulled toward one another and back toward your tailbone and your heels are reaching for the mat.

**Benefits of Downward-Facing Dog:**

- Calms the mind, energizes the body
- Strengthens arms and legs
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Stretches shoulders, calves, feet muscles, hands and back
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, back pain, fatigue
- Used as therapy for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sinusitis

Upward Bow or Wheel Pose  
 (Urdhva Dhanurasana)



*Please note: Upward Bow is considered an advanced yoga pose and should not be practiced without professional supervision and your physician's approval.*

**Step-by-Step:**

1. Laying on your yoga mat flat on your back, bend your knees and set your feet on the floor with your heels as close to your tailbone as comfortable. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your head, palms flat on mat and close to your ears on either side of your head, fingers pointing toward feet.
2. Press your feet actively to the mat, exhale as you raise your tailbone up toward the ceiling or sky, and lifting the buttocks off of the floor. Keeping your arms parallel, continue to take 2 or 3 deep breaths.
3. Press your feet and hands firmly into your mat, as you pull your shoulder blades together and toward your tailbone. Turn your upper thighs slightly toward one another, lift pubic bone toward your naval.
4. Turn your upper arms outward, keeping your weight focused on the middle of your fingers on both hands. Spread your shoulder blades across your back and gently let your head hang toward your mat.
5. Stay in the pose between 5-10 seconds and gently release by lifting head and lowering body slowly.

**Benefits of Upward Bow or Wheel Pose:**

- Strengthens arms, legs, wrists, buttocks, abdomen and spine
- Stimulates thyroid & pituitary
- Increases energy & counteracts depression
- Used as therapy for asthma, back pain, infertility, and osteoporosis

**Cautionary Notes:** Not every yoga pose is designed for every person's body and personal ability. It's always an option to practice yoga while near a wall for support. If any pose is uncomfortable, modifications can be made to meet individual needs. Please consult your physician and/or a professional yoga practitioner before beginning any fitness routine, including any new yoga practice.