

Yoga For People Over 50

If you've never done yoga before, the thought of starting over age 50 may seem daunting. However, yoga is far from being a "one size fits all" type of activity, as you can modify it to fit your needs without hassle.

In fact, everyone should be performing yoga, especially as you age; since it can play an important role in helping you maintain flexibility and strength through a range of low impact movements.

Strengthening the bones, muscles and increasing your flexibility skills improves mobility in aging, one of the key considerations for all adults heading into their senior years.

Yoga is also an excellent mind-body exercise that greatly lowers stress, which is a culprit in numerous chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, obesity and even dementia conditions, such as Alzheimer's.

Even better yet, yoga is free, as you do not require expensive equipment, and can be done in the comfort of your home. Not sure where to start? Join a yoga class, or hire a personal yoga trainer.

Here are some of the best yoga poses for healthier aging, incorporate these into your routine to get maximum benefits of yoga:

The Warrior Pose

The warrior pose is a great standing pose that helps increase strength of the leg muscles, as well as improving bone density (as standing is known for doing). In addition, this pose also boosts flexibility in the hip region and inner thighs.

To perform:

- Stand with feet shoulder distance apart, with arms down to the sides.
- Turn to one side, and step your foot out about 3 to 4 feet, on the same side. Rotate your foot about 90 degrees.
- Raise your arms while inhaling, to shoulder height.
- Exhale, and simultaneously bend the outstretched leg to a position as close to parallel to the floor as possible.
- Keep your other leg straight, and hold pose for 30 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

The Bridge

The bridge pose is extremely popular, owing to its benefits of strengthening the lower back muscles and hips. The bridge pose may be particularly useful for persons with lower back pain, or those who spent much of their lives at a desk job.

To perform:

- Lie on a stable surface (the floor preferably) with your back and feet flat on the floor and bend your knees. Keep arms to your sides.
- Press hands into the floor as you breathe in.
- Exhale and contract abdominal muscles as you simultaneously push your hips and butt off of the floor.
- At the top position your back and upper legs should form a 45 degree angle, resembling a “bridge.”
- Hold for 30 seconds and then slowly return to the start position.

Legs Up A Wall

This pose is beneficial for stretching the hamstring muscles, similar to bending over but without the stress on the lower back muscles. This pose is also useful for persons with poor circulation, as it drains blood flow from the legs and recirculates it through the heart.

To perform:

- Sit on the floor with legs close to a wall.
- Shift your body so that your legs are up the wall, bracing the back of your feet against the wall.
- If you are unable to stretch your feet in that position, move your hips away from the wall a bit, and place the bottom of your feet on the wall.
- Stretch your hamstrings for a period of 30 seconds, then slowly take your feet off the wall.

The Tree Pose

If there was one pose representing yoga in all its glory, it would be the tree pose. At the core of the tree pose's benefits is improving balance, very important in healthy aging to help prevent falls and tumbles, since falls are the one cause of injury in the aging population.

To perform:

- Stand with feet together, and hands with palms together, overhead.
- If this is your first time, raise one leg slightly up, so that toes are gently touching the ground but with heel touching the ankle of the next leg.
- Stay balances in this position for approximately 30 seconds.
- Repeat with other leg.

As your balance improves, raise your toes and heel higher so that your non-working leg is fully bent at the knee.