

Article's Month Year | chopra.com | Melissa Eisler | Fitness

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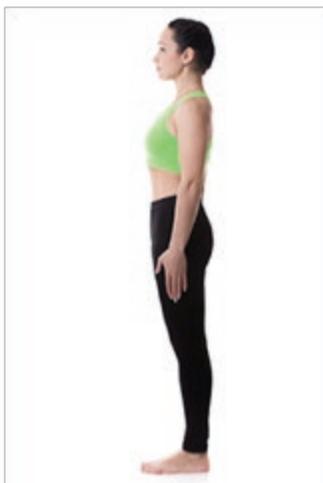
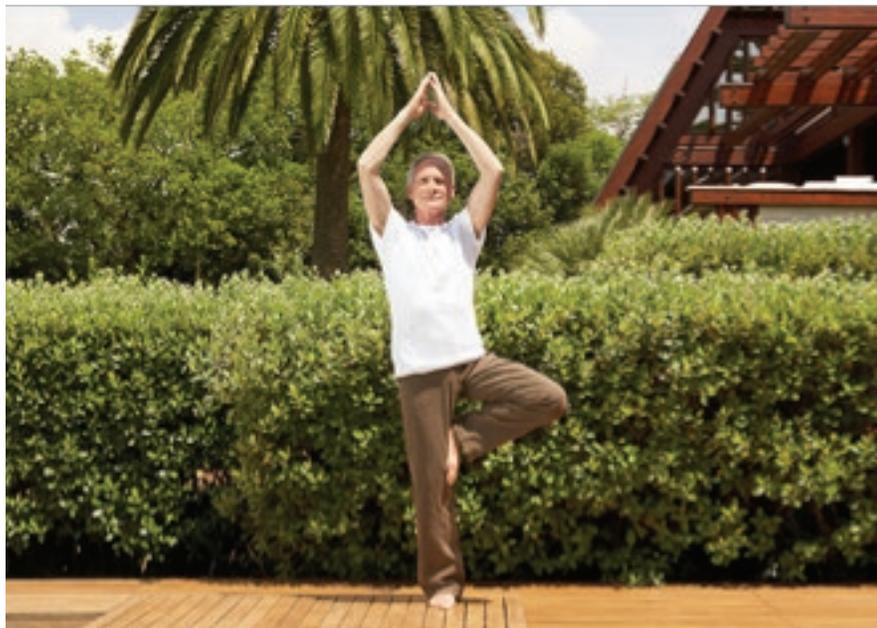
## 5 Beginner Yoga Poses for Seniors

If you've reached senior status and you're not already practicing yoga, now's a good time to begin.

Yoga is a great form of exercise for seniors. Physically, yoga can increase flexibility, mobility, strength, and balance through low-impact movement. Psychologically, it can help keep your mind sharp and increase positive emotions, mindfulness, and awareness of Self.

But the practice of yoga in the West has become intimidating—especially to seniors just starting out. If your goal is not to look like a human pretzel, but rather to increase your balance, stability, and flexibility as you age, a yoga class can seem daunting and more suited to young acrobats.

Rest assured, yoga is for everyone—you just have to find the style of yoga best suited for your needs. These five yoga poses are a great starting sequence for seniors looking to begin a daily yoga routine.



### 1. Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Mountain pose is a great pose for seniors to start with because it's low impact and helps you focus on your breath and become aware of your body. It's also the foundational pose for all other standing poses. When practiced regularly, this pose can help you improve your posture and reduce back pain.

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel, with your arms at your side.
- Spread your toes and press them into the floor; distribute the weight of your body evenly into both of your feet.
- Squeeze your thighs and engage the muscles in your legs.
- Align head over your heart, your heart over your hips, and your hips over your ankles.
- With each inhale, lengthen your spine and reach the crown of your head toward the sky.
- With each exhale, allow your shoulders to relax away from your ears and reach your fingertips toward the ground.
- Continue for five to 10 breaths.



## 2. Tree Pose (Vrikshasana)

Tree pose is a great balancing and strength-building pose for seniors. With practice, you should see an increase in stability and muscle strength in your legs.

- Stand with your feet together and palms together at your heart.
- Choose a point of focus for your eyes and hold a steady gaze to support your balance.
- Slowly lift your right foot off the floor and open your knee out to the right side, placing the sole of your foot to the inside of the left leg—at your ankle, shin, and possibly even above the knee, being careful not to rest it directly on the knee.
- Helpful Modification: You can start off by lifting your heel only a few inches from the ground and resting it on your opposite ankle, and using the ball of your foot as a kickstand to help you balance. Alternatively, you can hold onto a wall or piece of furniture for more support.
- Once you feel stable, raise arms above your head, fingertips reaching to the sky.
- Hold this pose for 20 to 30 seconds, if possible.
- Repeat with opposite leg.

## 3. Low Lunge Pose (Anjaneyasana)

Next, slowly transition from standing poses to poses on the mat. Low Lunge Pose stretches your muscles, opens your hips, and releases built-up tension in the body. It is similar to Lunge Pose, but with the added stability of your back knee grounded on the floor to help you balance.

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and arms at your side.
- Step the left foot forward and bend your left knee until your knee is directly over your ankle.
- Lower your right knee to the ground and tuck your back toe under.
- Helpful Modification: Use a blanket or towel below your back knee to take the pressure off the knee.
- Inhale and circle your arms open and lift your fingertips to the sky. Exhale to relax your shoulders away from your ears, still reaching fingertips for the sky.
- Breathe for 20 to 30 seconds, and then return to standing and repeat with opposite leg.



## 4. Bridge Pose (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana)

Bridge pose focuses on balancing and strengthening the muscles in your legs, hips, and lower back, while opening the shoulders and heart. This gentle backbend will open up your chest, helping to keep your spine flexible.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor—hip-width apart and directly under your knees.
- Keep your arms straight along the sides of your body, and shuffle your shoulder blades slightly underneath the body.
- Press the palms of your hands into the floor and engage your quadriceps and stomach muscles.
- Slowly lift your hips and spine, and continue to draw your shoulders under your body, possibly even interlacing your hands below your hips.
- Helpful Modification: Bring a block or bolster under the base of your spine to support your body weight.
- Hold for 30 seconds, and then slowly release, starting to lower from the shoulders until your back and hips are flat on the floor.



## 5. Legs Up the Wall Pose (Viparita Karani)

A great way to end your gentle yoga practice is with this restorative, calming pose. Legs Up the Wall Pose can be helpful in relieving anxiety, mild depression, insomnia, digestive problems, varicose veins, menopausal symptoms, and tired legs.

- Place a folded blanket flush against the wall and sit on the blanket with your right hip touching the wall and your knees touching your chest.
- Shift your weight so your back and shoulders are on the floor, with your sitting bone against the base of the wall and your legs extended up on the wall in a restful position.
- Let your head and chest rest heavily. Relax the rest of your muscles and let your hands rest on the floor or on your belly.
- Helpful Modification: If you have a belt or strap, create a one-foot loop and wrap it around the legs, mid-way between your ankles and knees. Allow the weight of your legs to be supported by the strap.
- Remain in this pose for 10 to 15 minutes, fully releasing and relaxing your body and focusing on deep breathing.

As you work through your yoga practice, keep in mind:

- You can modify these poses to accommodate your physical needs, using props such as blocks, blankets, cushions, or chairs.
- Try to remain relaxed when moving through these poses; it will be much more enjoyable.
- Don't force yourself into a pose. You should not feel pain, only slight discomfort in the form of a stretch.
- Remember to breathe while holding the poses. Deep breathing helps loosen the muscles and improve your respiration.
- Don't forget to enjoy the practice!

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