yoga
for
athletes

15 poses to run, bike and swim better
You’re an athlete: You know that sports like swimming, biking, and running build cardiovascular strength, and they fortify your bones—something the gentler forms of yoga and meditation can’t do—while also teaching you to draw on reserves of willpower to keep pushing hard and moving fast. With improved aerobic fitness, you’ll be able to hold yoga poses longer and with less tension, and to keep your breath calm.

On the flip side, when you regularly practice yoga, your body is resilient, your breath is strong, and your mind is in the present on the mat. Yoga is fantastic for cultivating muscular strength and flexibility, and improving posture. It helps build a durable, injury-resistant body that’s ready to absorb the demands of sports training. And yoga develops body awareness, so you can apply your best form to any sport, which means greater stamina and endurance.

The bottom line: Whether you’re a swimmer, biker, or runner, yoga can be a powerful cross-training tool. Ready to give it a try and explore new dimensions to your mind-body connection in the process? Keep reading to get started!

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This swim sequence builds core strength, especially along the back of the body, to help you find balance and length in the water. It also stretches the shoulders and ankles to give you better range of motion and fluidity in your stroke.

1 Downward-Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana)
Start on hands and knees, with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Spread your fingers wide as you press your hands down, then tuck your toes under and lift your hips. Externally rotate your upper arms, and sink your chest without exaggerating the arch in your lower back. Lower your heels toward the floor, keeping a very gentle bend in your knees. Stay for 10 breaths.

2 Plank Pose with leg lift
Shift forward, shoulders over wrists, and hold a long line from heels to the crown of your head. Keeping your core engaged and torso steady, inhale, and slowly lift your right leg until it’s parallel with the floor; exhale, and lower it. Repeat with the left leg. Continue this slow-motion kick 10 times as you alternate your legs.

3 Extended Puppy Pose (Uttana Shishosana)
Drop your knees, and shift your hips over them. Move your hands forward to stretch your shoulders as you sink your chest toward the floor. Bend at the elbows if you need less intensity. Stay for 10 breaths.

4 Locust Pose, arms extended (Salabhasana variation)
Shift onto your belly. Inhale, and lift your arms, torso, and legs. Hold for 5 breaths, then lift your right arm and left leg higher, as you lower your left arm and right leg; alternate to opposite sides, then go back and forth. This will create a slow-motion flutter kick that includes arm movement to build strength in your back. Repeat for 10 breaths.

5 Child’s Pose with side stretch (Balasana variation)
Come to hands and knees, and then lower your hips over your heels. Point your toes behind you to stretch the tops of the feet. Walk both arms to the right until you feel a pleasant stretch in the left side of your torso, through your latissimus dorsi (flank) muscle and left shoulder. Stay for 10 breaths, and repeat on the other side.
1 Chair Pose (Utkatasana)
Stand with your feet pedal-distance apart. Bend your knees and lower your hips as far as you can without letting your knees go beyond your toes. Keep each knee facing straight over the corresponding foot’s second toe. Lift your arms and keep your gaze level with the horizon. Stay 10 breaths.

> 2 Intense Side Stretch (Parsvottanasana, variation)
From Chair Pose, step your right foot 2 to 3 feet forward, and turn your left heel in about 45 degrees, keeping the outer left foot down to help stretch the left calf. Hinge your pelvis forward over the right leg, maintaining a straight spine and stopping when you feel a stretch in your right outer hip and hamstrings. Stay 10 breaths, and repeat on the other side.

> 3 Lord of the Dance Pose (Natarajasana)
Stand on your right foot. Bend your left knee, taking your left foot in your left hand behind you. Reach your right arm in front of you and lean forward from the pelvis, stretching the chest and left thigh, areas that tighten as you ride. Stay 10 breaths, and repeat on the other side.

> 4 Supported Fish Pose (Matsyasana, variation)
Lie on your back with a rolled towel or yoga mat against the length of your spine. Keep your hips on the floor, with the base of the mat or towel at a comfortable midback spot. Spread your arms to the sides to feel a release across the chest. Stay for 2 to 5 minutes.

> 5 Supported Bridge Pose (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana, variation)
Bend your knees and take your feet hip-width apart. Lift your hips and slide a yoga block below the sacrum and the upper buttocks. Roll your shoulders down toward your spine and open your palms toward the ceiling. If you feel stable, walk your feet away from the block to release the hip flexors, which can become short and tight from cycling. Stay for 2 to 5 minutes.

This bike sequence builds strength in the hips and thighs to help you push on the pedals. It also helps reverse the rounded back that comes from leaning over your handlebars for extended periods.
**1 Standing Pigeon Pose with chest stretch**

Place your outer right ankle above the left knee. Bend your left knee as you lower your hips back and down. Once you feel steady, add a chest stretch by interlacing your fingers at your low back and either squeezing your elbows together or straightening your arms. Hold for 10 breaths, and repeat on the other side.

**2 Garland Pose (Malasana)**

Turn your knees and toes toward the corresponding front corners of your mat, and sit your hips as low as you can. Allow your heels to lift if necessary, placing a rolled mat under them. Take your hands to prayer position, elbows resting lightly against your inner thighs. Hold 10 breaths, and enjoy the release through your feet, calves, thighs, hips, and lower back.

**3 Twisting Low Lunge (Anjaneyasana, variation)**

Standing with your feet hip-width apart, step your right foot forward as far as you can, and bend your right knee until it’s over your right heel, as your back heel lifts. Bring your left palm to the floor under your shoulder. Lengthen your spine by pressing your right hand into your right thigh, and reaching the crown of your head forward. Then twist to the right, as you raise your right hand overhead, arm extended toward the ceiling. Hold for 10 breaths, feeling a stretch in the right outer hip and the piriformis (located deep in the right buttock), as well as a stretch in the left hip flexors. Repeat on the other side.

**4 Reclining Eagle Pose (Supta Garudasana)**

Lie on your back, knees bent, left leg crossed over right. Spread your arms to the sides and drop your knees to the right. Adjust your position as needed so that you feel a pleasant stretch along the outer left hip, through the glutes and the iliotibial band (on the outside of your thigh). Hold for 10 breaths, and repeat on the other side.

**5 Legs-up-the-Wall Pose (Viparita Karani)**

Sit with your bottom on the ground, knees bent, and your right hip close to a wall. Roll onto your left side, relaxing your back so that your torso ends up perpendicular to the wall. Scoot your bottom to the wall, and place the soles of your feet on the wall. Then press into your feet, lift your hips, and slide a rolled mat under your sacrum. Next, straighten your legs, extending your feet toward the ceiling, so that your heels rest against the wall. Spread your arms wide. Keep your neck long, and feel the weight of your legs settle your pelvis into the mat. Hold 5 minutes or longer.

This run sequence balances strength and flexibility in each leg by stretching the major muscles used in running. Reclining Eagle and Legs-up-the-Wall also help speed recovery between workouts by encouraging relaxation and reducing swelling in the lower legs.