



Prairie Yoga Teacher Training 500-Hour Thesis

Yoga For Dancers

By Cara Chang Mutert

Yoga For Dancers

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Preface

This thesis has evolved over time. As the practice of yoga continually reminds us, it was a lesson in patience, surrender, acceptance and right effort.

It began with a passionate idea of teaching a workshop titled Yoga for Dancers, broken into three segments: Yoga for Dancers, Yoga for Injured Dancers and Yoga for Mature Dancers. I set a date in August of 2010, but only had 2-3 interested participants for each workshop. While many others expressed interest, few were able to sign up due to scheduling. Despite having already developed 3 class plans with separate sequences to address the specific issues in each group, I decided to postpone the workshop until more interest and fewer conflicts surfaced.

Growing impatient and eager to complete my thesis earlier rather than later, I decided to offer a class specifically for low back sufferers. This was my backup plan early on, since I have personally suffered from low back pain for years as a result of my years as a dancer and later as a dance teacher. The Low Back Therapy class series began in February. Although I thought I would have people clamoring to get into the class, I only had 5 people sign up. Regardless of low enrollment, I was determined to complete my thesis as soon as possible, so I decided to follow through with the class.

Once again, I had a series of 6 sequences designed, in advance. The plan was to progressively move through the series of classes beginning with sequencing designed to open and release muscular tension. Next, I planned to work on opening and mobilizing their joint restrictions. By the second half of the series, my hope was to focus on strength and stability as well as continue to develop their flexibility and mobility.

Upon meeting the group, however, only one of the students had done yoga before. These women were in a lot of pain, and carried a lot of fear and apprehension about moving at all. I understood quickly I would have to bring the class down several notches. Despite their fear, all of them trusted me enough to give yoga a try, and over the course of the workshop, they discovered an increasing sense of relief not only from their pain, but also seemed to exude a sense of hope that their quality of life could actually improve.

As I continued to teach and adapt this 6-week low-back class series, coincidentally the director of the most established and well-known ballet school in the area reached out to me. She had been attending my gentle yoga class periodically for several months. She asked if I would be interested in teaching a 6-week class series to her advanced company dancers during their upcoming summer intensives. As they often do, things magically fell into place.

As a result, I returned to my original Yoga for Dancers thesis idea, structuring the workshop as a 6-week series specifically for young intermediate to advanced ballet dancers. Here is my thesis for Yoga for Dancers, which addresses the specific needs of young pre-professional dancers and how yoga can not only improve their performance as dancers, but also prolong their dance careers. The classes were taught on Friday afternoons at 2:30 p.m. from June 24th - July 29th at the Judith Svalander School of Ballet in Crystal Lake, IL.

For those that are interested, I've also attached my sequencing for the Low Back Therapy series, both the preliminary and actual, which could be used therapeutically for dancers as well. The preliminary sequencing

would be more appropriate for those dealing with relatively minor low back pain, while the actual sequencing would be better suited for injured or mature dancers suffering from more significant or debilitating pain.

Advanced Yoga Teacher Training (2010-2011)

500-Hour Thesis

By Cara Chang Mutert

Yoga for Dancers

After more than 30 years of dance as a student, performer and teacher, I've experienced injuries from chronic ankle and knee injuries, hip and low back pain, as well as neck and upper back tightness.

Since many of my own dance and yoga injuries have taught me about the dangers of hyper-mobility and the predisposition to injury, I have learned to recognize repetitive movement patterns occurring in young dancers, as well as in older more mature dancers suffering from similar injuries. Yoga provides a natural way for dancers to gain strength and a better understanding of how their bodies work, as well as undo some of the inaccurate physical cueing and counterproductive conditioning that often is a cultural aspect of dance.

My goal is to help young dancers gain a better understanding of correct alignment from an internal perspective, and help them improve their strength to prevent injuries and prolong their dancing careers. For those who are already injured, my hope is to show them ways to correct the repetitive patterns that may be causing the injuries, as well as provide them with yoga tools to reduce pain and regain proper alignment in their bodies. I'd like to offer them ways to understand and manage pain from past and chronic injuries, as well as provide them another outlet to recreate the mind-body-spirit connection, which is why so many former dancers are drawn to yoga. In my experience, it has been a natural and fortunate progression.

Pre- Class Planning:

Like most classes, the challenge will be addressing the different needs and the varying abilities of each individual. Some will be strong and mobile, others will be weak and hyper-mobile, while others might be strong, but not flexible. Some students will prefer a hot sweaty workout, as many are accustomed to in their dance classes, while others might be more naturally introspective and want to focus on the more relaxing poses.

For consistency, classes will begin with a short discussion, asking students how they felt after the previous class and if they had any questions or comments. I'll also ask them to let me know about current areas of discomfort or injuries, and then continue on with the asana portion of class starting with centering and simple breathwork. Eventually, I will introduce how prolonging the exhalation can slow the heart rate, which is a useful and important tool for managing strenuous rehearsals and demanding performances.

Since all the students are dancers, my assumption is that most will be itching to move right away, since that's their comfort zone. As usual, we'll start with breathing to center and turn our attention inward. Then we'll move into a warm-up to open the joints and awaken the muscles and spine by integrating poses that move laterally, as well as extend, flex and twist the spine. From here, the sequence will progressively become more vigorous, moving into sun salutation variations, weaving various poses into it.

The majority of the classes will be sequenced in a considerably challenging vinyasa format to entice and interest these young dancers, who are often not engaged unless they are challenged fully and engrossed in constant

flowing movement. Sequencing will be designed to bring openness into the joints and stability into those areas that are typically hypermobile in dancers, such as the shoulders, knees, spine, ribs and lower back.

Because dancers, particularly young ones, are accustomed to working hard and pushing themselves as far as they can go, I'll begin the series by introducing them to a relatively long vinyasa sequence to challenge them and peak their interest. From there, we'll move into inward turning seated poses, inversions and backbends. As usual, we'll end in savasana.

Once I get a feel of where the students are and establish awareness of more accurate alignment, maybe I'll introduce some partner poses and more challenging poses to keep their interest. As we move toward the end of their summer intensive, the girls will be tired from dancing every day for the past month, so I'll introduce more restorative poses and hopefully they'll be ready to relax, which can often be hard for pitta and vata types, which would describe the doshas, or constitutions, of the majority of ballet dancers.

If it feels right, I'd also like to take time for some discussion later in the session, opening the room up for a group dialogue. For me, the journey of yoga has helped me uncover many things about myself, and understand the cultural conditioning that led to my own self-deprecating tendencies.

In the world of dance, particularly ballet, it has been somewhat of a tradition to often imply to young students that they are not good enough in some way. Whether you're considered too tall or too big, your legs are too big or too short, your turnout is not good enough, your feet are not flexible enough or whatever the case may be... young dancers can often become conditioned into thinking there is something inherently wrong with them.

And while there is truth in the fact that only students of a certain body type, with a high level of intellect, drive, strength and flexibility will ever make it into the world of professional ballet, dance can still be a source of great creative expression, joy and happiness whether as a professional, or not. Again only if they're open to it, I'd like to see if we can explore this subject with students, and shine a light on how they can learn to appreciate their own individual strength and beauty through the internal exploration of yoga.

Yoga for Dancers Workshop

Purpose:

To introduce young dancers to the benefits and joy of yoga, help them gain a deeper understanding of their bodies, learn how to move more safely, with awareness, to avoid injury and prolong their dance careers.

Overall Workshop Goals:

To help dancers experience how yoga can:

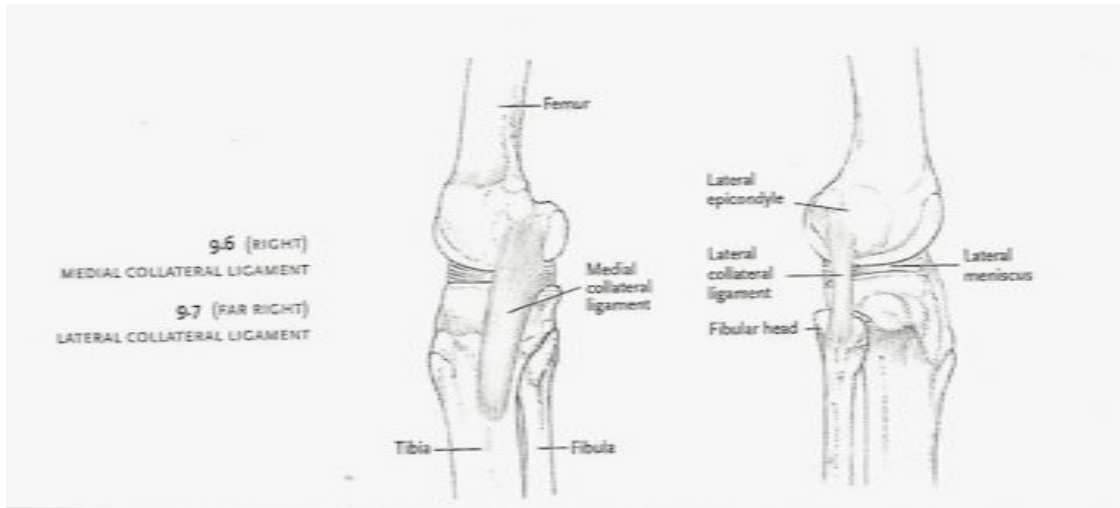
- Reduce and improve tendencies toward hyper-mobility (majority)
- Safely increase flexibility (minority)
- Build core and upper body strength
- Understand correct alignment
- Gain body awareness and appreciation
- Improve breath and endurance
- Apply the use of the breath to overcome performance anxiety
- Learn to move from the core to the periphery or from the inside out
- Heal old injuries
- Prevent new injuries
- Relieve chronic pain in feet, knees and hips
- Strengthen joints
- Lengthen spine

Physical Areas of Focus:

- **Knees** – avoiding hyper-extension by strengthening the knee joint and quadriceps, preventing twists, sprains, meniscus tears and other knee ligament injuries by initiating and maintaining turnout with correct external hip rotation.
- **Hips** – gaining balanced strength in both the abductors and adductors to facilitate proper and safe external rotation, increasing awareness and strength along the inner leg which is often weaker due to constant external rotation, grounding the femur, opening and releasing the iliopsoas and piriformis.
- **Core Strength** – understanding real core strength deep below the layers of the rectus abdominus and learning to access the strength of the transversus abdominus.
- **Low Back** – establishing sacral stability by strengthening the gluteus medius, maintaining correct pelvic alignment which is often hyperlordotic, and strengthening internal rotation with the adductors.
- **Shoulders and Upper Body** – building upper body strength, improving or stabilizing flexibility in shoulder joint, and learning to lift and project from the heart and sternum, and across chest and collarbones.
- **Feet and Ankles** – building strength, lengthening plantar fascia, opening the calves and releasing the Achilles tendons to prevent tendonitis which is common injury among dancers.

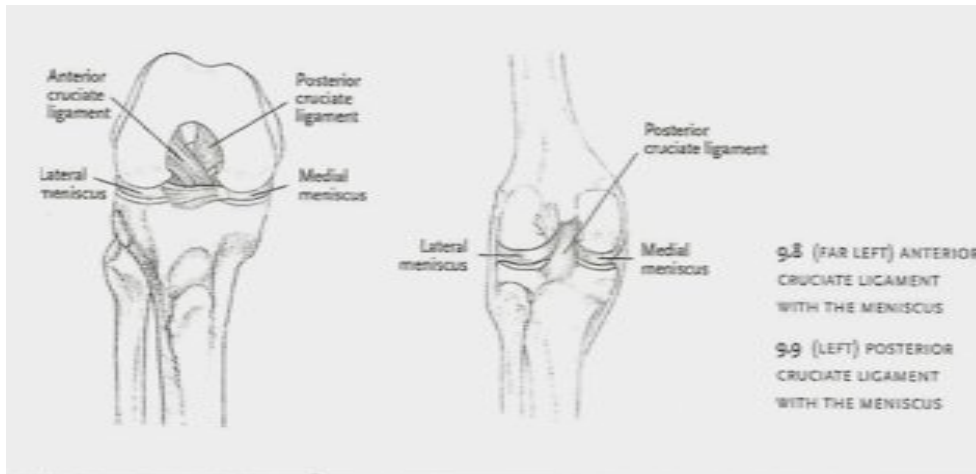
Anatomical Illustrations:

KNEES



Due to repetitive turning involving twisting motions both toward and away from the midline, the knee joint is highly vulnerable to injury among dancers. Underdeveloped adductors caused by constant external rotation, as well as hypermobility in the hips and ankles all contribute to the weakness in the joint. To complicate things further, many dancers have hyperextensive knees. While this creates a beautiful aesthetic line in extension, it results in weak posterior cruciate ligaments and stresses the anterior cruciate ligament creating even more instability in the joint. As a result, both lateral and medial miniscus injuries, as well as lateral and medial collateral ligament tears can occur.





Illustrations by Sharon Ellis and Lauren Keswick, "Yoga Body," by JH Lasater.

HIPS & LOW BACK

Because the spine, hips and legs are all connected, muscles like the iliopsoas, piriformis, quadratus lumborum work together to maintain correct pelvic alignment. When alignment is compromised, it is often these muscles that compensate, causing tightness and pain through the hips and low back.

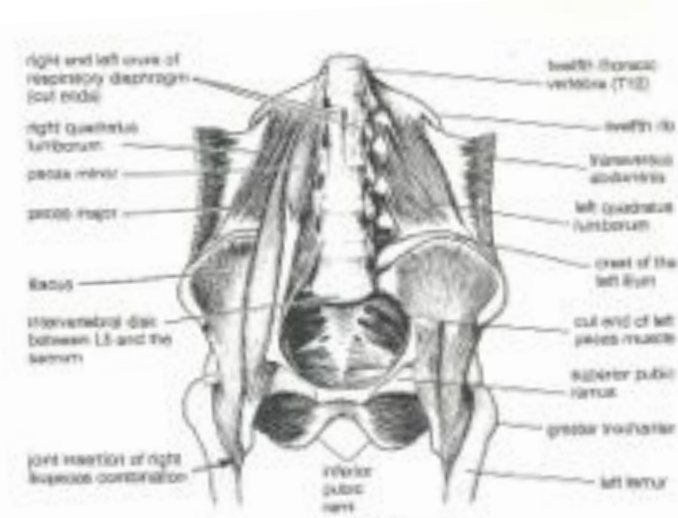


Figure 3.7. Deep dissection of the pelvis and lower abdomen revealing the psoas and iliacus muscles and their conjoined insertions on the femur. Their contraction lifts the thigh, thus bringing about hip flexion (Sappey).

Illustrations by H. David Coulter, "Anatomy of Hatha Yoga"

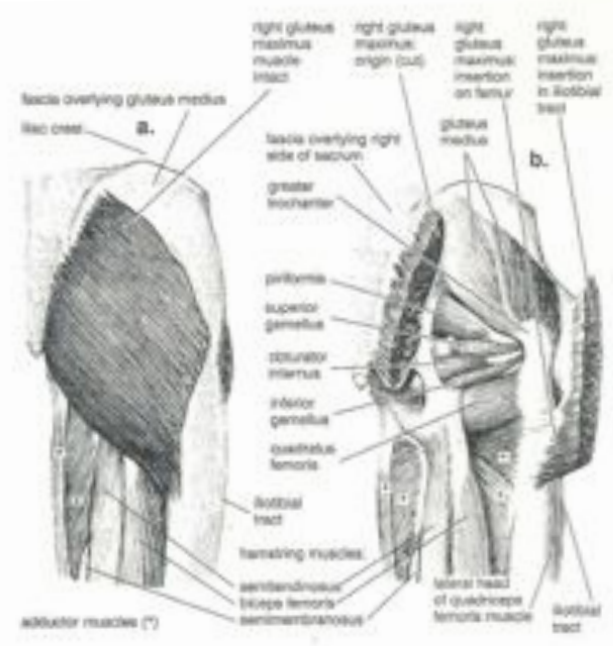


Figure 3.8. Right gluteal region and upper thigh from behind, with superficial dissection on the left (a) and deeper dissection on the right (b). The partial cut-away of the gluteus maximus on the right (b) exposes deeper muscles of the hip, as well as a clear picture of the distal insertion of the gluteus maximus to the ischiofemoral tract and the femur (Sappey).

The muscles in the gluteus form the core of movement through the hips and provide the strength required to stand on one leg. Increasing strength in the gluteus medius and the adductors can help to gain stability in the pelvis, while understanding the role of the piriformis, obturators and gemelli for external rotation can improve correct alignment when engaging turnout.

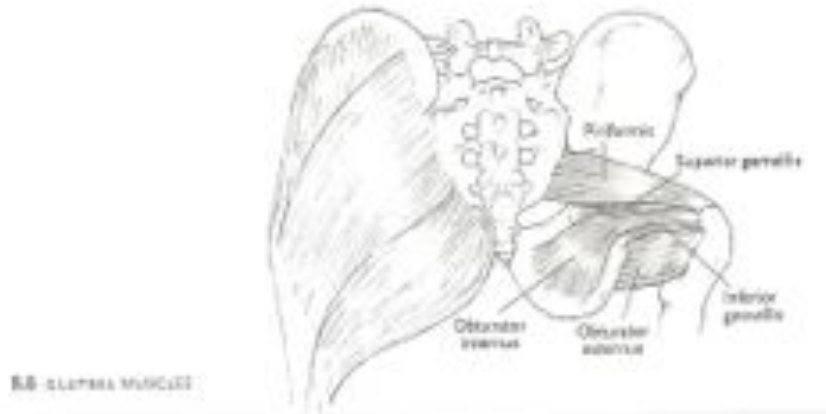
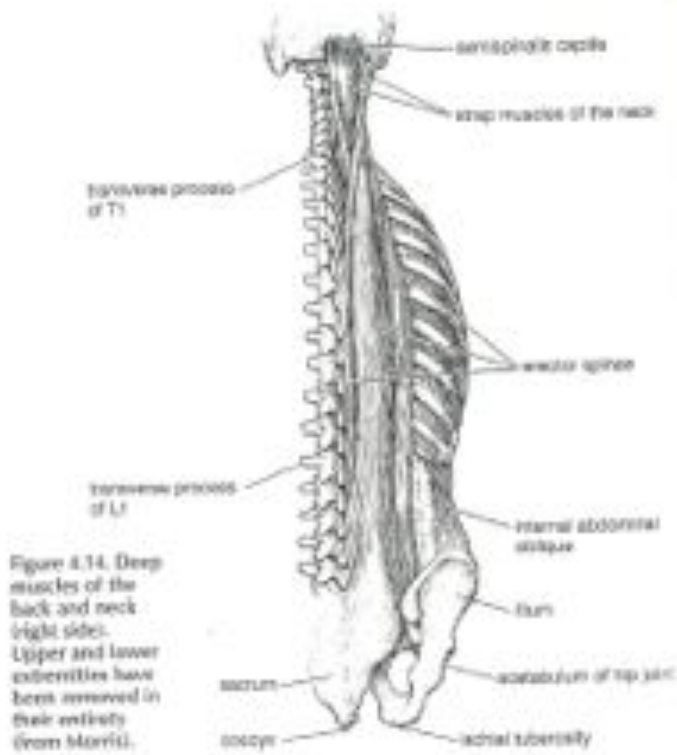


Illustration by Sharon Ellis and Lauren Keswick, "Yoga Body," by JH Lasater.

The erector spinae is responsible for extending the spine, maintains the erect position of the spine when standing and sitting, and also help in side bending and twisting along with the abdominal muscles. These muscles are therefore engaged and activated in all standing, seated, twisting, lateral movement and backbending poses. Creating balanced strength here, then, is again key in establishing spinal stability and reducing back



pain.

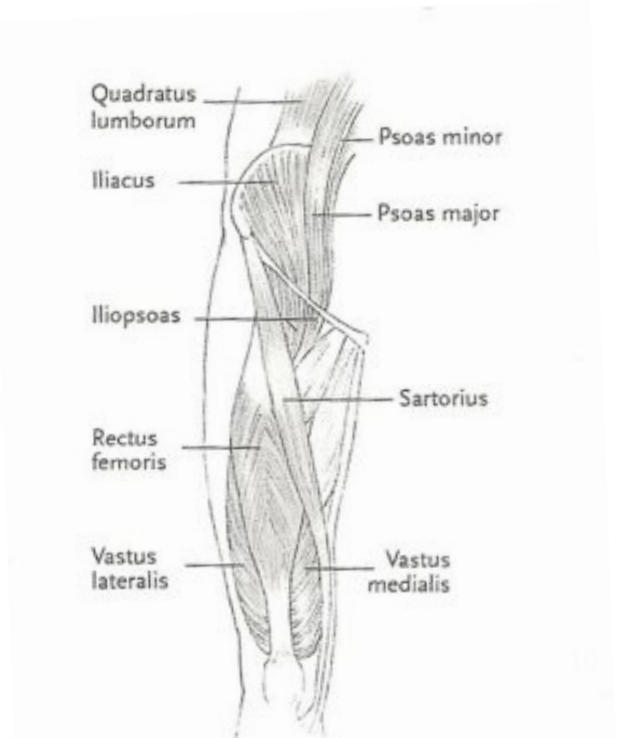
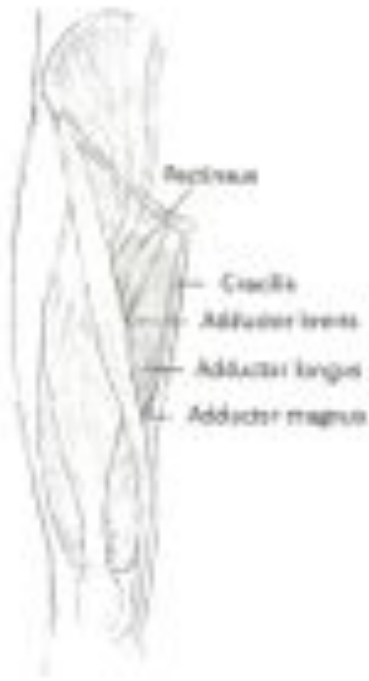


Illustration by David Coulter, "Anatomy of Hatha Yoga"



Leg illustrations by Sharon Ellis and Lauren Keswick, "Yoga Body," by JH Lasater.

The muscles in the thigh and pelvis are some of the strongest and most important in the body and form the floor of the pelvis and stabilize the hips. The quadratus lumborum, iliopsoas, and sartorius (above) are all connected to the hips and pelvis and serve as an anchor to the spine.

The adductors and internal rotators (left) in the medial thigh muscles are typically weak in dancers due to continuous abduction in external rotation. Strengthening and learning to activate these muscles are critical in creating stability in the hips, low back and knees.

Outline for Class Discussion:

- I. Why yoga for dancers?
 - Strengthens
 - Lengthens
 - Stabilizes
 - Improves body awareness and understanding
 - Teaches how to move from within, from the inside out
- II. How is yoga like dance?
 - Improves flexibility within safe parameters
 - Integrates intuitive movement
 - Connects the body and spirit
 - Requires focused muscular control and mental clarity
 - Integrates strength, flexibility and fluidity of movement
- III. How can it strengthen you?
 - Improves muscular strength by holding poses
 - Focuses on alignment
 - Improves joint stability
 - Works with breath for endurance
- IV. How can it increase your flexibility safely?
 - Allows muscle fibers to lengthen and release through long holds
 - Focuses on alignment

- Engages opposing muscles as you stretch
- Works with breath to deepen into stretches

V. How can it make you a better dancer?

- Improves your understanding of your body
- Enhances your understanding of your personal strengths and limitations
- Fosters joint strength and improved flexibility
- Improves stability
- Increases focus and concentration
- Improves endurance by effectively using the breath
- Encourages you to move more freely and expressively
- Provides tools to help you to relax and release pre-performance jitters and anxiety
- Shows you how and why you need to take time to heal and replenish your body
- Prolongs your career and longevity

Workshop Outline:

Class 1: Body Awareness, Breath, Strength – Young dancers already have a strong mind-body connection, but most have not learned to listen to their bodies and generally push through the pain for the sake of the art. Because a flat stomach is part of the dance aesthetic, most do not know how to breathe fully. Also common among many young dancers is their reliance on their very flexible bodies to recreate the outer form of the steps and exercises rather than working from a place of strength. The purpose of this class is to bring awareness to all three of these areas.

Class 2: Twists & Low Back – Because of hyperlordosis in the spine, dancers often suffer from low back pain, since the most flexible area of their spines take the brunt of all the flexions and extensions they do in all their exercises at the barre, in the centre and across the floor. Class will explore ways to activate areas that are underused and release, strengthen and stabilize the areas that are overused.

Class 3: Core Strength and Stability – Dancers know that they need a strong core, but like most of western society, many of them often confuse core strength with the surface abdominal muscles, the rectus abdominus or 6-pack abs. This class will explore new ways to access the deeper layers of the core to provide them more strength and stability and learn to work from the inside out.

Class 4: Upper Body Strength & Endurance – Most dancers and people in general think of yoga as “stretching.” With some exceptions, the majority of accomplished dancers don’t really need to stretch more than they already do in class and rehearsals. My goal with this class is to show these predominantly pitta/Type A dancers that yoga is more than the floor stretches they’re accustomed to. I want to show them that yoga can be challenging as well. Since ballet generally focuses on strengthening the feet and legs and is often more concerned with the line of the upper body rather than strength, the upper body is often somewhat neglected. But when partnering comes into play, upper body strength becomes a critical factor not only in the fluidity of lifts, but plays a role in safety as well. My hope is to show them how yoga can help them become stronger more well-rounded dancers.

Class 5: Hips and Working from the Inside Out – Hip pain is one of the most common complaints of just about any dancer you’ll meet. Most of this comes from constant external rotation in the hips, overuse of the abductors, and underuse of the adductors for internal rotation. We will work on understanding the importance of balancing both sides of the strong muscles that support leg and as well as the muscles that facilitate hip mobility. We will also focus vyana vayu, working from the core outward, so they can experience not only the strength and power they can generate by moving from their center but the creative expression they can project outward if they learn to initiate their movement from within.

Class 6: Healing & Restorative: My goal is to help injured or exhausted dancers who experience pain due to hypermobility and repetitive movement patterns learn tools and techniques to heal their body, gain strength and prevent future injuries. As the last class in the series and to help the dancers prepare for their final workshop performance later that day, this class will be therapeutic and restorative in nature.

CLASS 1

Body Awareness, Breath, Strength

Class Focus: Stability vs. Flexibility. Understanding hypermobility. Strengthening knees and adductors. Improving hip mobility and strength.

Key Actions: Lift the kneecaps and quadriceps; lift the sternum up and lengthen the tailbone down, notice any areas of tightness, and breathe into that area to release it.

Sequence 1:

1. Siddhasana-Breathing, centering
2. Warm up- Lateral stretch, forward bends, seated twists
3. Bidhalasana
4. Adho Mukha Svanasana
5. Uttanasana
6. Tadasana



7. Basic Surya Namaskar - Slow
8. 2nd and 3rd rounds include:
 - Utkatasana
 - Virabhadrasana I
 - Parsvottanasana
 - Parivrtta Parsvakonasana
 - Virabhadrasana II
 - Parsvakonasana
 - Trikonasana
 - Ardha Chandrasana
 - Anjanasana
9. Eka Pada Rajakapotasana
10. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana 1,2,3
11. Jathara Parivartanasana
12. Savasana

As expected, students found the poses easy to replicate.

Benefits of Key Pose: Ardha Chandrasana

- Strengthens hip abductors
- Opens chest and shoulders
- Develops muscular stability in standing leg and along the hip and torso of extended side
- Engages quadriceps
- Challenges neck, hip and spinal alignment against the pull of gravity

Post-Class Observation: Approximately 25 students were in attendance. Class was scheduled at the end of the week on a Friday afternoon, after a week of dancing about 6-8 hours a day. I asked Lauren and Marielle, two college-aged company dancers who have been attending my yoga classes regularly at my own studio, to demonstrate up front.

Students were, as anticipated, disciplined and extremely flexible. There were, however, 3 boys who were not surprisingly, less flexible. They were particularly tight in their backs and hamstrings.

Students said they had all participated in yoga classes before, so they were familiar with some of the basic poses. When I asked them what they were looking for, they said they wanted to stretch. When I asked them what injuries I should know about, several mentioned ankle, knee and hip injuries.

The class was a very slow flow designed to give me a chance to observe patterns and tendencies in the group, as well as to establish better alignment and understanding of the poses. They did well in replicating the external shape of the poses, but there was not a lot of vyana vayu, energy expanding from their center outward. Their energy was limp, confirming one of my overall goals of helping them learn how to move and dance from the inside out.



The male dancers, reflective of the majority of the population, were relatively tighter than the majority of the females in class.

Students seemed relaxed and refreshed after class, but I wasn't sure if class was what they had expected.

CLASS 2

Twists, Low Back

Class Focus: Relieving low back pain. Improving pelvic stability. Strengthening muscles that support the spine.

Key Actions: Draw the low belly in; lift the front hip points up and relax the tailbone down; press the outer hips in.



Phalakasana, plank, can help strengthen the abdominals to bring more stability into the low back.

- 3 legged dog- Ekapada Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Plank - Phalakasana
- Salabhasana
- Urdva Mukha Svanasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 8. Ardha Bhikasana
- 9. Dhanurasana
- 10. Crocodile - Nakrasana , rest on belly
- 11. Adho Mukha Svanasana with low back press
- 12. Balasana with low back press
- 13. Ardha Matsyendrasana
- 14. Supta hasta padanghustasana 1,2 & 3 with strap
- 15. Apanasana
- 16. Savasana

Sequence 2:

1. Siddhasana
 - Forward bends
 - Neck release
2. Bidhalasana
3. Balasana, with lateral stretch & twist
4. Chakravakasana
5. Adho Mukha Svanasana
6. Uttanasana
7. 2 Sun Salutations integrating
 - Virabhadrasana I
 - Parsvottanasana
 - Parivrtta Parsvakonasana
 - Virabhadrasana III
 - Parivrtta Trikonasana



Supta Hasta Padanghustasana is one of the best poses to open the hamstrings and strengthen the adductors in the lower leg, while maintaining neutrality in the spine.

Benefits of Key Pose: Parivrtta Parsvakonasana

- Stretches the side body
- Relieves hip and low back pain
- Opens the groin
- Stabilizes the hip and knee joints
- Tones the abdominals
- Develops balance and focus
- Offers deep stretch in hips and shoulders



Post-Class Observations:

Before class began today, students said they were tired and their low backs and quads were sore. They said they felt “awesome” after the last class, and particularly enjoyed savasana. The boys moved up front and center, so that was a good sign.

One of the dance teachers at the studio told me that students reported the class was “intense,” following the last class. Not sure what that meant, however, one of the student mentors, Lauren, said the younger students were mostly familiar with yoga that involved stretching and relaxing, and perhaps didn’t realize yoga’s ability to increase strength and stability.

Since stretching, from my perspective, is a lower priority for these hypermobile dancers, I think it’s important that they realize that yoga can offer them much more in terms of improving their performance. I may integrate a

longer restorative section for the next class. However, I still hope to emphasize strength and stability for the majority of the class.

CLASS 3

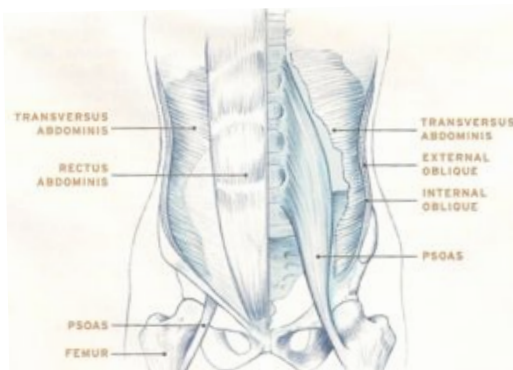
Core Strength & Stability

Class Focus: Increasing core strength to reduce hypermobility. Avoiding rib displacement and hyperlordosis.

Key Actions: Press the outer legs in; draw in slightly on the lower front ribs; lift from the root of the pelvis to the navel.

Sequence 3:

1. Child Pose
2. Broken Toe Pose
3. Baddha Anguliyasana
4. Vajrasana & Garudasana
5. Ardha Adho Mukha Svanasana- Half Dog
6. Salabhasana – in 3 parts
7. Adho Mukha Svanasana
8. Roll up – engage abdominals
9. Urdva Hastasana with lateral stretch right and left
10. 2 rounds of Surya Namaskar integrating...
 - Utkatasana
 - Internal shoulder rotation in Virabhadrasana I
 - Parvritta Parsvakonasana – modified
 - Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana, circle ankles
 - Virabhadrasana III
11. Dolphin, elbow plank with twist
12. Bhikasana
13. Setubandha
14. Urdhva Dhanurasana
15. Supta Dandasana
16. Halasana
17. Sarvangasana
18. Jathara Parivartanasana- deep twist variation
19. Savasana



Class sequencing included poses to strengthen the transversus abdominus and the internal and external obliques.



Virabhadrasana III was another core strength pose, while urdhva dhanurasana was included to open the psoas, hip flexors and lengthen the rectus abdominus.

Benefits of Key Pose: Virabhadrasana III

- Strengthens muscles along the spine
- Develops posterior shoulder strength
- Opens chest
- Promotes awareness of correct hip alignment
- Builds abdominal and core strength
- Improves balance and focus

Post Class Observation:

Class went well however, I could tell they were tired before we even began. Thought the big backbend might help give them a little more energy. They seemed excited to do something that seemed more challenging and different. Many of them did struggle with Virabhadrasana III, which I think surprised them. Balancing on one leg comes fairly easily for dancers, but I had a feeling the internal rotation might throw them for a loop and challenge them. They were ready for Savasana.



CLASS 4

Upper Body Strength

Class Focus: Strengthening the upper body. Challenging the class with a strength-building class.

Key Actions: Press into the inner edges of the hands at the roots of the forefingers and thumbs; draw the elbows in towards the midline; release the shoulder blades down the back.

Sequence 4:

1. Breathing
2. Lateral Stretch
3. Bidhalasana
4. Adho Mukha Svanasana
5. Uttanasana
6. Roll up through spine to Tadasana
7. 2 rounds Surya Namaskar integrating
 - Virabhadrasana I
 - Parivrtta Parsvokanasana with palms in anjali mudra
 - Uttanprishthasana - Lizard
 - Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana
 - Eka Pada Apanasana
 - Virabhadrasana II with ghomukasana arms
 - Parsvakonasana with bind
 - Trikonasana with bind
 - Ardha Chandrasana
 - Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana
 - Anjaneyasana
 - Vasisthasana
8. Bakasana
9. Uttanasana
10. Balasana
11. Navasana/Ardha Navasana
12. Matsyangasana – Aadil Open Twist
13. Halasana
14. Psoas twist
15. Savasana



Vasisthasana was one of the peak poses chosen to build upper body strength and challenge complacency.

Benefits of Key Pose: Vasisthasana

- Stabilizes shoulders
- Stretches and strengthens wrists
- Strengthens arms, legs and abdominals
- Opens hip of lifted leg

Post Class Observation:

I told students at the beginning of class that although I knew everyone was tired after their 4th week of intensive dance training, this was the “peak” of the workshop series, and I felt it was important that I show them how yoga can offer more than just a good “stretch.” They seemed reluctant. One student asked if she couldn’t hold a pose anymore (quite a few had specifically commented on down dog), should she just push through no matter what? I explained she could come out of the pose, but better yet, she could stay in the pose, back off a little and then take a few breaths to explore the pose, and see if there was a way she could make small micro-adjustments in her body to make the pose feel better. She as well as others seemed to understand and respond positively to the feedback.



During the class there was some laughter, particularly during parivrtta ardha chandrasana, vasisthasana and bakasana. They seemed challenged and intrigued by their surprising difficulty. Following class, students were clearly more charged and excited after this class. They seemed enthusiastic, energetic and even more thankful than before. It feels as if I made a real connection with them in this class. The familiar, faster flowing movement may have resonated with them.



Sequencing surprised and challenged the dancers, which kept them engaged and enthusiastic throughout class.

CLASS 5

Hips and Working from the Inside Out

Class Focus: Moving beyond striking a pose. Improving adductor strength and knee stability. Understanding external hip rotation and engaging internal rotation.

Key Actions: Expand your energy from the center of your body and extend it out your fingertips and out the soles of your feet; press through the big to ball mound of your foot; spin your inner thighs back.

Sequence 5:

1. Sukhasana, breathing & neck release
2. Bidalasana
3. Balasana w/ twist & lateral stretch
4. Adho Mukha Svanasana
5. Uttanasana
6. Tadasana
7. Surya Namaskar, integrating
 - Utkatasana
 - Virabhadrasana I
 - Anjaneyasana
 - Virabhadrasana III
 - Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana
8. Virabhadrasana II
9. Parsvakonasana
10. Trikonasana
11. Eka Pada Rajakapotasana
12. Balasana
13. Dandasana
14. Trianga Mukha Eka Pada Paschimottanasana
15. Paschimottanasana
16. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana 1, 2, 3
17. Hammock
18. Savasana

Benefits of Key Pose: Trikonasana

- Releases hips and groin
- Opens chest and shoulders
- Strengthens quadriceps and ankles
- Aligns and strengthens neck
- Offers a sense of expansiveness as awareness of the inner body increases



Utkatasana helped to bring focus to vyana vayu, working from the core and expanding outward. Supta Hasta Padanghusthasana with straps and resistance focused on strengthening the hips and knees as well as lengthening the hamstrings.



CLASS 6

Working with Injuries – Healing/Restorative

Discussion:

- I. Common Dance Injuries
 - Knee pain due to hyperextension
 - Knee pain due to forced turnout, weak adductors and ankle pronation
 - Hip and psoas tightness due to overuse of external rotation
 - Low back pain due to both of the above
 - Upper back and neck pain
 - Foot and ankle pain
- II. What can yoga do?
 - Strengthen areas of hyperflexibility
 - Work to counter the overuse of certain joints of muscles
 - Work to offset injuries caused by repetitive movement patterns
 - Work to lengthen muscles that are overused and often accommodating for weaker muscles.
 - Heal injuries
 - Prevent future injuries
- III. How?
 - Using therapeutic yoga techniques to lubricate and open the joints and muscles
 - Use more traditional yoga practice to strengthen weaker areas and lengthen tighter muscles that often may be compensating.
 - Use breathing and isometric exercises to bring awareness to the injured or weak areas to heal and strengthen them.



Balasana is calming to the nervous system and the mind, and releases low back and hip tightness.

Class Focus: Managing injuries caused by hypermobility. Relieving neck, shoulder and upper back pain. Healing and restoration.

Key Actions: Use the breath to release any areas of unnecessary gripping; relax the jaw, tongue and soft palate; soften your brain and facial muscles.

Sequence 6:

1. Constructive relaxation pose
2. Setu Bandha with arms moving with the breath
3. Apanasana
4. Ananda Balasana-Happy Baby Pose
5. Eye of the needle
6. Bidalasana
7. Balasana
8. Adho Mukha Svanasana
9. Tadasana
10. Sun Salutation including:
 - Virabhadrasana II
 - Parsvakonasana
 - Trikonasana
 - Eka Pada Rajakapotasana
11. Balasana
12. Adho Mukha Svanasana
13. Ardha Bhekasana
14. Salabhasana with shoulder assist
15. Supta Dandasana
16. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana 1,2,3
17. Hammock
18. Psoas Stretch
19. Jathara Parivartanasana
20. Savasana



Apanasana softens the hips and massages the sacrum and low back.



Benefits of Key Pose: Salabhasana

- Strengthens the low back
- Develops posterior hip and thigh strength
- Opens the shoulders and chest
- Stretches abdominals



Savasana...

Post Workshop Observation:

Young dancers are a hard sell. I knew this going in, based on my own experience.

I took my first yoga class in the mid-1980's when I was 22, shortly after deciding that my knee injury was too debilitating to continue performing. It was held in the basement of a local YMCA with an older instructor probably in her late 60's with bleached-blond hair wearing a matching light blue leotard and tights. I thought the teacher was weird and freaky, and the poses were too easy. Any corrections she made I thought were pointless, and I thought the whole thing was just not my thing. Now, 25 years later and almost 20 years into my practice, of course I realize I was so wrong, as I still work to refine, hone and fine-tune even the most basic of poses with micro-movements and internal adjustments. The practice never stops challenging me.

But having lived in their slippers and with maybe a little more insight into their mindset, I worked to structure this workshop in a way that would challenge these young dancers, perhaps in a way they didn't expect, to engage them in the process of yoga. I sensed some reluctance at the onset, as well as maybe a little fear and anxiety. I know in the past they had taken yoga from an instructor who disapproved of much of what ballet



dancers do to and with their bodies. From a yoga teacher's perspective, I understand her point of view. But as a former dancer and sharing the sometimes inexplicable passion for dance, I understand that the pain, discomfort and finding the will to push through both physical and mental barriers are ironically part of the joy and culture of the dance world. Very much like professional athletes, being wimpy is not an option. Those who can take it, are the ones who succeed.

So throughout the workshop, I worked to relate with these young dancers. I

reminded them of my own years of dance training and weaved areas of dance analogies into explanations of the poses. I also pointed out poses that would be helpful to support and strengthen their bodies as well as undo some of the destabilizing repetitive muscular patterns they've developed through endless hours of classes and rehearsals. I tried to remind them that taking time to heal, restore and replenish their bodies is part of creating the balance they need to prevent injuries and prolong their dance careers.

While I know I won most of them over, there were still a few holdouts till the very end. I could tell by their expressions in even the most challenging poses when I definitely felt the vibe of "Is that all you got?" A few others probably had the same impression of me as I did of the lady in the light blue tights and leotard!! But despite that, they were disciplined and respectful, and overall I think most of them enjoyed it.

Evaluation:

Based on the student responses to the instructor evaluation, I managed to sway the majority of them to the benefits of yoga. Below are the results of my questionnaire. There were 19 respondents.

1. Did the instructor present material in a clear manner?
2 – Good 17- Great

2. Did the instructor show enthusiasm when teaching?
3 – Good 16 – Great

3. Was the instructor knowledgeable about the information presented?
1- Good 18 – Great

4. Was the information relevant and appropriate for your needs?
3 – Good 16 – Great

5. To what degree did you enjoy this class?
1 – Not very good 2-OK 2-Good 14-Great

6. What exercises were most helpful to you?
Popular responses included:
 - Down Dog
 - 3-legged Dog
 - Child’s Pose
 - Triangle
 - Warrior Poses
 - Savasana
 - Poses that stretched the hips, back and legs.

7. What did you like most about this class?
Responses included:
 - I liked the fact that we kept moving throughout the entire class.
 - Relaxing but challenging
 - Relaxing and strengthening
 - Great to have at the end of the week
 - You know what a dancer needs and explain everything
 - Helped me find my center of strength
 - Savasana

8. What would change or wish was done differently?

Responses included:

- Less Down Dog
- More Relaxing
- Wish we could have listened to classical music
- The end of class
- Nothing

9. Comments?

Responses included:

- It was hard, but very helpful
- I used to hate yoga, but your class made me love it now
- I hope we have this class again next summer
- I felt like this was really needed for us dancers
- I appreciated the individual attention that you gave to the students
- Loved this class! Thank you!

Based on student responses, most of them really did enjoy it and hopefully learned from it. I know that if they continue with yoga or ever pick it up again, at some point in their lives many of them will resonate with it on a deeper level, like I did. Less Down Dog was probably the most common complaint, which is not surprising, since most of them are much less developed in their upper body. I tried to express to them that with time, it actually becomes a pose that you want to return to over and over. Only practice and time will convince them otherwise.

In questions 2 and 4, three people ranked my enthusiasm and class relevance as “good,” rather than “great.” And while “good” is good, it probably truthfully meant ok. As Gabriel says, we need to get tougher on ourselves when evaluating our own teaching performance. So it is food for thought and reason to consider why a few of those students responded to those points somewhat less favorably. It re-affirms that my very mellow, quiet and grounded demeanor, particularly when teaching yoga, can often be misread as dull or uninterested. In this particular case, teaching a room full of young dancers, nothing could have been further from the truth!

So I will continue to work on livening up my speaking voice and physical presence, as well as exuding more excitement and passion as I continue to hone my teaching skills. In addition, for those who did not understand the relevance of yoga as it relates to dance and physical and mental performance, I will work harder on finding and presenting more connections that they can understand and relate to in future workshops, should the opportunity arise again.

Conclusion:

My goal of this class series was to introduce young dancers to yoga in a way that would inspire them to consider practicing yoga as a way to help them become stronger, even better dancers, with fewer injuries so they can dance for an even longer period of time. My hope was this experience would offer these dancers a new and different perspective of yoga and might spark a fire in at least a handful of them so they realize how yoga can support them throughout their dance careers. I hope they now understand that while yoga can be good for “stretching,” it can also provide so much more in terms of strength, endurance, stability and clarity of mind.



Teaching this workshop was a dream come true for me.

Although initially I had thought about introducing partner poses, my time was really limited since I was working with such a large group, so I opted to not integrate those into the sequencing this time around. Additionally, I had hoped to maybe open up the room to discussion about body image and other physical and psychological pressures that young dancers face. But I don't feel I reached quite that level closeness with the girls that would allow for such an intimate discussion. And for the most part, I have to say, there seemed to be a healthier mindset among these students and fewer obsessive tendencies than I have observed in the past. Perhaps things in the world of dance are really changing for the better!

With my thesis and all of this coming to a close, it's almost hard to be done...

Creating and teaching this workshop series was like a dream come true for me. It was a culmination of all that has driven me in my life. It was the coming together of my life passions. As I walked through the room, teaching yoga to a room full of dancers, I realized my worlds had become one. It was almost surreal. It was yoga in action. I am grateful for the experience, my teachers, my students and all that I have learned.



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Appendix

Yoga for Low Back Pain

While these classes were not originally designed specifically for dancers, these sequences would be appropriate for injured as well as mature, aging dancers since low back pain is very common ailment among dancers due to extreme extensions in the spine, repetitive jumping and constant turnout.

As dancers mature, retire and often become instructors, what was once a minor discomfort can evolve into chronic pain. From the hundreds if not thousands of hours spent in ballet class and the subsequent repetitive movement patterns that is then carried into their daily life, basically their whole lives have been spent in external rotation. You'll notice most dancers will walk with their feet turned out and lead with their pelvis. Because of their gate and posture, the sacrum and low back become compressed and their hips become ungrounded, all leading to back pain. Yoga serves as an ideal way to improve and even heal injuries that aging dancers often assume is just a condition of their existence, as I once did.

But even more than relieving physical pain, yoga serves as a way to reconnect with the mind and body, which is what dancers crave. For dancers who can no longer dance due to physical limitations or injuries or may have just been away from dance for many years, it serves as a natural progression. Yoga provides a magical and wonderful way to rediscover joy and strength in their bodies and spirits once again.

Below are two sets of six sequences. The first sequence was designed for moderate levels of low back pain for students who still have a relatively good degree of mobility. The second sequence was created for those suffering from more acute, debilitating pain and who have as a result, been immobile for a considerable amount of time.

Yoga for Low Back Pain

Preliminary Sequencing – Suitable for Moderate Low Back Pain

Classes will be 1 ½ hours long. There will be 6 classes in the series. Classes are all subject to change based on the student ability and levels of pain on any given day. Sequence 1 will begin with a more traditional gentle sequence to familiarize students with the class structure and each other. As the class progresses, we will add more props, variations and partnering to enhance and deepen the effects of the poses, as well as add additional poses. Sequencing will focus on muscular release through the hips and low back, strengthening poses for the core and to support the spine.

Sequence I – Stabilizing

1. Constructive Relaxation Pose – Knees Resting In
2. Eka Pada Apanasana I & II
3. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana I & II with bolster
4. Leg/knee lifts. Build awareness of iliopsoas.
5. Jathara Parivartanasana
6. Hip grounding. Use hands for resistance.
7. Sunbird balance
8. Child Pose
9. ½ Dog - Ardha Adho Muha Svanasana
10. Adho Mukha Svanasana
11. Uttanasana
12. Tadasana
13. Urdva Hastasana
14. Ardha Uttanasana with blocks. Bend and straighten knees. Release tailbone down when bending
15. Virabhadrasana II
16. Vrksasana
17. Supported lunge. Extend opposing arm forward for core strengthening.
18. Wide stance, uttanasana, bend and straighten.
19. Adho Mukha Svanasana
20. Phalakasana modified
21. Lower down to belly. ½ Locust Ardha Salabhasana
22. Sphinx
23. Table
24. Thread the needle twist
25. Child – Balasana
26. Move to dandasana
27. Ardha Navasana
28. Setubandhasana
29. Psoas release
30. Savasana

Sequence 2 – Opening/Mobilizing

1. Constructive Relaxation Pose
2. Cross shins or ankles and rock
3. Gentle twist with feet off the floor R& L
4. Flowing twist sequence. Roll to right side -Stack palms out in front shoulder height
 - Bring left arm over ear and open up to back. Bring arm up back and over to touch palms.
 - Reverse circle with arms.
 - Open left arm to sky and reach back. Bring left leg up then right. Then roll to left to repeat sequence to left.
5. Hip Traction. Supine, feet on floor, knees bent, press using heels of hands into tops of femurs
6. Supta Baddhakonasana – move knees up and down one at a time, then both.
7. Tias core sequence from suptabaddhakonasana. Start with breath, then spine, then head and then arms.
8. Apanasana. Rock.
9. Cross shins or ankles and rock.
10. Supta Dandasana, roll hips down with thumb
11. Apanasana
12. Supta upavista konasana
13. Setubandasana, moving with arms & breath
14. Bidalasana
15. Uttanasana
16. Urdva Hastasana
17. Adho Mukha Svanasana
18. Virabhadrasana II
19. Parsvakonasana
20. Phalakasana modified
21. Ardha Salabhasana
22. Salabhasana
23. Balasana
24. SHP 1 & 3 with straps
25. Jathara Parivartanasana with feet off floor. Slight cobra back bend in low back.
26. Savasana. Supported with bolsters under knees, blanket under ankles.

Sequence 3 - Strengthening

1. Tadasana
2. Urdva Hastasana
3. Ardha Uttanasana
4. Brahmandandasana sequence
5. Circle arm out to R, cross over midline, then to left, then over and down back and up to right. Repeat 3x on each side.
6. Uttanasana w/ blocks.
7. Supported lunge with opposing arms
8. Virabhadrasana III with blocks supported (optional)
9. Anjanejasana with blocks, emphasize lengthen the tailbone down and lift the front hip points up
10. Quad stretch on belly, press the pelvis down
11. Salabhasana
12. Urdva Dhanurasana (optional)
13. Virabhadrasana II
14. Parsvakonasana
15. Phalakasana modified on knees, focus on core strength
16. Ardha Salabhasana
17. Salabhasana
18. Balasana
19. Setubandhasana with block between knees.
20. Gomukasana legs on back
21. Urdva Dandasana
22. Leg Lifts - Alternate
23. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana 1,2,3 with straps
24. Savasana, supported

Sequence 4 – SI Joint focus

1. Discussion poses that can compromise stability:
 - forward bends, like parsvottanasana and even uttanasana
 - backbends, such as virabhadrasana I and anjaneasana
 - twists, like marchiasana ardha matsyendrasana
 - wide angled poses, such as prasarita paddotanasana
2. Tias Cranial sacral spinal rolls with breath/core sequence
3. Clam shell leg lifts, lay on side
4. Supported lunge. Extend opposing arm forward for core strengthening.
5. Wide stance, uttanasana, bend and straighten. Emphasize pelvic stability by engaging gluteus medius by pressing the outer hips in.
6. Standing at wall, Leg on chair press low back toward wall, use strength of glutes and pelvis. Draw outer hips in, legs down, quads up. Open across chest, shoulderblades down.
7. Adho Mukha Svanasana
8. Phalakasana modified on knees.
9. Lower down to belly. ½ Locust Ardha Salabhasana
10. Sphinx
11. Table
12. Virasana
13. Dandasana
14. Ardha Navasana
15. Trianga mukha eka pada paschimottanasana with bolsters and blocks
16. Supta eka pada virasana, supported
17. Setubandhasana, with block under sacrum
18. Psoas release, open knee twist
19. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana with straps and hip traction with lower leg
20. Eye of the needle
21. Supine Gomukasana legs
22. Jathara Parivartanasana, let feet hover off floor
23. Savasana, supported

Sequence 6 – Stabilize, Mobilize, Strengthen, and Restore

1. Balasana
2. Bidhalasana
3. Thread the needle twist
4. Phalakasana modified on knees
5. Ardha Salabhasana
6. Salabhasana
7. Sphinx
8. Low Cobra
9. ½ Dog
10. Adho Mukha Svanasana
11. Ardha Uttanasana
12. Urdva Hastasana
13. Vrksasana
14. Virabhadrasana II
15. Parsvakonasana
16. Supported lunge. Extend opposing arm forward for core strengthening.
17. Virabhadrasana III with blocks supported with arms
18. Wide stance, uttanasana, bend and straighten.
19. Adho Mukha Svanasana
20. Phalakasana modification
21. Balasana
22. Ardha Navasana
23. Toe/heel/ball of foot tapping
24. Setubandhasana with block between knees
25. Eye of the needle/Reclined Pigeon
26. Psoas release
27. Jathara Parivartanasana
28. Savasana

Yoga for Low Back Pain

Actual Sequencing – Suitable for Acute Low Back Pain and Injuries

Below is the actual sequencing followed on each day of the workshop based on student abilities and levels of pain on any given day, which was considerable for all the majority of students in attendance. While the previous sequencing was originally planned, during the first session, I discovered that one of the women experienced severe pain in both seated and supine positions due to a rather broad protrusion in her low back near her tailbone. At this point I realized my plan for the series was out the window for the most part, since the majority of the classes were to be performed in a supine position, to keep the spine neutral and avoid pressure on the lumbar spine. But we adapted.

The actual sequences followed below focused on muscular release through the hips and low back, and strengthening poses for the core and to support the spine.

Sequence I – Stabilizing

1. Constructive Relaxation Pose – Knees Resting In
2. Eka Pada Apanasana I & II
3. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana I & II with bolster
4. Leg/knee lifts. Connect with psoas.
5. Clam shell on back. Each leg 3x, then both.
6. Jathara Parivartanasana – w/ blocks between legs on & bolster for support
7. Sunbird balance
8. Balasana
9. Ardha Adho Muha Svanasana
10. Uttanasana – w/ blocks
11. Tadasana
12. Urdva Hastasana
13. Ardha Uttanasana with blocks. Bend and straighten knees. Release tailbone down when bending
14. Virabhadrasana II
15. Vrksasana
16. Supported lunge. Extend opposing arm forward for core strengthening.
17. Phalakasana - plank modified on knees.
18. Balasana
19. Reclined Pigeon- Eye of the needle
20. Apanasana
21. Savasana

Sequence 2 – Mobilizing/Strengthening

1. Constructive Relaxation Pose
2. Shoulder opening, lift one arm, then the other, then both
3. Knee to chest pose
4. Setu Bandha
5. Apanasana
6. Open knees. Happy baby prep.
7. Table. Bidhalasana.
8. Adho Mukha Svanasana
9. Urdva Hastasana
10. Uttanasana
11. Supported lunge. Alternate arms extending forward.
12. Parsvottanasana with blocks
13. Supported lunge, same arm extending forward
14. Virabhadrasana II
15. Parsvakonasana
16. Utkatasana with blocks and repeat without
17. Phalakasana modified on knees
18. Ardha Salabhasana.
19. Salabhasana
20. Salabhasana with arms forward and side
21. Balasana
22. Ardha Navasana
23. Spinal rolls, breathing into belly
24. Jathara Parivartanasana with blocks
25. Savasana. Supported with bolsters under knees, blanket under ankles.

Sequence 3 – Open & Mobilize

1. Constructive Relaxation Pose
2. Shoulder Opener with arms
3. Psoas Release – Knee to ankle
4. Bidalasana
5. Balasana
6. Sunbird
7. Balasana
8. Ardha Uttanasana on blocks
9. Urdva Hastasana
10. Ardha Uttansana
11. Tadasana
12. Adho Mukha Savanasana at wall with hip traction
13. Virabhadrasana II
14. Parsvakonasana
15. Utkatasana with blocks between knees and hands
16. Supta Hasta Padanghustasana 1 & 2
17. Setu Bandha with block between legs
18. Setu Bandha with block under sacrum
19. Reclined Pigeon - Eye of the needle
20. Savasana

Sequence 4- Stabilize & Strengthen

On Chairs:

1. Breathing/Centering
2. Lateral Stretch
3. Ardha Uttanasana – Half forward bend with blocks, straps around thighs
4. Seated Twist
5. Lateral Stretch holding the side of the chair
6. Knee to chest. Open to armpit
7. Uttanasana

Standing Poses Modified using chairs:

1. Tadasana
2. Urdva Hastasana
3. Ardha Uttanasana
4. Tadasana
5. Uttansana
6. Adho Mukha Svanasana
7. Standing Bidaldasana-Cat-cow
8. Uttanasana
9. Utkatasana
10. Tadasana
11. Trikonasana
12. Parsvakonasana
13. Virabhadrasana II
14. Prasarita Padottanasana
15. Vrksasana
16. Virabhadrasana 3 - modified with hands on seat

On the floor:

17. Sunbird balance
18. Balasana
19. Knee to chest 1 & 2
20. Hip Traction with straps and calves on chair
21. Rest calves on chair for savasana

Sequence 5 – Strengthening & Stabilizing

1. Tadasana
2. Urdva Hastasana
3. Ardha Uttanasana
4. Brahmandandasana sequence
5. Circle arm out to R, cross over midline, then to left, then over and down back and up to right. Repeat 3x on each side.
6. Virabhadrasana II
7. Parsvakonasana
8. Supported lunge with blocks, extend opposing arms
9. Uttanasana with clasped hands and bent knees
10. Virabhadrasana III with blocks supported
11. Anjaneyasana – Hands on blocks
12. Thread the needle
13. Sunbird balance
14. Balasana
15. Apanasana – 1 leg, then both
16. Hip traction with strap
17. Savasana with chairs under calves

Sequence 6 – Stabilize, Mobilize, Strengthen, and Restore

1. Virasana
2. Balasana
3. Bidalasana
4. Sunbird
5. Balasana
6. Thread the needle twist
7. Phalakasana – Plank modified on knees
8. Ardha Salabhasana
9. Salabhasana
10. Low Cobra
11. ½ Dog
12. Adho Mukha Svanasana
13. Ardha Uttanasana
14. Urdva Hastasana
15. Virabhadrasana II
16. Parsvakonasana
17. Supported lunge. Extend opposing arm forward for core strengthening.
18. Virabhadrasana III with blocks supported with arms
19. Wide stance, uttanasana, bend and straighten.
20. Adho Mukha Svanasana
21. Phalakasana - plank modification.
22. Table
23. Balasana
24. Ardha Navasana
25. Toe/heel/ball of foot tapping
26. Setubandhasana
27. Clam shell leg lifts on side
28. Reclined Pigeon - Eye of the needle
29. Psoas release
30. Jathara Parivartanasana
31. Savasana

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###

Yoga and Ballet: Restore Your Balance

If you are a ballet dancer, you've no doubt learned to accept some level of chronic pain as a fact of life. It typically shows up in your knees, lower back, hips, and feet, which bear the brunt of long rehearsal hours. Instead of ignoring it, why not address the imbalances that contribute to it?

Ballet dancers spend a lot of time turned out, causing an imbalance between weak medial and lateral rotators, located in and around the hip, and a tight iliotibial (IT) band, which is a thick group of fibers running along the outside of the thigh. Yoga can strengthen weak muscles and elongate overly tight ones, as Alfonso Martin, principal dancer at Tulsa Ballet, has discovered. He had a tendonitis in the patellar tendon, or "jumper's knee," so he went to Ken Randall, a Tulsa physical therapist. Randall found that Martin's quadriceps and IT band were tight while his internal rotators were weak and recommended yoga.

The key to healthy, pain-free joints is equal strength from all sides. "Think of the joint like a tent pole," Randall suggests. "If one cord is too tight it is going to pull the pole out of line." Yoga postures help stretch what's tight, and strengthen and stabilize what's weak. A class takes the body through a full range of motion, toning the muscles on all sides of a joint to keep the bones aligned and the joint stable. You not only work the same muscles sequentially, but also the pairs of opposing muscles (your quadriceps and hamstrings, for instance).

Remember that any repetitive motion causes wear and tear on a joint. This damage begins silently in the cartilage where no nerves exist. You won't feel any pain until the bone itself starts to wear down. Sometimes all you feel is a dull achy sensation or muscle fatigue after class. Doing yoga will help you notice what's going on in your body before pain or injury occurs.

Here are three poses that can help:



Triangle Pose (Trikonasana) This pose will strengthen the quadriceps, lengthen the hamstrings, and work the inner and outer thighs and hips.

Warrior II Pose (Virabhadrasana II)

If done correctly, this pose energizes and stabilizes the inner thighs and strengthens the gluteus medius muscles.



CHRYSLER

Pigeon Pose (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana)

This pose stretches and releases the outside of the hip and the piriformis muscle deep in the buttock.



MARTY SCODUTO

Article from [Dance Magazine, July, 2005](#) by [Linda Sparrowe](#)

Pictures from [Yoga Journal](#)

Why They Love Yoga: 5 Dancers' Favorite Positions

Yoga began as a path to spiritual enlightenment about 5,000 years ago in ancient India. It includes meditation techniques, breath control exercises, and a detailed set of ethical principles. It also involves a series of physical poses (asanas) that have become popular in the West in recent years. Dancers have discovered yoga as a way to relax between technique classes, rehearsals, and performances, while still maintaining flexibility and strength. Here several dancers explain how yoga benefits their bodies and their work.

Kellie Epperheimer, 23, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago I started yoga after I sprained my ankle. It gave me a way to work a little more slowly. As a dancer you have drive, so the pace was really hard for me at first. The balancing poses especially helped me stabilize and find a nice center string to work from in my body alignment.

Now I appreciate having a slow hour and a half where my mind can go to a different place instead of having to think about a step.

FAVORITE POSE sirsasana (headstand). "I feel my plumb line and all of my muscles lifting and being activated. It's soothing."

THE GIFT OF TIME

Paul McGill, 20, current Broadway revival of A Chorus Line. With yoga you can take your time and focus, unlike a dance class, and it's changed my dancing. I don't just jump and kick and turn anymore. My movement has more fluidity.

When I was younger I danced, but I didn't know where the movement was coming from or what muscles I was using. With yoga you feel every little thing in your body. It's very personal, very internal. There's no one watching me, no one judging me. I can just be.



FAVORITE POSE parivrtta parsvakonasana (twisted side angle, with legs in lunge, upper body twisting). "It helps me release my lower back, which gets really, really tight after each show."

APPRECIATING IMPERFECTION

Briana Reed, 32, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Yoga helps me with life on the road. When I get to a hotel and pull out my mat, it centers me. I find that my hamstrings are more flexible. I am more steady on my feet. I've also learned to control my breath, so I'm not as tired performing.

In yoga there's no such thing as a bad class because you're doing it for yourself and you don't have an audience or an artistic director to disappoint. You have the chance to be imperfect. It's a huge relief.

FAVORITE POSE sirasana (headstand).

"This pose was the scariest thing for me and I had to learn to trust myself. I never imagined that I could stand on my head. Now I'm more willing to try things that I wouldn't have before."

AN UNEXPECTED ENERGY

Seth DeGrasso, 30, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet I started yoga because I wanted to increase my flexibility, but after a few months I also noticed my mental focus had increased, and the breathing and relaxation exercises allowed me to connect with my muscles in a much deeper way.

Yoga has allowed me to understand more of that internal connection between breath and movement, which has given me more energy. I've learned to stretch by elongating rather than going into stretches too aggressively, which helps my body protect itself. Plus certain things throughout the day don't bother me as much as they used to.

FAVORITE POSE padmasana (lotus). "When I began my hips were very tight. To find calmness within this pose has allowed me to increase my flexibility tremendously."

PREPARING TO PERFORM

Elana Altman, 25, San Francisco Ballet Yoga's a good way to stretch and relax and prepare myself for a performance. It's not an aerobic workout. It's about using the particular poses to get specific results in your body, like opening your hips or releasing your back or neck tension.

Ballet is all about turnout and extension--it uses the same muscles over and over. Yoga puts me into a different sort of alignment. It makes me very conscious of my body and that can translate into preventing injuries. When my body doesn't let me dance anymore, at least I'll have yoga!

FAVORITE POSE kapotasana (pigeon pose, where you sit on the floor with legs in a split).

"This is a good isometric butt and hip stretch. Since ballet is all about turnout it's great for dancers."

From Dance Magazine, Jan, 2008 by Shayna Samuels

Pictures from Yoga Journal

