

Hip Enough? Hip Opening Poses

Release negative emotions and improve your alignment by opening the muscles around your hips.

By Diane Anderson; Sequence by Stephanie Snyder

There are so many reasons to do hip-opening poses: Supple hips can ease back pain, give you a more agile gait, and even improve circulation in your legs. But there's a more subtle benefit to hip openers, too: We hold stress and negative emotions—such as fear, guilt, and sadness—in our pelvis, says San Francisco vinyasa teacher Stephanie Snyder. For this reason alone, Snyder believes it's particularly important to do poses that move *prana* (life force) through that area. "You know your junk drawer at home?" she asks. "The pelvis is like the body's junk drawer. Whenever you don't know what to do with a feeling or experience, you put it there."

Snyder designed the following sequence to move your ball-and-socket hip joint through its full range of motion. When you do it regularly, you may see improvement in the rest of your practice, since the pelvis is the foundation of alignment in many poses. Here are some things to remember as you do the sequence. Take your time with opening your hips, because hip ligaments are strong. "Don't push yourself," Snyder advises. "Be receptive to the breath moving into the pose." If you have a knee injury, modify the seated poses (5 and 6) by straightening your bottom leg, and practice poses 7 and 9 on your back. At the same time, don't avoid difficulty. People often dread hip openers because they are such a challenge. "Don't look away from tight places," Snyder says. "Be present without judgment. You can really make this a delicious practice."

Warm up: To build heat and lubricate your joints, do a few rounds of [Sun Salutations](#).

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Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)

From [Adho Mukha Svanasana](#) (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), step your right foot between your hands and bring your left knee to the floor. Reach your arms overhead, and keep your hips parallel to the front end of your mat. Isometrically draw your left thigh forward and hug both thighs in toward your pelvis. Lift the pit of your belly toward your heart and your heart toward the sky. Let your shoulders slide down your back and keep the front of your throat relaxed as you lengthen your spine. Stay for 5 breaths. Return to Down Dog, and then do Low Lunge with your left foot forward.

High Lunge

From Down Dog, step your right foot between your hands and reach your arms overhead in a high lunge. Keep your hips square and draw your outer right thighbone in toward the pelvis. Spin your inner left thighbone up, and gently tuck your tailbone. Allow your weight to drop into your legs, press your feet down into the earth, and feel the rebound of energy rise all the way up through your fingertips. Stay for 5 breaths, and then step back to Down Dog. Switch sides.

Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II)

Take a wide stance with your feet parallel. Turn your right foot out and your left foot in, bend your right knee to 90 degrees so that it's centered over your right heel. Align your right heel with the arch of your left foot. Engage your legs, pull your low belly in, and gaze over the top of your right hand. Simultaneously press both thighbones toward your back body and your sitting bones toward the front body. Feel the pelvis descend as your spine lifts and lengthens upward. Stay for 2 to 5 breaths, and then switch sides.

Utthan Pristhasana (Lizard Pose)

From Down Dog, step your right foot between your hands to a lunge position. Bring both forearms to the floor inside the right leg. Keep your inner left thigh lifting and resisting. As your left heel reaches back, your heart opens forward to create length in your upper back. You can modify the pose by bringing your back knee down or placing your forearms on a block. Stay for 8 breaths. Switch sides.

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)

Sit in [Dandasana](#) (Staff Pose), draw your right knee into your chest, and place your right foot on the floor outside your left knee. Draw your left foot in toward your right sitting bone. Bring your right hand behind you in line with the center of your sacrum and wrap your left arm around your right leg. Press your right foot and hand down as you lengthen your spine and twist to the right, initiating the movement from your belly. Hug your right knee into your left shoulder. Feel the stretch in the outer right hip. Stay for 5 breaths. Repeat on the other side.

Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose), variation

From sitting, stack your right knee on top of your left. Your feet should be in about the same place on either side. Keep your feet active. Inhale to lift and lengthen your spine. You can stay here or you can fold forward by reaching your arms in front of you and resting your head near your knees. Keep rooting your sitting bones into the earth as you allow the front of your hips to soften into the body. Stay for 5 to 8 breaths. Switch sides.

Pigeon Pose

From Down Dog, bring your right shin forward and down so that your right foot is in front of your left hip and your right shin is nearly parallel to the front edge of your mat. Flex your right foot. Stretch your left thigh back as you draw your left hip forward. Lengthen your belly as you fold over your right leg. If your right hip does not easily reach the floor, place a folded blanket or block under your right sitting bone. Stay for 10 breaths. Repeat on the other side.

Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)

From Dandasana, draw your right knee into your chest, and then drop it out to the right. Bring the left knee into the chest and out to the left. Bring the soles of your feet together and keep the outer edges of your feet grounded. Stay here or fold forward. To modify, place blocks under your outer thighs. Stay for 5 breaths.

Frog Pose

From all fours, bring your forearms to the floor. You can put a blanket under each knee for padding. Widen your knees, one at a time, as far apart as possible and bend them so that your thighs and your shins are at 90-degree angles. Flex your feet. Keep your front ribs in, your waist long, and your tailbone down. Take 5 to 10 long, deep breaths through this challenging and effective hip opener.

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Release: Bring your knees to the floor, sit on your heels, and place your forehead on the floor in [Balasana](#) (Child's Pose). Your arms can be by your sides or outstretched. Relax your belly and jaw. Rest here for 5 to 10 breaths, then savor [Savasana](#) (Corpse Pose) for at least 5 minutes.

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