



## core curriculum

5 great yoga moves to strengthen your abs and back BY AYANA D. BYRD

### ◀ The Cobra

Relieves minor backache and tones abs

**Step 1:** Lie on your stomach with legs and feet together. Plant palms on the floor beneath shoulders with fingers facing forward.

**Step 2:** Raise upper body by slowly lifting the head and chest, making sure to keep shoulders down. (Pelvis and thighs shouldn't leave the yoga mat.)

**Step 3:** Hold pose for 20 to 30 seconds as you take even breaths through your nose. Return to your starting position and repeat once. ▶

Yoga's not only good for achieving balance, fostering calm, and making you flexible enough to put your leg behind your head, but "it can also build core strength," says Teresa Kennedy, hatha yoga instructor and founder of Harlem's Ta Yoga House. "And targeting those abdominal and back muscles can ease lower-back pain." Do this series of *asanas* (the Sanskrit word for yoga postures), modeled by Kennedy, three times a week. In as many months you should have a tighter stomach and a more limber back.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM GUSZELSKI; MAKEUP: ANDIS OH ESINARS; WIND-RELIEVING POSE: SHARON HARTLEY; PROP STYLING: ALMA VELENKIC; CLOTHING: STYLE & CO. SPORTS



### Chair Pose

Strengthens abs

**Step 1:** Stand with legs hip width apart, holding arms straight ahead with palms facing downward.

**Step 2:** Bend knees and squat as if you're about to sit in a chair. Be sure to center weight in your heels, and don't bring hips lower than the knees.

**Step 3:** Reach forward, and focus eyes straight ahead while inhaling and exhaling through the nose. Hold for 20 seconds. Slowly return to standing position, then release arms.



### Wind-Relieving Pose

Stretches spine and aids digestion (which explains the embarrassing name)

**Step 1:** Lie on your back. As you inhale, pull right knee to your chest. Keep left leg straight and on the floor.

**Step 2:** Press shoulders and the back of neck into the floor while tightly holding knee. Breathe for ten seconds.

**Step 3:** Switch sides, holding left knee to chest for ten seconds. Complete set by hugging both knees to chest and holding for ten seconds. Repeat set.



### Upward Boat Pose

Strengthens abs, improves balance, and aids digestion

**Step 1:** Sit on the floor. Bend knees and plant feet on the floor. **Step 2:** Inhale, lean back and lift heels off the floor, straightening your legs as much as possible. Extend arms with palms facing down. If this is too difficult at first, you can place your hands under your knees for support.

**Step 3:** As you hold the pose for 30 seconds, keep your back straight, and make sure your abs are doing the work.



### Bow Pose

Stretches spine and increases lung capacity

**Step 1:** Lie facedown with forehead on the floor. Part legs, bend knees, then take hold of ankles.

**Step 2:** Lift upper body and thighs by raising your head toward the ceiling and pressing ankles back against your hands. **Step 3:** Balance on your stomach; the goal is to hold the pose without rocking. After 20 seconds, ease into starting position.

## mind control

### Simple ways to get more out of meditation

When you're used to ripping and running, quiet reflection can be a tall order. Use these mind-be-still tips, courtesy of Maya Breuer, a Kripalu yoga instructor in Providence, Rhode Island, who hosts retreats for women of color.

**Find an open space.** Clutter creates distractions. Help prevent the mind from wandering by sitting in a serene area.

**Set a timer.** A clear ending time makes meditation less daunting. Start at five minutes and gradually work your way up to 20.

**Sit comfortably.** "You may think meditation has to be done cross-legged, but for many the position is difficult," says Breuer. Feel free to sit with your back against a wall and your legs in front of you. The key is to keep your spine erect.

**Feel the rhythm.** Focus on the rhythm of your breathing as you in-

hale through your nostrils and exhale through your mouth. The steady beat promotes relaxation.

**Use a mantra.** Silently repeating a sacred word such as *amen* or *om* can help you tune out racing thoughts. A short phrase such as "I am breathing in; I am breathing out" also works.

**Watch your thoughts.** Rather than trying to suppress what's on your mind, imagine that it's a silent movie you're passively watching. This allows you to acknowledge your thoughts without losing yourself in them.

—BEVIN CUMMINGS □