

# Rise and shine with the sun



Welcome to the first installment in a new alternative-health feature entitled Yoga Moments. Content is provided by Dr Abhishek Agrawal, who runs Abbyssan Yoga & Wellness Center in Phuket. Each month, Dr Abhishek will be giving readers step-by-step instructions on how to combine a series of postures to form a simple routine.

The Sun Salutation is an effective way of loosening up, stretching, massaging and toning all the joints, muscles, and internal organs of the body and is ideally practised before other *Asanas* (postures). Its versatility and application make it one of the most useful methods of inducing a healthy, vigorous and active life.

Sun Salutation is composed of three elements: form, energy and rhythm. The twelve *Asanas* are the physical matrix around which the form of the practice is woven. These *Asanas* generate *prana*, the subtle energy which activates the psychic body. Their performance, in a steady, rhythmic sequence, reflects the rhythms of the universe; the twenty-four hours of the day, the twelve zodiac phases of the year

and the rhythm of the body/mind complex generates the transforming force which produces a fuller and more dynamic life. The ideal time to practise the Sun Salutation is at sunrise, the most peaceful time of the day. Whenever possible, practise in the open air, facing the rising sun. Sunset is also a good time to practise as it stimulates the digestive fire.

However, the Sun Salutation can be practised any time of the day provided the stomach is empty. Beginners should start with two or three rounds and add one more round every week to avoid fatigue.

Advanced practitioners may practise a larger number of rounds; however strain should be avoided at all times. For physical benefits, practise three to 12 rounds more quickly and for spiri-

tual benefits, three to 12 rounds slowly.

#### Contraindications:

The practice of the Sun Salutation should be immediately discontinued if a fever, acute inflammation, boils or rashes occur. These may develop due to excess toxins in the body.

People suffering from high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, those who have had a stroke should not practice the Sun Salutation, as it may over stimulate or damage a weak heart or blood vessel system.

People with back conditions should consult a medical expert before commencing this practice. Although some back problems may be alleviated, conditions such as slipped discs and sciatica will be better managed through an al-

ternative *Asana* program.

Completely avoid the practice if suffering with a hernia or intestinal tuberculosis.

#### Benefits:

The Sun Salutation stimulates and balances all the systems of the body, including the endocrine, circulatory, respiratory and

digestive systems. Its great influence on the pineal gland and hypothalamus helps to prevent pineal degeneration and calcification. This balances the transition time between childhood and adolescence in growing children.

Synchronizing breathing with the physical movements of the Sun Salutation ensures that the practitioner, at least for few minutes daily, breathes as deeply and rhythmically as possible.

This removes the carbon dioxide from the lungs and replaces it with fresh oxygen, increasing mental clarity by bringing fresh, oxygenated blood to the brain.

#### Position 1: *Pranamasana* (Prayer Pose)

Stand upright with your feet together and eyes closed. Slowly bend the elbows and place the palms together in front of the chest in *namaskara mudra* (as shown in first picture), mentally offering homage to the sun, the source of all energy. Breathe normally and relax the whole body.

#### Position 2: *Hastha Utthanasana* (Raised Arm Pose)

While inhaling, raise and stretch both arms above the head with arms separated, shoulder width apart. Bend the head, arms and trunk backward.

**Benefits:** Tones spinal nerves, opens lungs and removes excess weight.

#### Position 3: *Padahasthasana* (Hand to foot pose)

While exhaling, bend forward until the fingers or the palms of the hand touch the floor on either side of the feet, keeping your legs straight or bent at the knees. Try to touch your knees with the forehead without any strain to your back and neck. Do not be alarmed; it's very common to feel the deep stretch at the back of your legs (Stretching hamstring muscles).

**Benefits:** Improves digestion and helps to remove constipation.

#### Position 4: *Ashwa Sanchalanasana* (Equestrian pose)

Inhaling, stretch the right leg back as far as possible, keeping the foot flat and toes pointed. At the same time, bend the left knee, keeping the left foot on the floor in the same position, with the arms straight.

In the final position, the weight of the body should be supported with both hands, the left foot, right knee and right foot. The head should be tilted backward, the back arched and the inner gaze directed upward.

**Benefits:** Improves the function of abdominal organs by massaging them and strengthens the leg muscles.

#### Position 5: *Plank Pose*

Exhaling, move the left leg back to meet the right and position the whole body in a straight line like a plank of wood. Keep the heels vertical to the floor, contract the muscles of the thigh and pull up the knees, wrists resting under the shoulder.

**Benefits:** Strengthens the shoulders and the muscles of the arms.

#### Position 6: *Balāsana* (Child Pose)

Drop both knees onto the floor, keep the feet flat and toes pointed. While exhaling move the body back, resting the buttocks on the heels. Do not place your hands in order to move your body back.

**Benefits:** Stretches the shoulders and back muscles.

#### Position 7: *Ashtanga Namskara* (salute with eight parts or points)

Keeping the trunk parallel to the floor, actively exhale and lower the chest between your palms on the floor. In the final position the knees, chest and chin should touch the floor simultaneously. The buttocks, hips and abdomen should be raised.

**Benefits:** Strengthens the legs and arm muscles, develops the chest.

#### Position 8: *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana* (Upward facing Dog)

With a deep inhalation, lift the chest, abdomen and thighs up, stretch the arms completely and push the head and trunk as far back as possible, with or without resting the knees on the floor. The spine, thighs and calves should be fully stretched, and the buttocks contracted tightly.

**Benefits:** Rejuvenates the spine, helps in removing lumbago, sciatica, and improves the elasticity of the lungs.

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