

BikeYoga 101

If you're holding this book, chances are you ride your bike... a lot. Do you ride for fitness? For competition? To commute to and from work? To change your body or to change the world? Do you ride for pleasure, simply for fun? If you answered yes to any of these questions, this book was created for you, whether or not you have ever done yoga before.

Now let me ask you: Do you tune up your bike more than you pay attention—I mean really pay attention—to your own body? There's no doubt a well-tuned bike functions better than one that sits neglected in the shed, rusting and gathering dust. It's more reliable, less noisy, and experiences fewer "mechanicals". Safety hazards can be assessed and corrected before a problem arises. It is more efficient and more enjoyable to use. A well-tuned body acts in much the same way, but our bodies aren't merely machines. They are driven by complex physiological and biological processes and are animated by spirit.

The word spirit derives from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning "breath". This word has different meanings and connotations, all relating to a non-corporeal substance contrasted with the physical body. Thus we could say *the spirit of a human being is the animating principle or energy in that individual*. From this purely textbook definition of spirit, every living person is a spirited being, whether or not we consider ourselves spiritual people.

BikeYoga is a simple practice to tune-up your mind, body and spirit. This approach to yoga is synthesized from years of study, practice and analysis of many popular forms of yoga currently found in the United States. It has evolved from my teaching work, through close collaboration with sports physicians and physical therapists, cycling coaches and athletes, and is informed by decades of cycling expertise as a recreational and competitive cyclist.

Cycling is an amazing form of exercise, a fantastic way to improve fitness, or lose weight. Riding bikes is not only fun, it can also be practical. Heading out for a solo ride in nature can be a very meditative experience. And getting together with friends for a group ride provides training support as well as social connection.

The only downside to all this bike riding are the demands placed on the musculoskeletal system, causing shortening of and tightness in muscles and tendons, causing pain, discomfort, poor posture, weakness and shortness of breath—all of which can be balanced and brought into harmony again through simple movements and stretches which address these imbalances.

What's different about Bike Yoga?

Mainstream images show yoga performed by svelte women in stylish outfits and wild, gymnastic-like poses that would be virtually impossible for the majority of us unless we quit our day jobs, stop riding bikes, and devote ourselves to practicing yoga day and night, 24/7. *BikeYoga* is not for already bendy women; it is for bike riders of all ages, abilities, genders and styles of riding. It's simple, straightforward, and accessible. It may take awhile before you touch your toes, but as you progress through the series you will find your day at the office feels more energetic, your rides are more comfortable, and your post-race recovery is more complete. If you prefer singletrack to asphalt, you'll be happy to know flexible bodies don't break nearly as often or as badly when you crash.

BikeYoga is based on the premise that you ride your bike often enough and hard enough to call it vigorous exercise or maybe even an intense workout if you race. *BikeYoga* offers a simple method for cultivating flexibility and balanced strength through regular, consistent practice. The *Therapeutic Practice* section is recommended as a brief daily or every-other-day practice; short and sweet, it hits all the key areas in about 20 minutes. In fact, if that's the only part of this manual you use, you'll be doing pretty good.

BikeYoga is also an embodied meditation through mindful (slow) movement. The last section of this book describes meditation techniques to help you calm your nerves and clear your head. Often the most elusive aspect of yoga, meditation can also be the most rewarding—helping you tap into the power of your mind. Meditation gives us mental strength and flexibility on and off the bike.

**It's not about the destination.
It's about the ride.**

PREPARATION & CORE WORK (continued)

Downward Facing Dog and Plank poses are two staples of most hatha yoga practices. Of all the prone poses, they are the most active, because all of your weight is supported by the shoulders, core and legs. The most common error many people make is letting the weight “rest” in the hands, and not engaging the thighs to lift the hips. Always spread your fingers wide and press hands completely flat.

DOWNWARD FACING DOG POSE

Start in all fours, on hands and knees, tucking your toes under. On an exhale lift your knees off the ground. Come up as high as you can on your toes, bending your knees slightly. Lengthen the sides of your waist and draw your thighs back. Engage the lower abdomen while reaching your heels down and straightening your knees.

AWARENESS: Is your back rounding when your legs are straight? If so, bend your knees to press your chest back further toward your thighs. Do not shorten the pose to get your heels flat on the floor.

ACTION: Spread your fingers and palms wide, index finger straight ahead, and press into the floor firmly. Lift your abdomen to support your lower back. Look back between your legs, releasing the weight of your head down.

BENEFITS: Stretches hamstrings and calves; tractions the spine; tones the abdomen; strengthens arms, wrists and shoulders.

GO TO: Plank pose or rest in Child’s Pose first.

PLANK POSE

Enter from Downward Facing Dog pose. Shift forward so your shoulders are directly above your wrists. Keep your hips lifted, forming a strong line from shoulders to heels.

AWARENESS: Are your arms straight? Are your hips sinking toward the floor? Can you engage your abdomen?

ACTION: Engage your thighs firmly and lift your hips.

BENEFITS: Strengthens arms; abdominals/core; tones legs.

GO TO: Childs pose to rest your wrists or back to Downward Facing Dog.



Backbends

Backbends are essential for keeping the spinal column strong, supple and flexible, and ensuring a free flow of energy throughout the nervous system. Backbends tend to be invigorating and stimulate the nervous system so it is important to breathe smoothly, in a relaxed fashion, without forcing the poses. These poses help counteract the hunched-over posture of sitting with the weight of the head pulling forward and down.

SPHINX POSE

Lie down on your abdomen, legs outstretched. Place your forearms palms down with your elbows directly beneath your shoulders.

AWARENESS: Relax the muscles along your spine. Can you feel traction in your vertebral column? Breathe deeply and just allow your body absorb this passive extension of the upper back.

ACTION: Keep your legs toned. Draw your abdomen in to lengthen and support your lower back.

BENEFITS: Traction upper spine; refreshes nervous system.

GO TO: Locust pose.

LOCUST POSE

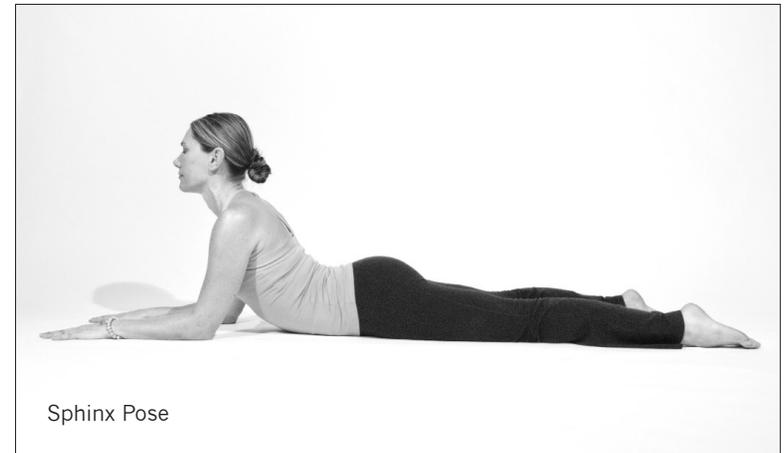
Enter from Sphinx pose. Keeping your chest lifted, slide your hands back alongside your ribcage, pressing the palms down, and drawing your shoulders back. Exhale and lift your legs off the ground.

AWARENESS: As you engage the entire back body to lift, can you engage your abdomen slightly to add support?

ACTION: Reach back through your feet, spreading your toes. Keep your knees straight. Engage your buttocks and hamstrings. Keep drawing forward through your sternum and you engage the rhomboids, between the shoulder blades.

BENEFITS: Strengthens the entire back of the body; tones abdominal organs.

GO TO: Upward Facing Dog pose.



Sphinx Pose



Locust Pose