

yoga

JOURNAL

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Prepares
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HEALTH, HOPE & HIV

How Yoga
Can Improve
Quality of Life

CHRISTY TURLINGTON

on the Inner Life

MARK EPSTEIN

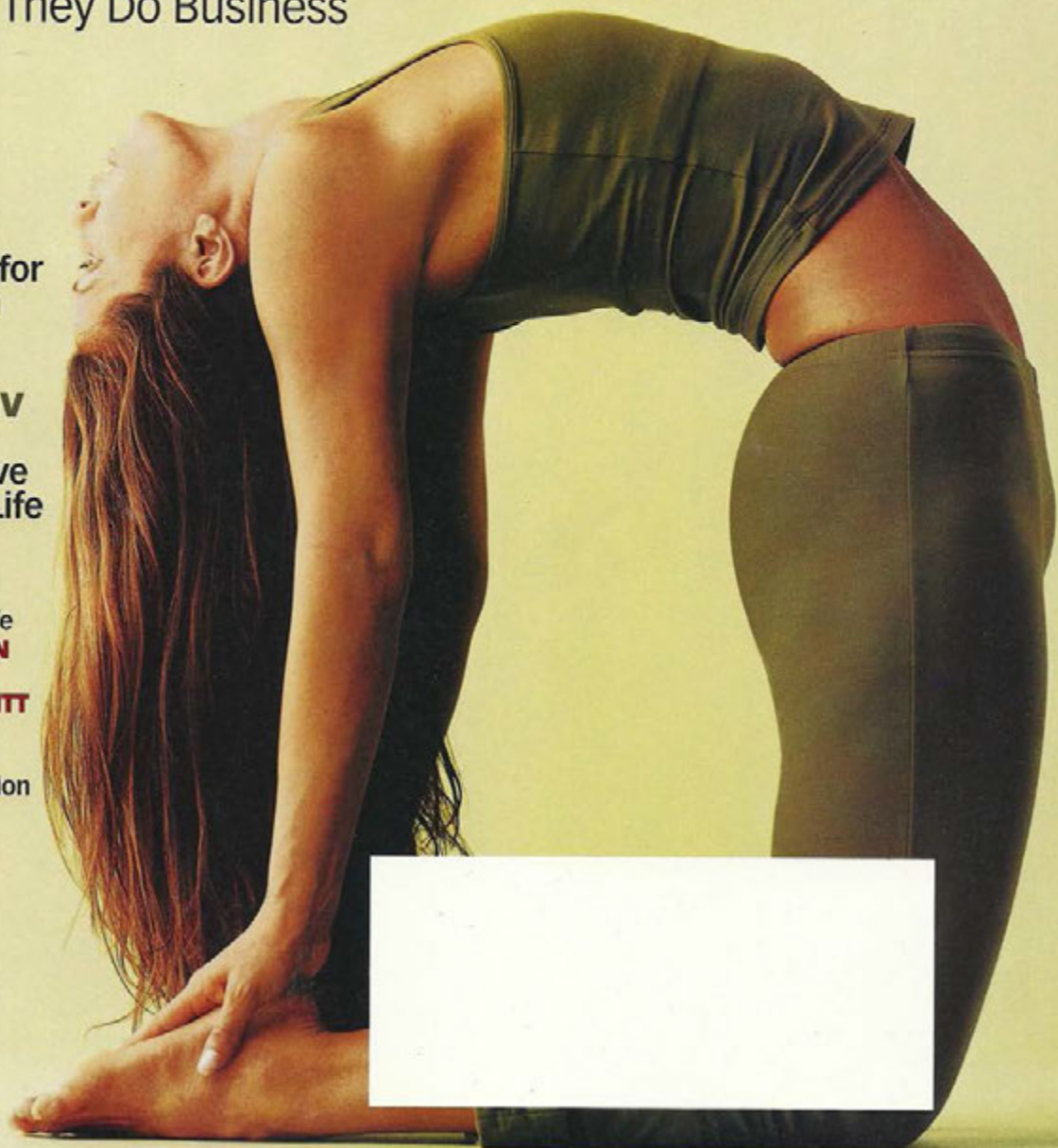
on Anger

PHILLIP MOFFITT

on Desire

ED BROWN

on Self-realization



Asana

BY BARBARA BENAGH

Kapotasana (Pigeon Pose)

Benefits

Increases shoulder and spine flexibility

Tones diaphragm and spinal
and abdominal muscles

Improves circulation along the spine

May relieve depression
and increase energy

Contraindications

Pregnancy

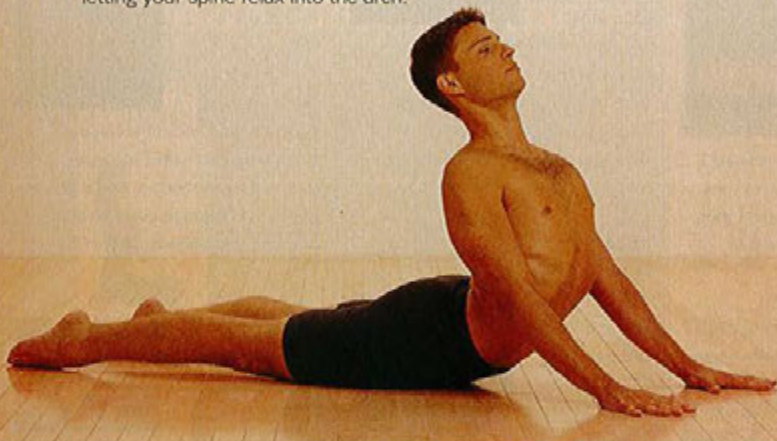
Hypertension

Some low back and sciatica problems

Shoulder injuries

Active asthma or acute
respiratory allergies

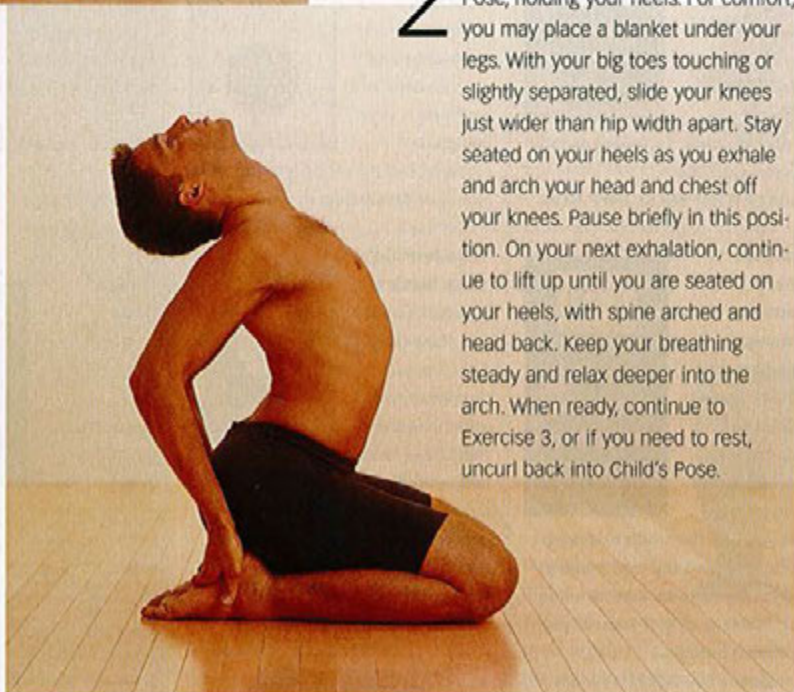
1 Bhujangasana. Lie face down on the floor. Place your palms on the floor by your chest, fingertips forward, elbows in. Press the tops of your feet into the floor and gently drop your tailbone. Inhale to open and lift your chest. Exhale to pull the abdomen in and up. Roll the tops of your shoulders back and straighten your arms, moving your hands forward if necessary. Stay for several breaths, keeping your head upright and gazing slightly down. Repeat the pose 2-3 times, letting your spine relax into the arch.



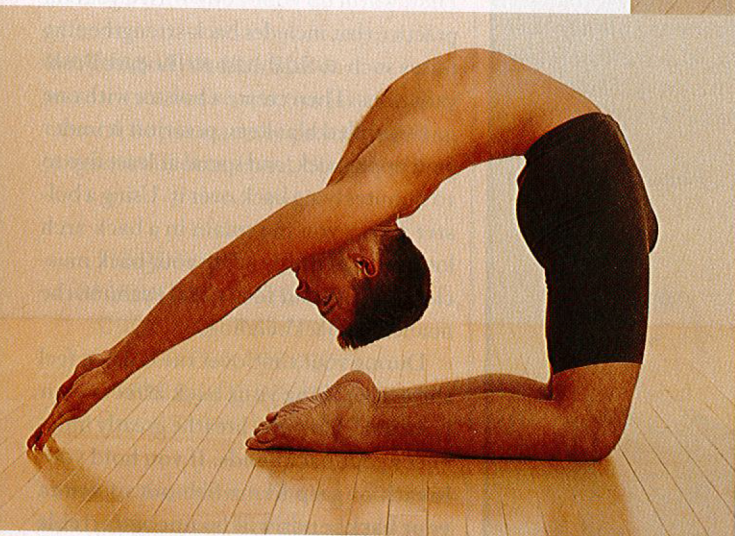
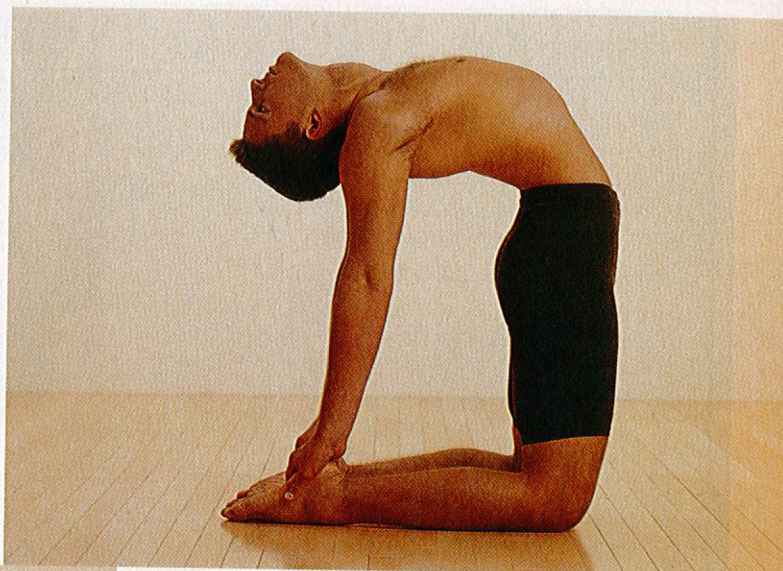
IF YOU PAY ATTENTION to how an accomplished teacher leads class, you will notice that each session consists of a deliberate sequence of postures that complement and nourish one another. The best guidance for sequencing I ever heard came from well-known teacher Angela Farmer, who described asanas not as poses but as "pauses in an ever-changing flow of movement." By taking this perspective, you can free yourself to be absorbed in the sensations of the various paths of movement from which individual asanas emerge.

You can approach the challenging backbend Kapotasana (Pigeon Pose) in this spirit, using a sequence in which the simplest asana includes the essential movements needed for the final pose. These movements reappear organically

2 Seated Back Arch. Start in Child's Pose, holding your heels. For comfort, you may place a blanket under your legs. With your big toes touching or slightly separated, slide your knees just wider than hip width apart. Stay seated on your heels as you exhale and arch your head and chest off your knees. Pause briefly in this position. On your next exhalation, continue to lift up until you are seated on your heels, with spine arched and head back. Keep your breathing steady and relax deeper into the arch. When ready, continue to Exercise 3, or if you need to rest, uncurl back into Child's Pose.



3 Ustrasana. In Seated Back Arch, relax your upper thighs and deepen your groins. Keeping your spine arched and your head back, exhale strongly to lift your chest and curl up to Ustrasana (Camel Pose). If you can't retain the hold on your heels, loop a strap around your feet. Keep your hips positioned directly above your knees, neither pushing your thighs forward nor dropping your hips back. Hold the pose for several steady breaths. Then, maintaining the back arch, sit back on your heels. Finally, uncurl to Child's Pose. Repeat several times.



4 Deepening the Arch. (*Caution: You should be comfortable in Ustrasana before proceeding to the next two poses.*) In Ustrasana, firmly press your feet into the floor. Keep your hips over your knees and relax into your backbend. Let go of your heels, join your hands in prayer position at your heart and then stretch your arms straight overhead. It is very important to keep breathing evenly. As you exhale, deepen the back arch until your fingers reach the floor. Press the tops of your feet down and lift the tailbone to keep your hips as directly over your knees as possible. Stay for a few breaths; then either exhale to lift up to kneeling or proceed to the next exercise.

5 Kapotasana. From Exercise 4, walk your hands toward your feet. Press into your feet and lift your tailbone to provide the extension you'll need to do this. When you can hold your feet or heels, bring your elbows to the floor and put your head on your feet. Breathe steadily and continue to expand your chest and lift your tailbone. Come out of the pose by placing your hands on the floor and, on an exhale, lift up to kneeling. Then uncurl back down to Child's Pose.

