

A serene sunset over a body of water with a yellow and white kayak in the foreground. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The water is calm, reflecting the light. The kayak is positioned in the lower right, with its reflection visible in the water. The overall mood is peaceful and relaxing.

glide through summer

Yoga helps swimmers, rowers, and kayakers build needed core strength and relieve upper-body aches and pains.

sequence by tiffany cruikshank

photography by david martinez

As summer heats up, there's no better place to be than in the water—unless it's on your mat. Try this sequence to soothe achey shoulders, open tight hips, strengthen your core, and make all of your aquatic activities more enjoyable and fun.

*** SOOTHE, STRENGTHEN, AND BALANCE**

Tiffany Cruikshank, a sports medicine specialist, yoga teacher, and acupuncturist in Portland, Oregon, developed this yoga practice specifically for swimmers, kayakers, and rowers.

Her suggested sequence can help balance physical asymmetries that arise from repetitive movements

such as breathing to one side while swimming or paddling repeatedly to one side while kayaking. Reducing these asymmetries can increase the efficiency of your movements and lower your risk of injury.

Cruikshank's practice can also help you build and maintain core strength, which will give a vital boost to your swimming or rowing performance.



When your core muscles are strong, they work to cinch your abdominal organs and act as a firm girdle that supports your spine. This kind of integrated core strength helps increase the power you need for all your movements.

Of course, Cruikshank's suggested practice also offers sweet relief for post-playtime aches. Like any activ-

ity requiring lots of upper-body movement, water sports can sometimes cause tightness in your shoulders, upper back, and neck. Your hips might feel stiff from sitting in a boat for hours. By stretching the upper body and the hips, you can increase circulation to the surrounding tissues, which should keep the whole body feeling pliable and elastic.

Practice the yoga sequence on the following pages either before your time in the water or after you hit the dock. Not only will it help prevent tension and soreness, but it will also help relieve it. While you practice, embrace the idea of bringing your body into balance and let go of pushing into the poses. You'll set yourself up for a fun-filled summer.



PUPPY POSE, variation

Puppy Pose increases the shoulders' range of motion and relieves soreness in your shoulders and back.

Bring your palms together and place your elbows on a support that's close to waist height. Walk your feet back as you straighten your arms and lower your torso parallel to the ground. For a deeper stretch, bend your elbows, rest the edge of your upper arms on the support, and lift your hands straight up. If you want to stretch even deeper, bend your elbows more, take your hands behind the head, and allow the head to drop between the arms. Keep the elbows shoulder-width apart or closer, and relax the shoulders. Hold the pose for 10 or more breaths, until you're able to settle in and feel some sensation of release.

☀ Watch a video of model Djuna Mascall practicing these poses online at yogajournal.com/livemag.



PLANK POSE



Plank Pose will help you build and maintain core strength.

Come onto your hands and knees for Plank Pose. Step your feet back one at a time, hip-distance apart. Straighten your legs and stack your shoulders over your wrists. Cinch in your belly to support your spine, then broaden your chest and move it for-

ward as you shift your shoulder blades and tailbone back toward your heels. Breathe deeply through the sides of the rib cage and use the belly to hug the spine. Hold for 10 breaths, working toward 20 over time. Release any gripping in the neck or jaw.



ALTERNATE ARM AND LEG LIFT

Start on all fours with your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Cinch in your belly all the way around your waist, from front to back, to support the lower spine. Maintain the length and natural curves in the spine as you reach your left leg back and

your right arm forward, keeping both parallel to the ground. Lift your inner left thigh to internally rotate your back leg. Take 5 deep breaths into the sides of the rib cage, and then return to center and repeat on the second side.

You'll increase core strength and balance asymmetries in this pose.



BRIDGE POSE

Bridge Pose will help release tension in your neck and upper back.

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet hip-width apart. Slowly peel your spine away from the ground. When you've come up as high as you can, lengthen your tailbone toward your knees and lift your sternum toward your face. Slow the rhythm of

your breath and breathe deeply through the front, back, and sides of the rib cage. Relax your neck and jaw. Hold the pose for 5 to 10 breaths while you maintain the strength in the legs and soften the neck. Then, slowly lower the spine down to the ground.



SUPINE TWIST



This unique supine twist will stretch both the hips and spine. Start by lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Take your arms out to the sides (elbows either bent or straight). Place your left ankle just above your right knee and start to twist to the right. As you twist, let your left foot shift to the outside of your right knee. Rest your legs on the ground or, if they hover above the ground, support them with a rolled towel or a blanket. Take 10 breaths as you relax the hips and spine, and let gravity help you to move deeper into the pose. Come back up to center and repeat on the second side.

If you have an injury, consult your health care practitioner or an experienced yoga teacher to adapt this practice to your needs.



SHOULDER STRETCH

You'll relieve tightness in your shoulders and upper back in the classic arm position of Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose).

From a comfortable seated position, reach your left arm up toward the sky. Then turn your palm so it faces behind you, and externally rotate the left arm as you bend your elbow and walk your left hand down your back. Reach your right arm toward the floor and internally rotate the arm as you turn the palm back. Bend the elbow and walk the hand up until you feel a gentle stretch or until you can grab the other hand. If you can't clasp hands, start over with a towel (or even a T-shirt) in your left hand and let it dangle down the back so you can walk the right hand up the back to grab it. Make sure your clasp is loose enough that you can relax your neck and jaw. Breathe deeply for 5 to 10 breaths, then release and repeat on the next side. ❖

