



KeepActive

Yoga for Men's Back Health

By Phillip Meilbeck • Photos by Ralph DeHaan

Working hard to increase muscle size, power and physique, men train their muscles hard and constantly burden the primary foundation of their bodies: their back. We use our spine and the muscles that support it for virtually every movement we make. While built with large, strong looking muscles, the male back is often overlooked from the physical training standpoint of care and flexibility, and most men experience back problems. The lucky few live with only slight pain or inconvenience from time to time. But according to reports, 80 percent of men suffer back problems and are forced to begrudgingly endure back pain, which not only hinders workouts, but carries over into other aspects of daily life.

So, why not invest some daily effort – enjoyably – into relieving a good portion of that hassle and pain through some effective training? Even if you have experienced a serious injury, this proven routine (Men's Back Health through Yoga) employs the millenniums-old powers of yoga to increase flexibility, relieve back pain, increase strength and actually lengthen your muscles.

Loredana Meilbeck, a Southern California Yoga instructor who is an athlete and a survivor of devastating back injuries resulting from a tragic car crash, is the one who developed the routine. Undaunted and using yoga as her foundation for recovery, she developed this class to bring the powers of yoga to men.

Why just men, you ask? "I knew the capacity of yoga to heal the back. I know that so many men have back problems and just deal with the pain through unhealthy means – over-the-counter pain killers, drugs, risky surgery, etc.," Loredana says. "Women are typically attracted to yoga, but men are not." Generally, it is very rare to see men attending yoga classes. Maybe walking into a room full of skilled flexible women may seem daunting to men. "I wanted to change that, so I established a tone, a routine and atmosphere that men may find appealing, and invited just men to join me," she continued. "The results were incredible!" >>

Back problems can be complex in nature, often stemming from tightness in the hips, buttocks and legs. This yoga routine focuses on poses and positions that force stretching muscle and ligament tissues, helps to create more space between the vertebrae, opens the hips, and employs breathing to maintain focus and calm. The routine capitalizes on the flow of movement from one pose to the next and employs “counter-poses” (sequential opposing postures) to create balance and symmetry.

The routine can progress from beginner to advanced, and you should start gently. In some of the photos, you can

see the yoga instructor showing methods for increasing the depth into the poses and how using a partner can help you gain deeper reach (See insets).

This men’s back health yoga routine actually includes 14 specific poses and is detailed in the DVD *Men’s Back Health through Yoga*, available at www.mensbackhealth.com. Below is a sampling of four primary poses featured on the DVD to get you started. By doing this routine regularly (at least twice a week) and progressively, the benefits of strength, flexibility and comfort in your back are just breaths away! **MS&F**



Child's Pose

This is the elementary restorative pose in yoga. It extends the spine, open the hips.

Kneel and press the tops of your feet to the floor. Extend arms onto the floor in front of you, keeping the arms straight, stretching and allowing your belly to relax down between your knees. Breathe deep, elongate your spine, relax.

This routine specifically targets:

- The flexor muscles in the lower back.
- The junctions between the thoracic and lumbar spinal region.
- The spaces between the vertebrae.
- The hamstrings and opening of the hips.



Downward Facing Dog

Stretches the hamstrings and calf muscles, stretches and builds strength in the lower back muscles.

From a push-up position, push your hips up and walk your feet toward your hands. Arch your buttocks up, arms rigid, and press your heels to the floor. Keep your back straight and raise your tail bone up, up, up.





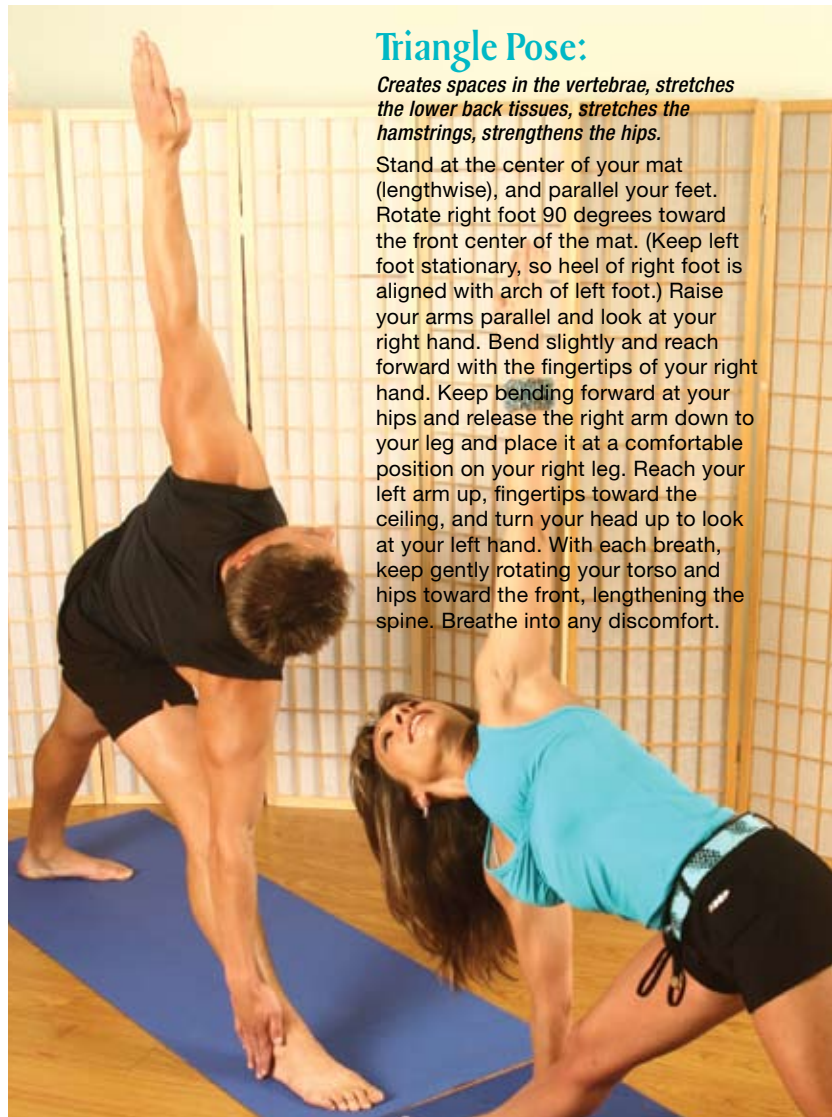
Swan Pose:

Stretches the hamstrings lower back, creates space between vertebrae.

From Downward Facing Dog, release your arch, and bring your right knee to the right front corner of the mat, placing your foot directly below your pelvis. Press your hands down, elongate your spine, and press your hips lower to the mat. Return to Downward Dog and repeat with your left leg.

Important Things To Remember:

- Hold each pose for at least 15 seconds up to 30 seconds. Press deeper into the pose as you gain skill and strength.
- Perform each pose twice (twice on each side for bilateral poses).
- Poses can be done in the sequence provided to capitalize on the “Counter-Pose” effect, yet can be done in any order that feels comfortable.
- Proper breathing is a vital aspect of enjoying yoga. Breathe deep and slow to calm your mind and muscles.
- Don’t fight any tension or pain, but b-r-e-a-t-h-e into it. Relax.
- Keep your posture and correct positioning with each pose. Your body is likely misaligned, and will fight to keep that misalignment. You will have to force your muscles to respond to the new directions you are giving it, which takes patience and practice.
- While in any certain pose, continually make adjustments to align yourself properly.
- Keep a mental awareness on all aspects of your body, yet remain calm through your breathing.
- Yoga is not a competition. It is an awareness of yourself.
- If you are unsure of where or how to start yoga, pick up a copy of this DVD or consider taking one-on-one sessions with an instructor.



Triangle Pose:

Creates spaces in the vertebrae, stretches the lower back tissues, stretches the hamstrings, strengthens the hips.

Stand at the center of your mat (lengthwise), and parallel your feet. Rotate right foot 90 degrees toward the front center of the mat. (Keep left foot stationary, so heel of right foot is aligned with arch of left foot.) Raise your arms parallel and look at your right hand. Bend slightly and reach forward with the fingertips of your right hand. Keep bending forward at your hips and release the right arm down to your leg and place it at a comfortable position on your right leg. Reach your left arm up, fingertips toward the ceiling, and turn your head up to look at your left hand. With each breath, keep gently rotating your torso and hips toward the front, lengthening the spine. Breathe into any discomfort.