

1.2 Lower Back and Abdominal Strength



1. Abdominal Breathing

Place the right palm on the belly and the left on the rib-cage. Feel the belly lifting and lowering beneath the right hand with the in and the out breath. The left hand remains still. Practice for 5 minutes.



2. Pelvic Tilts

Start with the knees bent, and feet hip-width apart. Inhale, and accentuate the arch in the lower back, rolling weight towards the floor of the buttocks. Exhale and flatten the lower back flat to the floor, pulling the abdomen smoothly in towards the spine.



3. Pawanmuktasana Abdominal Series - 3a. single leg raises

Press the back of the hips firmly to the floor. Inhale as you raise the right leg to the up-right position. Exhale as you make the downward or forward movement.



3b. Single leg cycling

Imagine that you are moving the leg through water, with a bit of resistance. Keep the back of the hips pressing into the floor all the way through. After doing five of each for the right leg, change for the left.



3c. Single leg circles

If needed, modify by bending the knee of the working leg.



4. Double Leg Raises

(Modify as needed, by bending at the knees.) Place a square-fold blanket beneath the back of the pelvis with the arms straight, palms pressing into the floor and hands beneath the blanket. Inhale as you raise both legs to an upright. Exhale as you lower the legs down to a point at which work is felt in the abdomen, but the lower back does not become more arched. Keep the back of the hips pressing into the floor. Repeat x 10, or until tired. Then do a second set.



5. Yoga sit-ups

Start with the knees bent, and feet hip-width apart. Place the hands onto the thighs. Inhale. As you exhale slide the hands up the thighs towards the knees. Keep the feet on the floor. Each inhalation squeeze the pelvic floor. Each exhalation pull the abdomen in. Keep the chest open. Repeat x 10, or until tired.



6. Modified Abdominal Twist

Take the feet together and the knees together, arms out at shoulder height, palms turned upwards. Try to keep the knees squeezing together throughout. Inhale and as you exhale lift the feet from the floor. Inhale and as you exhale lift the knees up and over the right elbow. Inhale back to centre. Exhale, lift the knees up and over the left elbow. This is one round. Practice 4 rounds. Those who are stronger, work towards straightening the legs.



7. Navasana (Boat Pose) Feet to Wall

Place the feet on the wall at hip height. Take the feet together and knees together. Make sure that the hips are directly beneath the knees. Lying on your back, inhale as you raise the arms above the head, lengthening the spine. Exhale as you lift the shoulders from the floor, palms beside the knees. Stay in the pose for 5 breaths, then rest. This is one round. Practice 5 rounds.



8. Slow Bhujangasana (Cobra)

Lie on the abdomen, and place the palms on the floor beneath the shoulders. Inhale and as you exhale, try to 'peel' the front surface of the body away from the floor, up to the height of the navel. As you exhale slowly lower back down. Try to use the muscles of the lower back, not the hands, to create the movement. Practice five rounds.



9. Ardha Shalabhasana (Half Locust Pose)

Lie on the abdomen, with arms stretched forwards. Inhale as you raise the right arm and the left leg. Exhale back to the starting position. Inhale as you raise the left arm and the right leg. Exhale back down. This is one round. Work to keep the raised leg straight and the lower leg with the foot pressing into the floor. Try to prevent twisting one side of the torso away from the floor. Practice 4 rounds.



10. Setu Bandha (Bridge) Vinyasa

10a. Start with the knees bent, and feet hip-width apart. Make sure that the heels are not too far forwards of the buttocks.



10b. Inhale as you raise the arms over the head and slowly lift the hips to knee height. Exhale as you roll back down the spine, one vertebra at a time, taking the arms down. Practice 5 rounds.



11. Knee circles

Bring the knees towards the chest, feet together. Place one palm on each knee-cap with the fingers pointing down towards the feet. 'Stir' the knees in a circular motion using the hands, so that the back of the pelvis describes a slow circle on the floor. Do a few one way, then change direction.



12. Halasana (Plough Pose)

Feet to Wall

Place two or three folded blankets with the neatly folded edges facing the wall. Lie down so that the shoulders are at the edge of the blankets and the neck is over the edge. Inhale and as you exhale roll into Halasana and take the feet to the wall at hip height. The spine should be upright, heels on the wall. Work to keep the lower back arching inwards, lifting the sitting bones up and back. Stay in the pose for 5 minutes.



13. Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

Lie on the back with knees bent, feet hip-width apart. Lift hips and place hands beneath buttocks. Lie back down on the hands and move the arms close together under the back. Straighten the legs along the floor and dorsiflex feet. Inhale into the chest.



14. Savasana

13. cont'd

As you exhale lift the chest, coming up onto the elbows with chin still on the chest. Then slowly move the head back. Stay in the pose for 5-10 breaths. To release, bring the chin onto the chest first, then bend the knees and lower the back down.