



Yoga For Ski Conditioning

We all know yoga strengthens our bodies, lengthens our muscles and improves our balance, but did you ever think yoga could be an excellent way to prepare for ski season? As an avid skier and vinyasa yoga teacher with a physical education background, I've created a sequence of yoga asanas and core exercises to get the body tuned up, loose and fit for the slopes. It is recommended these postures and exercises be

performed two to three times per week for at least six weeks before skiing. It is a beneficial programme for downhill and cross country skiing, and it can even help snowboarders!

It is especially important to warm the body gradually before embarking on any vigorous activity. I use this warm-up as a good preparation for the ski yoga asana sequence, and it may be used before hitting the slopes.

Powder Hound Postures

Pre-Ski Warm-Up



Begin in Balasana (Child's Pose), with arms stretched forward, head resting on a block or the mat. Take several long and slow deep breaths, breathing toward the back side of the body, as if to raise the spine toward the ceiling with the in breath. Feel your lower back soften and relax as you release the weight of your hips and legs. Hold this pose for at least 5 deep breaths.



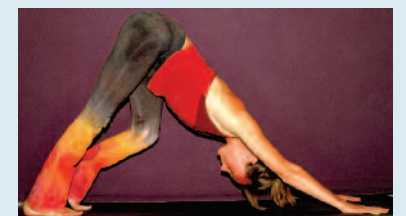
Come up onto hands and knees, stacking your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Begin to flex and extend

your spine, flexing with the exhale and extending with the inhale. Raise the crown of your head to the ceiling as you lift your tailbone, sliding your ribcage forward away from your hips, then round your spine, drawing your chin towards your chest and tucking your tailbone.



Continue flexing and extending your spine, moving with your breath for at least 10 breaths.

Next, lift your knees up off the mat and move into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose). Spread your fingers wide and press your fingerprints into the mat while lifting up on the very center of your palms. For stiff hamstrings, bend your knees and tip your pelvis forward as if your hips are a bowl of



water and you wanted to pour the water out of the bowl onto the floor. Raise your tailbone to the ceiling and allow your chest to sink gently towards your thighs. From downward dog pose, bend one knee, then the other to lower one heel at a time to the mat, as if you're smashing grapes under your feet. This will help to warm up your ankles and stretch and strengthen your calves. It is important for skiers to have strong and flexible lower legs for edge control while skiing. Next, step both feet up to your hands, parallel and hip width apart. With knees bent, fold forward from the hips and let your arms reach down towards the floor. Roll up slowly, letting your head be the very last thing that comes up.



Getting Ready For The Slopes

Now you are warmed up and ready to begin the strength asanas. Bend your knees and lower your hips to come into Utkatasana (Chair Pose) with your feet hip



width apart and your toes parallel. Chair Pose is one of the most effective yoga postures to strengthen the hips and quads. Strong legs help to prevent knee injuries and early fatigue. Raise your arms up to a 45-degree

angle as your hips lower. Be sure to keep your knees over your ankles and your hips slightly back behind your heels.



Tip your upper body forward 45 degrees. Hold this variation for 5 deep breaths. Come out of the posture and return again, this time bending your knees a little further, bringing your chest over the tops of your thighs and stretching your arms forward, parallel to the floor.



For a challenge, lift your heels up off of the mat. Hold for 5 deep breaths. Come out of the posture and return to the first variation, only this time raise your right foot just 1 inch off the mat, so the bottom of your foot is hovering over the mat. Hold for 5 deep breaths and repeat on the other leg. You may, for a challenge in this variation, extend and bend your standing leg, rising and falling as if weighting and unweighting on



your right arm forward and your left leg back. Keep your shoulders in line with your hips. Take a deep breath in and as you exhale draw your elbow and knee under your chest and hips, rounding your back and tucking your chin and your tail bone under. Extend your arm and leg as you inhale to complete the exercise. Repeat 8-10 times on each side. For an added challenge, reach your arm and leg out to the side 12 inches and follow the same directions as above.

Flexibility Is The Key

A flexible body is less likely to tear or be injured during a fall. It is important to stretch the hamstrings and inner thighs to reduce unnecessary pulling on the knee.



Begin by standing with your feet a leg length apart, toes facing forward. Allow your heels to move out slightly to start a gentle inward rotation of your thigh bones. With your hands on your hips begin to tip your upper body forward, folding from your hips until your spine is parallel to the floor, keeping your spine straight and in line with your head and tail-

bone. From here, begin to lower a few more inches by lifting your tailbone and releasing your arms. Place your hands onto a block or onto the floor. Hold for 5 deep breaths. To come out of the posture, place your hands back onto your hips and with straight legs and a long extended spine, lift your torso up and return to standing.



Now it is time to relax your body and visualize a beautiful day on the slopes. Lay on your back in Savasana (Corpse Pose) with your feet hip width apart and your arms by your sides, palms facing up as if you are catching snowflakes in your hands. Close your eyes and release the weight of your body. Imagine yourself standing at the top of a mountain, looking down at trackless fresh powder. Take a deep breath in and when you exhale imagine your skis pointing downhill, allowing gravity to whisk you off into a world of deep snow and pure bliss.

Jill Lawson

Jill Lawson is a certified Sivananda yoga teacher and has been teaching yoga and fitness classes for 16 years. She has a Master's degree in physical education and is a certified health and fitness instructor through the American College of Sports Medicine. She owns a business teaching yoga, Pilates and core conditioning in southwestern Colorado and leads workshops and retreats internationally. She can be reached at www.jilllawsonyoga.com