

Shoulder & Core Sequence

This sequence is suitable for students of all levels who wish to strengthen their shoulders and core. In order to build strength for the poses, incorporate the suggested strength training moves into your weekly practice 2-3 times a week with light to medium weights (or body weight).

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Plank Pose

Begin on all fours with wrists directly under shoulders. Walk one foot back and then the other until you are off the mat. Try to lengthen your entire body from feet to crown and keep a flat back with hips low. Press back through the heels as you engage your quads and your core.

Get stronger with: Abdominal crunches, lateral shoulder raises.



Plank Twist

From plank, release your left foot off the mat and bring your left knee towards the outside of your left elbow. Keep your back flat and do not let the hips rise. Engage your core and obliques to hold the knee up (you can rest it on the elbow) for 2-5 breaths. Repeat on the other side and then return to plank.

Get stronger with: Oblique crunches, lateral shoulder raises.



Four-Limbed Staff Pose (Chaturanga Dandasana)

From plank, keep your wrist right under shoulders and bend elbows back towards heels while keeping your arms "glued" to your sides. As you exhale, slowly lower your body down being careful not to let the elbows pop out to the sides or lowering too low where the elbow is higher than the shoulder. If you can't get your elbow and shoulder at the same level, do this move on your knees until you get stronger. Hold for 1 breath or if you have the strength, you may hold for up to 5 breaths.

Get stronger with: Tricep kickbacks, tricep dips, overhead shoulder presses, pushups.

Photographer: Jill Hunter jillhunterphotography.com



Upward Facing Dog (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)

From Chaturanga, inhale as you roll forward dropping the knees to the ground and lifting the chest with shoulders pulled back. Look up and feel the stretch in your chest and throat. Keep your feet flat on the mat and your hipbones off the mat. Engage your core and quadriceps muscles. Try to get into the position on 1 inhale and roll through the entire movement almost like a snake. Once you are in position, you can hold for 1-5 breaths.

Get stronger with: Pushups, seated leg extensions.



Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

From upward dog, on your exhale, use your arms to press yourself up and back. Lift your hips up high and then gently press your heels towards the ground (it's ok if they don't touch). Slowly try to straighten out the legs and press your chest towards your thighs. Roll your shoulder blades away from each other and completely relax the head and neck. Be sure to use your entire hand and think of making an upside down "V" shape with your body. Hold this pose for 2-5 breaths.

Get stronger with: Hamstring deadlifts, bent over rows (for back), and shoulder presses.



Dolphin

Slowly drop your forearms down to the ground, keeping your shoulders right on top of the elbows. Keep your legs in downward dog position and do not let your head touch the floor. Engage your shoulders and keep pressing your chest towards your thighs as you keep the hips lifted.

Get stronger with: Front, lateral and overhead shoulder presses.



Forearm/Dolphin Plank

From Dolphin, look forward and drop your hips so that your body is parallel to the mat. If you need to, walk your feet back more. Keep your elbows right under shoulders and think of pulling your navel towards your spine. Engage your core and try to relax your shoulders. Hold this pose for 2-5 breaths or even longer if you want to build abdominal strength.

Get stronger with: Abdominal crunches, shoulder presses, pushups



Child's Pose (Balasana)

Slowly drop your knees to the floor and press yourself back. Bend both knees and release your hips towards your feet. As you exhale, sink your ribs towards your mat and gently extend arms out in front (or back towards feet). Take at least 5 deep breaths and let your heart rate drop.

Get stronger with: N/A – resting pose



Crow (Bakasana)

Come onto all fours, then slowly lift your knees off the mat and press up into a low squat. Come up onto the balls of your feet and place your hands out in front and a little wider than your feet. Squat low and bring your arms out in front and make an "X" shape with your triceps and your shins (this will give your legs a shelf to rest on). As you get even lower, practice shifting your weight onto the backs of your arms and lifting your hips to the sky. Never look down at your feet – always look out in front on your mat. Once you are comfortable with your center of gravity, lift both feet up and engage your core muscles. Straighten your arms slightly and point the feet behind you. Hold for 2-5 breaths or longer. Exhale to release and drop the feet back to the floor and finish with optional child's pose.

Get stronger with: Abdominal crunches, bicep curls, lying leg raises, shoulder presses.