

# THE BEST YOGA POSES FOR RUNNERS



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# About the Author



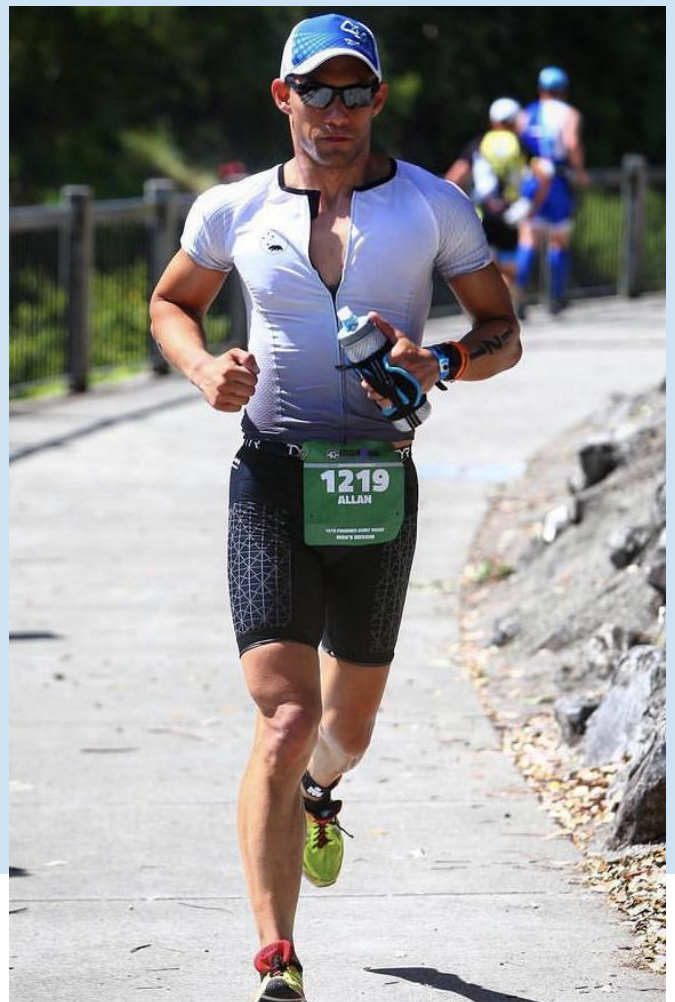
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# Introduction

*“Yoga is essentially a practice for your soul working through the medium of your body.”*

Tara Fraser

Who this is this book for..

...Runners who don't necessarily have a yoga background.

...Who don't have the time to invest in traveling to class.

...Who know they should do some mobility/stability/balance work but don't always enjoy it

...Who see a vast universe of yoga poses but don't know what's best for them as a runner.

There may be some other poses that didn't “make the cut.” Think of a recipe. But what makes the essence of the recipe doesn't change. This is simply a suggestion, a starting point. As my own yoga journey progresses, I'm sure the poses I'd select for this book will change. That's simply growth!

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**Non judgment.** In running, we can be obsessed with the numbers, which inevitably are accompanied by value judgments. Yoga poses offer a brilliant opportunity to practice non-judgmental perspective.

**Introspection and Body Awareness.** The poses themselves are important, no doubt, but they are also ways to learn more about ourselves.

Engaging the **parasympathetic nervous system**. Rest and digest. Relaxation. A perfect counterbalance to the fight or flight responses stimulated by intense running.

**Breathing.** Central to any yoga practice. Of course breathing is central to running as well. Breathing can fall into suboptimal habits when we're pushed toward "survival mode" while under the stress of running. Yoga is a way to reinforce the more effective breathing strategies.

*Finally, for more detailed and individualized instruction, seek out a qualified yoga teacher to help guide you through the finer points of each poses and assist with modifications to make poses harmonious with your body in a way that is safe yet challenging.*

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CHAPTER 01

# DOWNWARD FACING DOG

*Adho Mukha Svanasana*





# Downward Facing Dog key points

- If you could only pick one yoga pose, this would certainly be among the top candidates.
- Hips UP and BACK. If you see how dogs do it, because of their anatomy, their hips naturally sit further back, rather than the body in a V or pike position.
- I'm more interested in movement of the hips than whether you can get your heels down. **The purpose of downward dog is NOT to get your feet flat on the ground.**
- ...That's great if you can, but don't let that distract you from other benefits of including this in your practice.
- **If you need to bend your knees that's totally OK!**
- Push your chest down and back. Downward facing dog is a valuable chest opener as well!
- Because this pose is doable for almost every runner, it means you're more likely to do it.

# Marching in Downward Facing Dog

- Add some marching to get the effect for single leg motion, akin to running. Simply increase your knee bend and lift your heels further from the ground.
- When marching, you can keep your hips squared to the front if you want to closely replicate the running pattern.
- However, the hips CAN shift side-to-side to explore your motion. It's all about what you want to accomplish with the pose!





# Downward Facing Dog...more key points

- From a biomechanics perspective, the pose lengthens the posterior chain, or back body, from head-to-toe
  - Pay attention to the small muscles in your lower legs and feet and how they react to different positioning. My personal preference is to maintain the integrity of both arches, but feel free to explore what it feels like to let those foot muscles relax. Note how that changes the feels in your calves, knees, hips and even the low back.
  - You also create some **spinal traction**, or basically using gravity to decompress the spine, which is under quite a bit of stress while running.
  - Feel your hands in complete contact with the ground like you are trying to intently push the floor away.
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## CHAPTER 02

# SINGLE LEG FORWARD BENDING



# TWO selections!

- OK...so technically this isn't a single pose, but instead two different choices...
- Standing forward bend is a staple of many yoga practices. But because running involves each leg working independently, poses with a single leg emphasis make the cut here!

And the winners are.....

PYRAMID POSE  
*Parsvottanasana*



RUNNER'S LUNGE POSE  
*Modified Ardha Hanumanasana*



# Pyramid Pose key points

- Aim to square the pelvis with the lead leg
- Activate the muscles of the trail thigh to drive the trail heel toward the mat.
- Long, straight spine. Avoid rounding the spine to get further. In reality, once you get close to the lead thigh, some spinal flexion is normal, but if your spine is still parallel to the ground or short of that, you should prioritize a straight spine more than distance.
- **Lead with your heart...Don't let your muscles simply give way to gravity. Even when you see advanced yogis bending all the way forward over their lead thigh, they are actively in control of the pose**
- Hand placement options – Grasping elbows behind your back is one moderate difficulty option. You can also put your hands into prayer position behind your back, which requires more upper back and shoulder mobility. If you have the mobility, reaching down toward the ground is another way integrate your hands and arms.

# Pyramid Pose key points

- You can also put your hands into prayer position behind your back, which requires more upper back and shoulder mobility. If you have the mobility, reaching down toward the ground is another way integrate your hands and arms.
  - If you need an easier hand placement, you can place your hands onto a chair, table or even against the wall.
  - If you're beginner to intermediate, aim the centerline of your torso toward the inside of the lead thigh. If you're more flexible, you can angle your torso more laterally
  - I like this pose too because you can literally do it anywhere. Don't have to worry about getting down on the dirt, hot asphalt, wet grass, itchy grass or any other environmental condition involved with outdoor running.
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# Pyramid Pose key points: The Feet

- Like most standing poses, foot stability is essential to extract the most benefits from the pose. A well maintained arch means engaged foot muscles, and more control you can have over your legs, hips and pelvis.





# Runner's Lunge Pose key points

“Runners Lunge” has been applied to several different poses in the western yoga lexicon, but if you know the Sanskrit term, you'll be more precise!!

Some of the cues from pyramid pose apply here as well....

- Pull your toes toward your face
  - Long spine. Don't sacrifice spinal posture to get closer to your lead leg
  - Fold over your front leg, leading with the heart, pushing the chest down and forward
  - Front leg is active
  - This pose can be quite intense, so you may need blocks or other aids to get the most benefit from the pose
  - Part of the challenge here is to create that forward bending without losing integrity of pelvic alignment. Pelvis should stay relatively forward, not twisted or kicked out to the side.
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# Runner's Lunge Pose...more key points

- One reason to choose this pose (if you have to choose this versus pyramid pose) is the added mobility demand upon the feet, toes and ankles
- Many will find this pose a more direct and intense stress upon the hamstrings



# Runner's Lunge Pose...more key points

*Why might you choose this pose over something such as reclined hand to big toe pose (laying on your back and pulling your top leg toward your face, possibly with a rope)?...*

Unlike that pose in which the pelvis is stable and the femur is moving, in this pose ***the femur is fixed and the pelvis rotates over the femur***. This is similar to how the pelvis works when the foot is in contact with the ground while running (Closed kinetic chain versus open kinetic chain)



CHAPTER 03

# WARRIOR II

*Virabhadrasana*



# Warrior II key points

- Hips square to the long edge of the mat (not twisted toward your front leg)
- Front foot pointed in the direction your knee is pointed. Back foot turned in approximately 45 degrees
- Anchor into the mat with the outside of the back foot; this helps maintain the height of the arch





## Warrior II...more key points

- What else makes this beneficial for runners? Creating space in both hip joints; the inner and outer muscles of the hips often get neglected..Warrior II is perfect for these muscles
- Excellent for helping *spread the pelvic floor muscles*. When you create width in the pelvis (“spread your hip joints far apart”), you create a gentle stretch to the pelvic floor. Add some relaxed breathing and you’re challenging the pelvic floor in a healthy manner





CHAPTER 04

# TREE

*Vrikshasana*



# Tree Pose key points

- Pull your shoulders down away from your ears
- Relax your facial muscles
- Pick a spot in the distance to focus your eyes, but keep your gaze soft



# Tree Pose...more key points

- Why this is useful for running– ***running is a series of alternated single leg stances***. There are many ways to work single leg stance, but tree is one from the yoga universe that fills this key need. It also enlists core control to maintain stability throughout the rest of your body while balancing on one leg



- You can challenge balance in this pose with variations on the hand/arm placement, whether hands at your side, prayer position, hands overhead or even with eagle arms
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CHAPTER 05

# LOW LUNGE

*Anjaneyasana*



# Low Lunge key points

- This is one of the most misunderstood moves in running...
- **Think of a long, smooth curve along your ENTIRE back** body...avoid concentrating too much of the bend into the low back
- Maintain the **ribcage stacked over the pelvis**
- Glutes and abs are active. We are not merely sinking into the lead hip
- In fact, we should strive to **create space in the lead hip**, not only the trail hip





## Low Lunge...more key points

- Press the trail shin into the ground. This helps create a bit of traction to help lengthen the trail hip flexors and also open the trail hip joint
- Keep the front knee aligned over the 2-3<sup>rd</sup> toes of the front foot
- Arms can be overhead or resting on the front knee





CHAPTER 06

# THUNDERBOLT

*Vajrasana*



# Thunderbolt key points

- If the pose is too intense, use a bolster under your shins. If you're feeling knee pain or discomfort, it's a sign to back off
- Get tall but maintain your posture. Avoid arching the back and letting your rib cage flare forward. Keep your shoulders pulled down from your ears



# Thunderbolt...more key points

- Keep the heels underneath you; avoid letting them rotate outward. You should feel a deeper stretch with your heels beneath you but you might not be able to sink as far. However, you can substitute Hero Pose, which positions the shins and knees into a less demanding position, though **be aware of turning Hero Pose into a W-sit position**



*Photo Credit: EliteKidsTherapy.com*

# Thunderbolt...more key points

- A main benefit to running is that it addresses the oft neglected muscles of the shins. But to get the most from the stretch, the key is to maintain posture and alignment, so it is far more than just a shin stretch. You may feel a stretch in the quads as well.





CHAPTER 07

# PIGEON

*Eka Pada Rajakapotasana*



# Pigeon key points

- There's a lot going on here beyond the stretching to the front hip. It also challenges you to maintain the opposite hip neutral (the hip with the extended leg)
- ***Keep the pelvis aligned forward.*** It is easy to let the trail hip rotate outward. But when you keep the trail hip aligned, you'll probably feel a deeper stretch into that hip flexor
- As with during the Low Lunge, **grounding the trail leg will also stretch the hip flexor**





# Pigeon...more key points

- In the lead hip, you should be feeling the stretch deep into the back of the hip joint. If you're feeling it mainly in the knee, you should either place the knee on a bolster, or reposition your hip into an angle that allows for more rotation
  - This is another pose that addresses some of the key deep, rotational muscles of the hips. When in the pose, **explore the nuances of the position and create space in your hips.** Experiment with slight adjustments to your positioning. **Subtle shifts can yield profound differences in how you experience the pose**
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# Pigeon...more key points

- If you have really good mobility, you can certainly lean the torso forward over your lead leg rather than supporting in an upright position with your arms
- Some rounding of the spine is healthy when leaning forward, but **don't use rounding to substitute for motion that is more safely derived from hip mobility**



CHAPTER 08

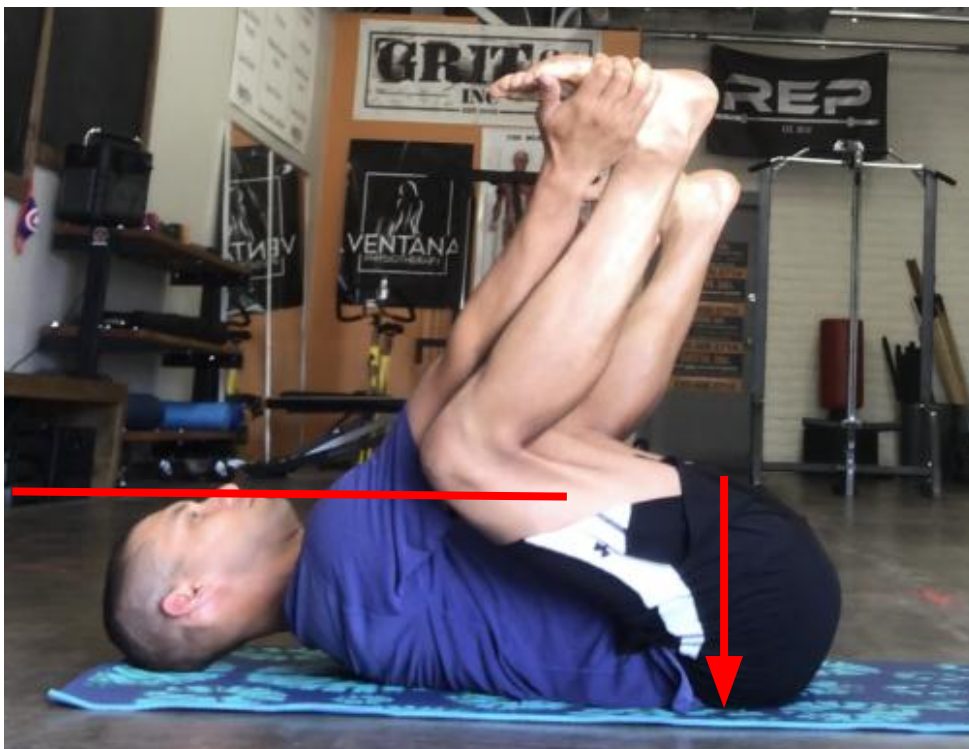
# HAPPY BABY

*Ananda Balasana*



# Happy Baby key points

- Everyone loves happy baby!
- The key to get the most from the pose is to let your sacrum sink into the floor
- But when doing so, keep your rib cage descended (avoid letting it flare)
- Separate your pelvis from the tops of your femurs
- Keep your face parallel to the ground. Avoid letting the face tilt backward, which often happens if the rib cage flares forward



CHAPTER 09

# LEGS UP THE WALL

*Viparita Karani*





# Legs Up the Wall key points

- Yes, this actually does have an official name in yoga!
- For years has been a favorite recovery pose for many runners. Does it help “flush out” toxins as has long been believed? I don’t know if we can prove that but we do know that it ***encourages relaxation and a shift toward a more parasympathetic state***, which is itself very beneficial for overall recovery
- As a residual benefit, it can help lengthen the back body as well
- Just as with happy baby, keep the rib cage neutral without and flare. Same applies for the head, maintaining the face parallel to the floor.





# To learn more...

Want to learn more about how to incorporate your yoga practice into your run training to run your best?

Need assistance with using your yoga practice to keep you healthy and in training?

Please reach out via my practice at Ventana Physiotherapy or contact me via social media on Instagram at @thekettlebelldoc

*Namaste*



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