

The 11 benefits of Salute to the Sun and a step-by-step guide on how to practice

Salute to the Sun is a flowing sequence of mostly forward and backward bends starting from a standing position moving through to a push-up pose and then returning to standing. There are only seven postures to learn as pictured below. In total, there are 12 steps in the sequence, with five positions repeated plus an additional and important practice once completed - lying horizontally in Corpse Pose.

Salute to the Sun has a few different names including the traditional name Surya Namaskar, which translates as Sun Salutations. Traditionally the practice is done at sunrise with an attitude of humility for the life-giving nature of the sun. So much so, the sun is thought of as a god (Surya) and the practice is a form of worship and praying for thanks (Namaskar) to the sun god.

It does take some time to feel confident and for the body to feel the benefits, allow about six weeks to get a grasp on the sequence. Learning from books (which is how I did it) or the internet is a great way to start, followed by sessions with qualified teachers. TIP: Print off this guide and place it on the floor in front of you as you practice.

There are many different variations on the sequence, such as postures being omitted or added and subtle technical changes such as the position of the hands being slightly different. Which one you practice comes down to personal preference and don't be limited to just one. For example, I quite often include the plank posture to increase the strength of the practice.









If you are not able to move through this sequence because of injury or it's just too difficult, there is a gentle and easier form which includes the cat posture as a substitute for many of the floor positions and added as a transition pose between the floor poses. Using this modified version is a good warm up, especially first thing in the morning and it means for my students that can't do the traditional version, they can still participate in and get benefits from that section of the class. Once you feel you are progressing with the sequence, start to introduce moving with the breath and experiment with holding the poses for extended counts or doing it at a fast pace.

Benefits of Surya Namaskar

1. A feeling of accomplishment from mastering something difficult which helps improve your mental health
2. Improved strength especially for the back, core, arms and legs
3. Increased flexibility especially for the spine and back of the legs (hamstrings)
4. For most people it can provide a mild cardio workout which improves general fitness and heart health
5. Improved functioning of the internal organs especially the liver - due to the increased blood flow and massaging effect of the forward and backward bends
6. Better posture
7. Reduced stress and anxiety which can lead to better sleep
8. Greater focus and clarity
9. Improved injury prevention and recovery
10. Increased energy in daily life
11. Drainage of the sinus ducts which can improve various sinus conditions

And the whole practice can be done in a short amount of time - about 10 minutes is all that's needed. The benefits of yoga as a whole are present in Salute to the Sun. - By Ben Whitaker, Sound Spirit Yoga and Meditation: www.soundspirit.com.au Copyright 2016

How to do Salute to the Sun?

	<p>1. Prayer Stand with feet together and palms together. Close the eyes and imagine the sun rising. (Pose 12)</p>	<p><i>EXHALE</i></p> 	<p>5. Mountain With the palms and feet touching the ground, the hips are raised so the body forms an inverted "V". (Pose 8)</p>
<p><i>INHALE</i></p> 	<p>2. Raised Arms Raise the arms, separate palms facing them forwards, a slight bend backwards in the upper body. (Pose 11)</p>	<p><i>HOLD OUT</i></p> 	<p>6. Eight Point The chin, chest, palms, knees and feet are touching the ground, with the hips raised.</p>
<p><i>EXHALE</i></p> 	<p>3. Hand to Foot Bend forward with a straight spine, the palms reach towards your feet. Knees can be bent if needed. (Pose 10)</p>	<p><i>INHALE</i></p> 	<p>7. Cobra The lower body, hips and palms touch the ground, the upper body is stretched upwards with a slight backbend.</p>
<p><i>INHALE</i></p> 	<p>4. Equestrian The right leg is pushed as far back as possible, with the left leg remaining between the palms on the ground. <i>Note: step back with the left leg on the next round</i> (Pose 9)</p>		<p>8. Mountain (Pose 5) 9. Equestrian (Pose 4) 10. Hand to Foot (Pose 3) 11. Raised Arms (Pose 2) 12. Prayer (Pose 1)</p>
			<p>Corpse Pose after last round</p>