



Yogga for kids

By Janine Keller

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Without realizing it, children practice yoga all the time, from the moment they are born. Yoga is fundamentally designed for children, as many of its poses are derived from animals and the environment. Examples of these are the lion pose, the tree pose, the cat pose, and the bridge pose. A favourite yoga pose among kids is the downward facing dog, with a bit of a silly twist—the variation is that the dog is taking a pee by lifting its leg! Laughter, smiles, fitness, and fun are all elements of a children's yoga class.

Yoga is a terrific way for children and families to exercise their bodies and their minds, and it can be combined with a variety of fun and creative activities. Yoga sessions can include music, dance, storytelling, and art, transporting children's imaginations to faraway places.

Sessions can begin with songs and games to warm up. Adults can take their cues from children's favourite things and incorporate them into the yoga exercises.

During our classes at Blue Skies Yoga, for example, we travel to distant places using storytelling, yoga poses, and drama. To respect the tradition of ahimsa, or non-violence in yoga, we use co-operative games instead of competitive ones. The children enjoy ending class with savasana, or a lying down relaxation pose. We use Beanie Babies for eye pillows to enhance the sense of relaxation.

Family yoga is a wonderful way for the entire family to experience yoga. Family yoga involves singing, co-operation, and doing partner yoga with each other.

So next time you have a free Saturday afternoon, head over to the library, take out a kids' yoga book, and try out the downward facing dog, with the 'pee on the tree' variation!

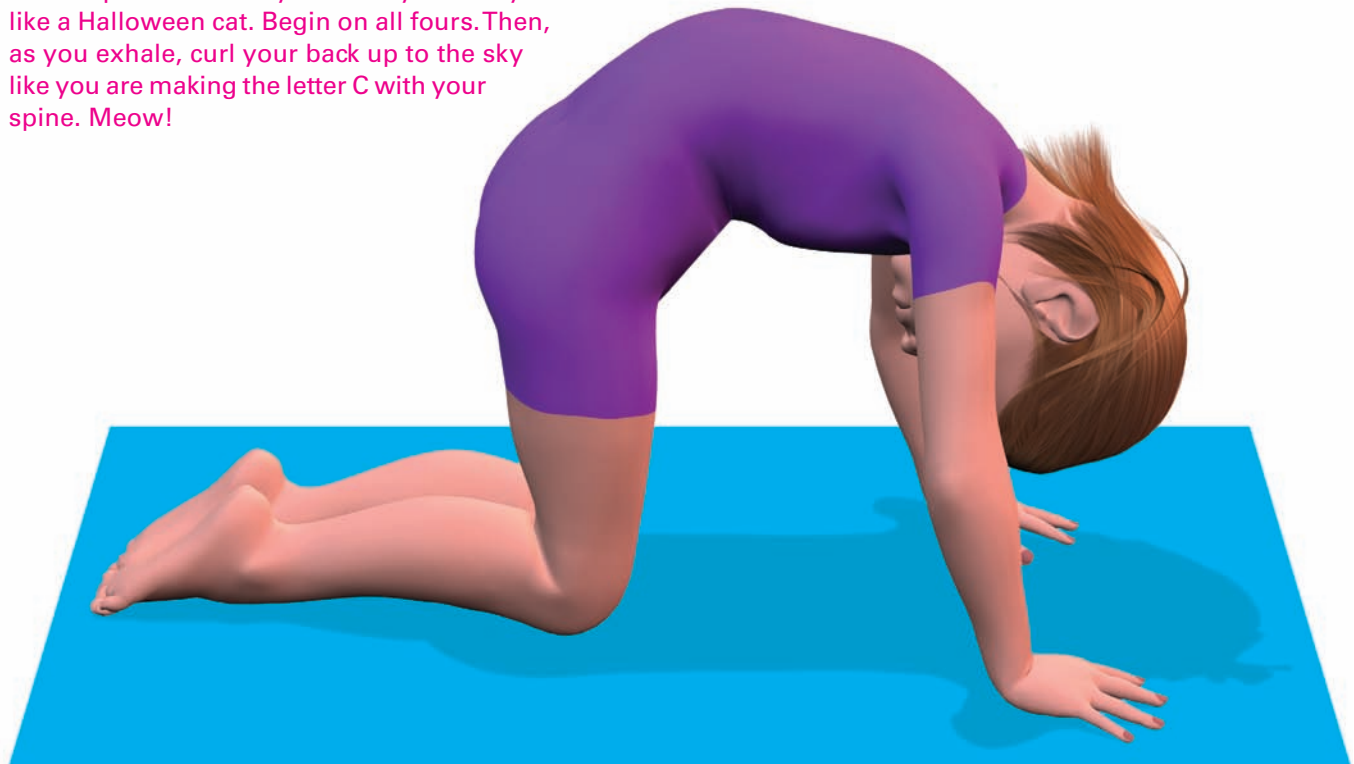
Until then, have a look at some of these fun and easy yoga poses, and ask your mom or dad to help you try them out!

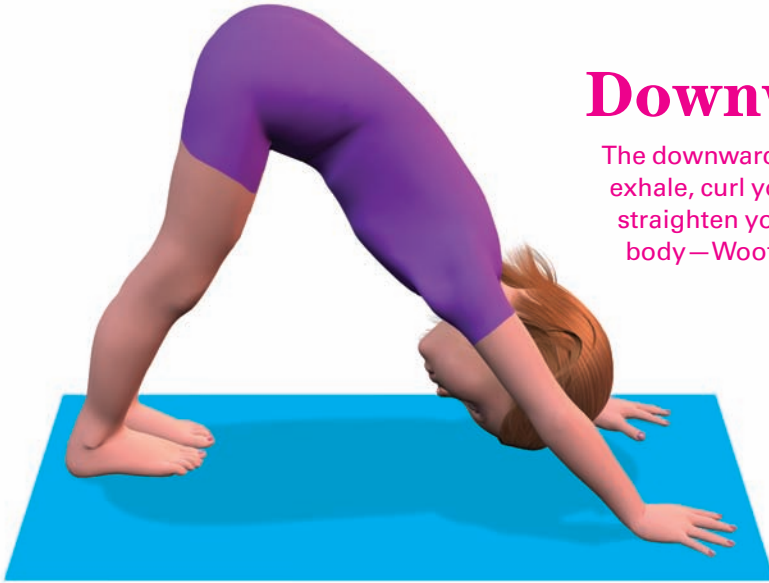
Benefits of Yoga for Children:

- Teaches children how to relax
- Encourages creativity
- Yoga is non-violent and non-competitive
- Teaches proper breathing
- Uses co-operative games and teamwork

Cat

The cat pose is where you make your body look like a Halloween cat. Begin on all fours. Then, as you exhale, curl your back up to the sky like you are making the letter C with your spine. Meow!



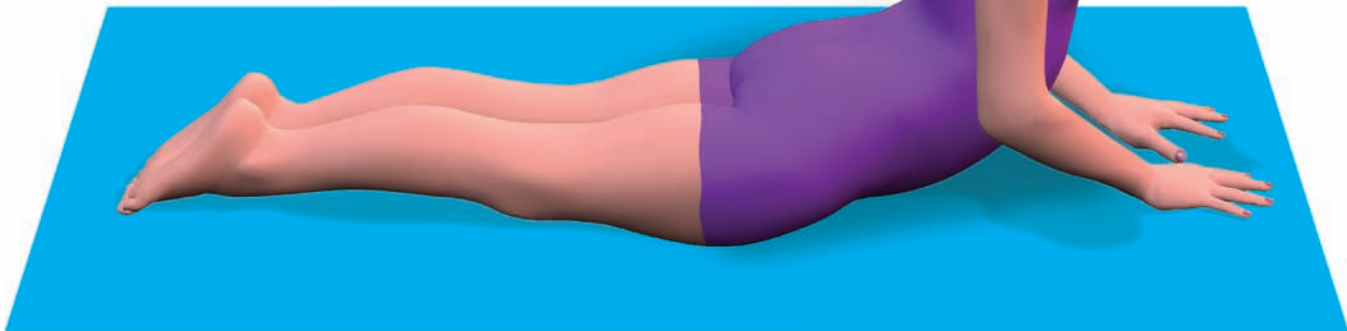


Downward Facing Dog

The downward facing dog also begins on all fours. Then, as you exhale, curl your toes under and lift your hips to the sky as you straighten your spine. You are making an inverted V with your body—Woof! What type of dog are you?

Cobra

The cobra pose is great for opening your heart. Begin lying on your tummy. Then, as you exhale, press into your palms and reach your heart up to the sun. Can you make a hissing sound like a snake?



Rock Pose

The rock pose is a resting pose and can be useful when you have far too many things on your mind. Begin by kneeling. Then, as you exhale, take your forehead to the floor and your hands beside you. Rest here for a few breaths, solid as a rock.

Warrior II

Warrior II pose is an energizing and confidence building pose. Begin standing at the top of your mat and take a step back with your left foot. Then float your arms to a T position and bend your right knee. Can you be strong yet peaceful like a yoga warrior? Don't forget to do the other side!



Double Boat

This pose requires a brother, sister, friend, or parent to help you out. Begin sitting facing your partner, toes touching. Then, grab hold of each other's wrists. Place your right foot on your partner's left foot. Then, as you exhale, press into each other's feet and straighten your legs. Great teamwork!

Bridge

Bridges are everywhere, including in yoga. Begin lying down on your back. Then, bend your knees, feet flat on the floor. As you exhale, lift your hips towards the sky and press into your hands at your sides. Can you lift your bridge so that a ship can sail under it?



Relaxation

Hooray! We have arrived at the final relaxation after trying our yoga poses. Begin by lying on your back and close your eyes. As you inhale, tense your entire body, and as you exhale, relax your entire body. Imagine your body is melting into the floor like ice cream on a hot summer day. Take this time to think of something you are thankful for and to rest your body. Namaste!

Janine Keller is a Certified Kids', Prenatal, Postnatal, and Yoga for the Special Child Instructor™, who received her kids' yoga certification in New York City and has been working with children for a total of 15 years. She is the founder of Blue Skies Yoga, the first company in Ontario to specialize in kids', prenatal, and baby & me yoga. You can learn more about Blue Skies Yoga by visiting blueskiesyoga.com.