

# **The Aerial Yoga Manual**

## **VOLUME 1**

A step-by-step guide for teachers and students of  
any aerial yoga or fitness program

**By**  
**Rebekah Leach**

**Photos by Matthew Leach**

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This book may be purchased in bulk with discount rates. Please send an e-mail to [books@aerialdancing.com](mailto:books@aerialdancing.com) for more information.

When practicing any aerial fitness program, always do so in the presence of a trained professional, with load-tested fabric hanging from load-tested rigging, which has been set-up and is inspected frequently by rigging professionals, along with crash pads underneath the fabric. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise especially a rigorous program that includes inversions such as aerial yoga.

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this material, there is a real chance of injury in execution of the movements described in this book. The Publishers and all persons involved in the making of this manual will not accept responsibility for injury to any degree, including death, to any person as a result of participation in the activities described in this manual. Purchase or use of this document constitutes agreement to this effect. Furthermore, rigging of aerial equipment is not discussed in this manual. It is highly recommended that you consult a professional rigger when it comes to using any hanging equipment.

ISBN 978-0-557-28838-0

United States of America

Published by Lulu.com

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Teaching and performing aerial work has put me in the best shape of my life and only motivates me to continue. I am happy that you have picked up this manual and hope that this program will bring the same enjoyment for you whether you are a teacher or a student of any form of any aerial work.

Rebekah Leach



# Introduction

This manual is volume one of a two volume series designed to cover the most fundamental moves that are part of any aerial yoga or aerial fitness program. When executed, the program itself is a mix of aerial dance movement joined with yoga and Pilates. However, in book form, where movement can be difficult to convey, the emphasis is mainly on the poses that are a part of the program.

## Before we begin, a few notes for the beginning aerial yoga student:

This book is not meant to be a substitute for personal instruction. Having a trained professional working with you can ensure that you have the proper body alignment, etc. If an aerial yoga studio exists in your area, by all means, begin there, even if your ultimate goal is a home practice. If there are no local classes, consider traveling to a location where aerial yoga is being taught to learn the basics. Once you have had an initial introduction, then come back to this book. However, as much as possible, continue the presence of a trained movement instructor. The important aspect is that they know proper fitness training techniques to prevent injury and how to interpret the alignment of the body in each position. This can be an experienced yoga teacher, a Pilate's instructor, gymnastics coach, a personal trainer, etc.

An outside eye to spot alignment issues is very important. Once you develop an eye for alignment, occasionally view pictures and/or video of yourself to check in and make sure that you are always improving.

Many people who pick up this book may be attending classes at a studio. It is good to have a basic understanding of the equipment you are entrusting with your weight; however, it is not as imperative as for those individuals who set up aerial apparatuses for private practice at home. Until aerial yoga equipment is ubiquitous as traditional yoga equipment, you must exercise a great deal of care when hunting for the proper set-up. There are two main parts to equipment: (1) the rigging set-up, and (2) the aerial yoga apparatus itself. As for the rigging set-up, it is recommended that you consult the services of a professional rigger who can help you set it up according to your location. Consult with a professional who understands how to set up weight bearing equipment. They can help you find the right spot from which to hang your equipment and install the system so that it can take your weight safely.

As for the apparatus, this is not as simple as going out and buying some fabric from the local fabric store. Please do not do this. Fabric for aerial yoga purposes must be load-tested, which means it has been put to the test and its breaking strength is known. Then, of course, you want to make sure that the breaking strength is much greater than what you weigh if you plan on climbing around on it. Another quality of fabric for aerial yoga purposes is that it is wide and strong enough for you to lay in when spread out like a hammock (or at least something close to it). Preferably it is a light material that allows air to flow freely around it and a material that does not promote excessive static cling.

So you have your fabric ready? Good. Okay, now you just need to make sure that you are hanging it in a safe way. Some popular mistakes are tying the fabric in such a way so that (1) it loops around in such a fashion that there is not enough friction and it slides off of the rigging once you put weight on it, or (2) it is tied so tightly that it is impossible to take out the knots in the fabric to properly wash and care for the fabric. Make sure that you have the proper knots in place to create an ideal balance between these two extremes.

If you are practicing aerial yoga at home over carpet with a low ceiling, then a regular yoga mat may be sufficient for you, but it's always better safe than sorry (especially when it comes to any aerial dance related activity). If you plan on going more than five feet above the ground or you are over a wood floor, it is recommended that you invest in a gymnastic mat that you place underneath you when you practice.

## The Benefits of Aerial Yoga

All the set-up hassle and potential dangers are not stopping the growing numbers of aerial yoga practitioners. So what makes it worth the hassle? It's all the benefits that a looped fabric can bring. A looped piece of fabric can support the body in ways that allow you to experience poses that may be straining or spine-compressing otherwise. Poses, such as a handstand which can be quite challenging for some, are suddenly not just possible, but are easier to try with the fabric wrapped around the body so that it is difficult to fall.

Some benefits of aerial yoga include the following:

- ◆ Practice advanced inversions without neck or spine compression.
- ◆ Develop upper body strength without even trying to!
- ◆ Stretch deeper without experiencing strain in the lower back because the fabric supports part of your body weight.
- ◆ Hold positions such as downward dog longer because weight is distributed evenly throughout multiple points.
- ◆ Increase your spatial intelligence by exposing yourself to new perspectives within 3-D space.
- ◆ Develop a stronger core by expanding the possibilities of shapes and positions in 3-D space. This develops deep inner core stability.
- ◆ Improve balance through use of the fabric that can move anywhere in space.
- ◆ Experience the empowerment of being able to align your spine correctly in each pose with the careful support of the fabric.
- ◆ Bring more oxygen through blood flow to your brain by the gentle inversions on the fabric.
- ◆ Reinforce proper body alignment, which will carry over into your every day life, and throughout your other fitness practices.

## The Downsides of Being Upside-Down

While being upside-down can bring great health for some, there are others who have conditions which make it dangerous for them to invert. Those who should NOT invert include anyone with any of the following conditions:

- ◆ High or low blood pressure
- ◆ Glaucoma
- ◆ Pregnancy
- ◆ Neck Injuries
- ◆ Heart Conditions of any kind
- ◆ Epilepsy
- ◆ Eye problems
- ◆ Other conditions – check with your doctor to make sure it's okay for you!

Also, it is recommended that women refrain from inversions during their menstruation period. Reversing blood flow goes against the body's natural urge to release stale blood and the endometrial lining, and it may lead to a backflow of menstrual fluid (known as retrograde menstruation).

*Fortunately, aerial yoga includes many more moves than inversions, so you can still reap benefits of the program without inverting.*





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# Answers to Questions

## How high off the ground should I have my loop of fabric?

There is not one height that will work for every movement. Different heights can lead to many variations, but a height that will accommodate most movements in this course is an arms length from the ground. Meaning, if you were to lie down underneath plumbline and outstretch your arms towards the ceiling, the loop should land at your fingertips.

There are some movements in which it is necessary to have a higher or lower fabric, especially if your legs are shorter relative to your torso. Most of the time, the perfect height is going to be found by trial and error to find what works best for your body.

## What is the “plumbline”?

The plumbline is the vertical line in space that goes directly from the middle of your rigging in a straight line towards the ground. You can also think of it as the line in space where the fabric would hang whether it is there or not.

## How does the plumbline work to my advantage?

Some movements work better with a higher fabric than your default height. In times where changing the height of the loop is inconvenient for just one movement, you can often travel away from the plumbline to achieve the same effect as heightening the fabric. Unfortunately, this doesn't usually work the other way around. In other words, it is better to have your fabric generally too low and use these sorts of tricks to make it higher than have your fabric too high. Knowing how to work with your plumbline is one of the marks of a seasoned aerial yogi.

## What is “fabric independence”?

Within the instructions in this manual, you may read the phrase: “become independent of your fabric.” This means that while the fabric is around you and helping you to stay balanced, your goal is to be holding your own weight. You want to be able to stay exactly where you are even if the fabric were to dissolve around you. This makes you independent of the fabric.

## What do you mean by “your weight is in your grip”?

It means squeeze tight! You are dependent of your grip strength at that point in the movement, and while the fabric may be wrapped around you at various places, you want to lift out of that and be holding on with your hands. This phrase will come up often especially in transitions of movements.

A myth about aerial dance is that you must be strong and able to do pull-ups to be able to start. This isn't necessarily true. What is perhaps more true is that doing aerial activities such as aerial yoga can help you build upper body strength and areas such as your grip strength. Just make sure to balance your pulling and hanging with enough pushing to keep your muscle structure in good shape.

## How long do I hold each pose?

The reason that there is no duration listed for each pose is that it will vary from person to person and from level to level as each individual progresses. When you first start learning these poses, simply hold for about 3 seconds or just enough to feel what the pose feels like and then exit. As you progress, listen to your body for how long to hold. A good rule of thumb is to work up to one minute holds. Hold everything but your breath!

Another rule you could utilize is to breathe through your nose. If you feel the urge to breathe through your mouth, or any change to your breathing requirements, this can be indicator of muscle fatigue, and choose that point to exit. Unless otherwise stated, exit each movement on an exhale.

Regardless of any rule of thumb or holding goal, make sure that you do not stay in any inverted pose for too long. You may feel fine when hanging upside down, but get quite a surprise when you re-invert. Always come up slow from every inversion.

## Should I skip the modifications if I'm advanced?

Modifications are for everyone! Knowing a modification is handy on days you do not feel so great, perhaps your body needs more rest, or perhaps you want to go deeper and hang out longer in a pose and a modification provides a way to enter or exit in an energy-saving manner. So, no matter what level you are working, make sure to take note of all modifications.

## About the difficulty levels


In a ten week beginning aerial yoga course, a teacher may cover all the moves in this manual. However, the average beginning aerial yoga student is not your average person. The typical beginning aerial yoga student has experience with some form of movement (yoga, Pilates, rock climbing, etc.); they are usually in good physical condition, and have a healthy body weight for their shape.

Many moves have variations after the initial step that make the move more challenging. Do not attempt the add-on movements the first time you try movements in this manual. Wait until you have mastered the foundation and then try the add-ons once you feel strong and capable.

*These indicators attached to each move can give you an idea of the relative level of difficulty:*

 = This move would be presented day one of a beginning course.

 = This move would be presented day two or three of a beginning course.

 = The move would not be presented until the student felt comfortable being in the air and moving their weight around in the fabric.

 = An extra amount of flexibility, strength, or inversion stamina may be required.

# Getting Started

*Do you feel ready to get started? Let's check.*

## Your Rigging System & Safety

- ✓ **Have you checked your fabric lately for any rips or holes? Have you cleaned it lately?**

Fabric does wear and tear, and should be replaced when it starts to wear down. It is important to de-rig your fabric from its hardware every so often for two main reasons (1) to clean it and (2) to check for wear and tear at the most probable location—near and around the rigging.

Clean your fabric according to the directions it came with. Typically, you want to air dry your fabric so that it will be stronger longer.

If you get a small hole from a finger nail snag for example, then you can sew up the hole with needle and thread. But if your fabric is showing signs of wear and tear that can create a larger rip, or rips near the rigging, it's time to replace it.

- ✓ **Have you inspected your rigging lately to make sure that there has not been too much wear and tear in the system?**

Have a qualified rigger help you develop a checklist for this part. The details will depend on your own person system.

Double check that your carabineers are locked. They should be locked towards the ground. This is because you want gravity pulling the lock in place, not working against you to undo the lock. This is most important over longer periods of time, but it is a good habit to have.

- ✓ **Do you have your mat underneath your fabric? Have you cleaned it lately?**

This may be anything from a regular yoga mat to a thick gymnastics crash pad. It depends on your level of experience, the surface under the mat, and how high you will be going in the air. It is recommended that beginners always start over a gymnastics mat when first testing the flying poses. Make sure to periodically clean your mat, and clean often if you are dripping sweat on it.

- ✓ **Do you have a spotter nearby?**

When you are first beginning, this person should be a trained professional who can help you learn the mechanics of using the fabric for various positions. As you advance, continue to have a spotter nearby at all times when practicing. Besides, it's fun to have a friend come along.

## Your Mind, Body & Spirit

- ✓ **Do you have on close-fitting but comfortable clothes?**

You want to cover your armpits, your midriff and the backs of your legs to prevent fabric burns. Keep your ankles bare so that you can easily maneuver the fabric around your ankles without twisting up a pant leg, etc.

- ✓ **Do you have a good playlist nearby to put on?**

Good music that boosts your spirit will help you perform better physically. (Actually, I'm not sure whether that's a proven statement, but I sure can attest to its truth through my own experiences.)

✓ **Have you been drinking enough water lately so that you are properly hydrated?**

By the time you start exercising, if you are dehydrated, it's too late to do anything about it. Proper hydration is something that must be done in preparation for physical activity. Make it a daily habit to drink plenty of liquids so that dehydration doesn't creep up on you. If you experience nausea or headaches when practicing aerial yoga, try drinking more water in the days and hours leading up to your workouts. Just make sure not to drink too much water right before your workouts. Keep your stomach light, especially of food in the hours prior to the workout.

✓ **Do you have your water bottle nearby?**

While proper hydration starts before a workout, you still want to keep up the hydration during the session as well.

✓ **Have you taken yourself through a mental and physical warm-up?**

The best warm-ups typically begin with the simplest of moves, such as raising the arms while breathing to establish the connection of movement to the breath. The three focuses of a warm-up include: (1) breath (2) awakening of joints and (3) raising your body temperature just enough so that if you had on a sweater at the beginning of the warm-up, by the end of the warm-up, you'd want to take it off. You can incorporate the fabric into your warm-ups once you have a solid understanding of movement on the fabric.

Incorporating the breath can be as easy as lying on your back and taking the time to focus on how your body moves as you breathe deeply in and out.

The awakening of your joints is the simple matter of taking time to rotate each of the main joints. This is like lubing up with WD-40. Here's an example that goes in a pattern I like to call "outside in" because you start with your outermost joints and work your way in to your center:

Rotate wrists and ankles, bend knees and elbows, rotate arms around at the shoulder and the leg at the hip, sway the hips from side-to-side and move the shoulders around in shoulder shrugs, etc. Next, move the head around at the neck and finally move in larger motions that require you to bend in the center of the body and reach in all sorts of different directions, losing up everything. Feeling warmer yet?

*You are now ready to begin your aerial yoga workout. Stay focused, be safe and have fun!*

# Chapter 1: A Few Basics

*Seated*

*Standing*

*Hip Hang*

*Wrist Wrap*

# Seated

Prerequisite: none

**1** Put one leg through the looped fabric. Bend the standing leg and begin taking weight in your hands. Throughout these exercises, keep your shoulders “seated” in your back. Do not let your shoulders come up as you take weight in your grip.



**3** Come up to a seated position. If you can reach the floor with your toes, feel free to push off and give yourself a swing.



**2** Hold on with both hands to the fabric as you bring your other leg into the loop. Again, keep those shoulders in mind. You can imagine a large air bubble held between the base of the neck and the shoulders that you don’t want to pop.



## Exit Strategy

Hold on to both sides of the fabric. Lift your weight so that you can step forward onto the ground, just as you would exit a swing.

 End of Movement 



# Standing

Prerequisite: none

**1** Put the arch of your foot on the loop. Grab as high as you can on the fabric with both hands. Remember to keep the neck long.



**2** Hold on with both hands to the fabric as you bring your other foot in. Pull yourself up to standing. Be careful to stagger your ankles so that your ankles don't collide at the bone.



## Tip

Many people are surprised at the discomfort in the arches of their feet when they first stand on the fabric. The arches can be tender since they are not accustomed to pressure. One thing you can do to help is to roll the arch of your foot over a tennis ball or other hard round object. Do a little bit every day. Apply more and more pressure each day until your feet eventually become less sensitive to the pressure.

 End of Movement 

# Hip Hang

Prerequisite: seated position

*How to enter hip hang from standing on the ground*

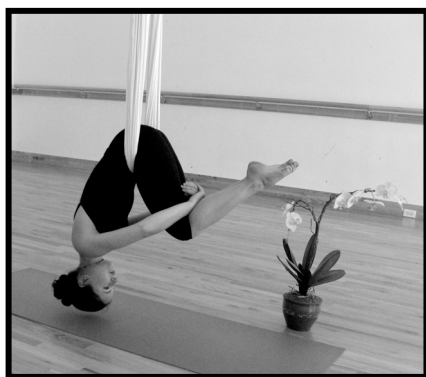
**1** Walk forward pressing the fabric below your hips. Lunge forward with one leg as you start to lean over. Keep the fabric below the top of the hip bones by continuing to press with your hands.



**2** Transfer one hand at a time to the floor while keeping the fabric in the crease of the body.



**3** Walk on your hands and feet back until you are directly under your hanging point (or plumbline). Let go with your hands, tuck in your legs, and feel free to hang.



## Exit Strategy

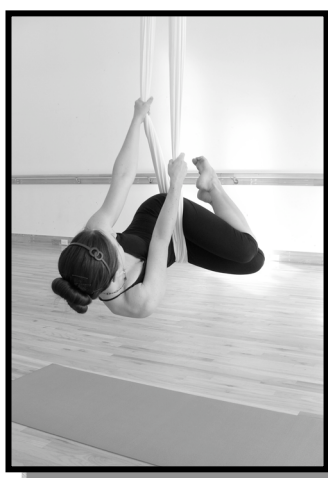
Walk forward, placing all your weight into your feet. Come back up to standing.

*How to enter the hip hang from a seated position.*

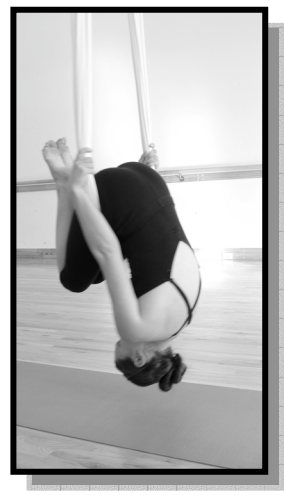
**1** Start in a seated position on the loop.



**2** Twist your hips over to one side of the fabric, making sure that you do not slide to your stomach as you do so. Keep the fabric twisting over your hips. When you have twisted as far as you can with your hips, bring your far hand over to the fabric closest to you.



**3** Continue tilting until you are facing the ground. Allow the weight of the head to gravitate towards the ground. Then, remove the hand closest to the ground and place it on the opposite side. Use your arms on either side to help you continue for a full 180 degree rotation of the hips.



*Continues on next page... →*

**4** It is common to get stuck just slightly before a full rotation, so feel free to give yourself a little kick of the legs with a pull of the arms to help scoot until your hips are even. Let go with your hands, tuck in your legs, and hang.

Another way to enjoy the hip hang is to fold your arms and let them hang. Feel the decompression of the spine and enjoy! (Just be sure not to stay too long especially if you are just beginning inverted movement.)



### **Exit Strategy back to sitting**

Reach up to one of the fabrics with both hands. Walk your hands up the fabric as your twist your hips to pull yourself back up to the seated position.



∞ End of Movement ∞

# Wrist Wrap

Prerequisite: none

**1** Sit on your mat underneath the loop.  
Reach your hands between the fabrics  
towards your head.



**2** Open your hands, reaching around the  
fabric to hold on in a wrist wrap.



*The wrist wrap can be a comfortable alternative to holding on with just your hands. Holding with the wrist wrap does not require as much grip strength. Nevertheless, make sure that you work on strengthening your grip in order to prevent injury.*

 End of Movement & Chapter 1 



# Chapter 2: Leg Stretches

*Leg Swing Series*

*Forward Fold*

*Downward Dog*

*Wide Leg Bend*

*Right Triangle*

*Reclining Hero*

*Plow*

# Leg Swing Series

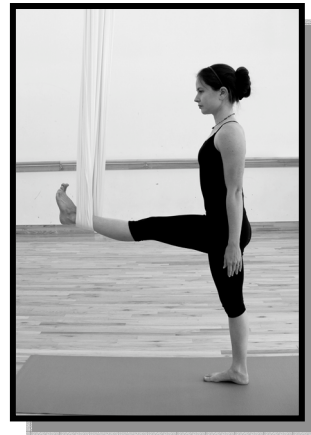
Prerequisite: none

*The height of fabric for the leg swing series depends on your flexibility. You want to work up to having the loop at waist height so that when you put your ankle in the loop, your leg is at a ninety degree angle to your body. If you cannot comfortably stand with your leg this high, put the loop a little lower, and gradually work higher over time.*

**1** Place your leg into the loop.



**3** Point the foot and then flex the foot. Lengthen the back of the leg by pulling your sit bone away from your heel. At the same time, visualize your femur (thigh bone) being drawn deeper into your pelvis.



**2** Firmly plant your standing leg on the ground. Feel your entire foot on the ground. Square your hips so that your hips would look exactly the same as if you were standing on two legs. If you are unable to square your hips, lower your loop. This is the “start” position for the leg swing series.



**4** Relax the foot so that it is neither flexed nor pointed. Begin swinging the leg back and forth, being careful not to change the position of the pelvis. It is tempting to lift the hips as your leg swings outward, but instead, reinforce the neutral pelvis position by pulling it in opposition as your leg swings out, so that nothing changes about your grounded stance.





**5** Return to the start position. On an exhale, twist your body towards the leg that is up. Look behind you as far as you can without changing the position of the pelvis. Place your opposite arm on the outside of the leg to support the twist of the torso. Reach your other arm towards the wall behind you.



**6** Return to the starting position. (Remember you can rest at any point.) Hold the fabrics with your hands and lean forward with a “flat back.” Draw the lower back towards your thighs as you draw your navel towards your spine. Feel the top of the thigh bone (of the leg that is up) sinking deeper into the pelvis.



**7** Release and place your hands together between the fabrics. Open your arms and bring your leg up with a pointed toe. Share the muscle power equally between your arms and your deep abdominal muscles helping to lift the leg. The goal is to decrease the dependence on the hip flexor, which is important to the lifting of the leg, but often times does more work than it should due to underused lower abdominals.



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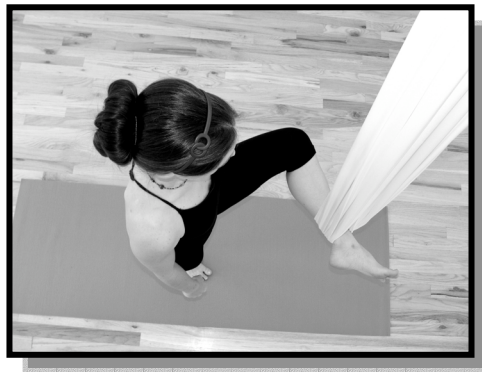
**8** Release your arms, place your palms together and bend at the hips. Reach as far as you can past your toes.



**10** Reach your arms forward and lean over with a flat back. Remember to keep the shoulders down. Don't let them creep up when you are not paying attention.



**9** Return to the start position and turn your leg out.



**11** Feel free to add on in ways that best meet the stretch cravings of your body.

When you are finished, remove your leg from the loop, switch legs, and repeat the entire sequence on the opposite leg.



### Body Awareness

Due to the swinging of the leg, there is a high risk of twisting the knee as your body twists. If you feel your standing leg being affected by the swinging motion, decrease the distance you are swinging. It can't be stressed enough how important it is to hold both the standing leg and the pelvis near to complete motionless as you swing the leg. It can be helpful to place your hands on your hips as a reminder, and keep your awareness in your body at all times to monitor what is happening as you swing.

Here are a few examples of INCORRECT HIP POSITIONS that can twist the knee if you allow your hip to do this while you are unaware.



In the middle picture, notice how the knee is facing slightly forward. This indicates the hip is lifting out of place. In this leg swing series, keep the knee and toes facing the ceiling at all times.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Forward Fold

Prerequisite: none

**1** Stand in front of the fabric with your feet hip width apart. (Or, for a different stretch, you can try feet together.) Hold on to the fabric with straight arms, keeping your shoulder blades “seated” in your back.

**2** Bend at the hips, drawing the back of the legs up towards the ceiling. Do not bend at the stomach, nor let your rib cage “pop.” Instead, bend at the hips and keep your spine in one straight line from the top of your head to your sit bones.



**3** Slide your hands down the fabric until you are at a ninety degree or as far as you can go towards a right angle.



## Exit Strategy

Do not roll up from this position. Rather, bend your knees, pull your navel to your spine, and lift through your entire torso to unfold the crease at the hips.

## Body Awareness

As you are holding the forward fold position, let's check in to your body:

- ◆ Your head → Do not relax nor let the head hang. Keep your head lifted in line with your spine. Lengthen through the back of the neck.
- ◆ Your arms → Are they straight without being hyper-extended nor bent? Lengthen at the elbows.
- ◆ Your shoulders → Are your shoulders seated in your back? Do not release the shoulders from their sockets.
- ◆ Your rib cage → A lot of the shoulder issues can be solved by correct placement of the rib cage. There is a tendency to sink the rib cage. Keep it lifted. This will help strengthen and reinforce the correct placement of the shoulder blades. With a popped rib cage, it is impossible to increase range of motion in the shoulders.
- ◆ Your core → Firm but do not tighten your back and stomach muscles. Flatten the belly. Do not arch the back nor let the belly hang.
- ◆ Your hips → Are they directly over the middle of your feet? Double check the location of your weight in your feet. Your weight should be shared equally between all parts of the foot in contact with the floor.
- ◆ Your knees → Double check that your knees are not hyper-extended. Do not lock the knees.
- ◆ Your pelvis → Feel the upwards drawing of the back of the legs into the buttocks as the pelvis continues to rotate forwards. Feel the lengthening of the torso out of the pelvic girdle.

☞ End of Movement ☞

# Downward Dog

Prerequisite: hip hang

**1** Take a small lunge forward, placing the loop below your hip bones. Lean over and place your hands on the ground. The loop should be in the crease of the body. (Note: This might look familiar from the hip hang.)



**2** Plant your hands on the ground. Shoulders are wide and grounded into the torso. Send your entire spine towards the floor. Give your head a little shake to release undo tension in the neck, but do not let it completely relax nor look up. Keep it neutral, in line with the spine.



## Body Awareness

While in the active downward dog position:

- ◆ Lengthen the backs of the knees, but do not lock the knees.
- ◆ Lift the tailbone away from your heels, and turn the upper thighs slightly inward.
- ◆ Draw the inner thigh muscles up into the groin.
- ◆ Press the entire hand into the floor and spread your fingers across the ground.
- ◆ Think of having a nice long neck, and make sure the shoulders are seated against the back.
- ◆ Widen the shoulders and draw them towards the tailbone.
- ◆ While your neck should be relaxed, do not let it hang. Keep your neck in line with your spine, which you can imagine to be growing longer by the minute.
- ◆ Do not allow your rib cage to sink. Keep your rib cage tucked in between your shoulders, but allow your lower back to curve with the natural lumbar curve.

## Adding On: One Legged Downward Dog

To deepen the stretch in the backs of the legs, bring one leg up between the fabrics, bend it, and then hook your foot. Let the leg slide down as far as it can close to your buttocks. Energize the downward dog position to feel a powerful stretch in the remaining leg. Switch legs to repeat.



## Variation: Downward Dog on Forearms

Repeat the above movements with the forearms on the ground instead of hands.



∞ End of Movement ∞

# Wide Leg Bend

Prerequisite: downward dog

- 1** Position the fabric in the crease of your body as if you were going into downward dog.



- 2** Widen your legs and lean slightly off plumbline, towards the ground in front of you. Make sure that your feet remain in parallel, with both the knees and toes facing forward.



## To Deepen the Stretch

- 3** To deepen the stretch, interlock your fingers behind your back, straighten your arms, and then let gravity pull your fists down towards the ground. Gently engage your muscles to draw your hands away from the ceiling towards the ground.





## Body Awareness

In the wide leg bend, keep the following tips in mind:

- ◆ Press your ankles slightly outward in order to keep the natural arch of the foot. Share the weight of the foot on the floor equally over the entire base of the foot, but have as little arch on the floor as possible.
- ◆ Reinforce the lifting of the fabric by lifting the inner thigh muscles.
- ◆ Maintain a long front side of your torso. Stay lifted in the heart, and keep in mind that you are bending at your hips while not overly bending your back. Play with gravity to relax into this lifted position with your elbows or head gently resting on the ground. If this is too much, try modifying the pose by placing your hands on your legs, and let the head relax.



- ◆ To exit this pose, place your hands on the floor, and walk your feet together. Transfer your weight into your feet so that you are fabric-independent. Then, with an inhalation, lengthen the front of the torso to come back up to standing.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Right Triangle

Prerequisite: standing on the loop

*Your legs and torso form the two legs of a right triangle, while the fabric is the hypotenuse.*

**1** Begin by standing on the loop. While holding your hands slightly above your head, bring your elbows between the fabrics. Carefully switch your grip one hand at a time so that you are holding on comfortably.



**2** Open your elbows away from each other and lean slightly back. Press the underneath side of your arms into the fabric. Release your hands one at a time from their grip by your ears to holding closer to your waist.



**3** Sink your weight back even farther. Bring your elbows into your sides so that your weight is under your arms. Press your shoulders down. Do not sink in such a way that your shoulders come up towards your ears.



**4** To continue sinking, send your bum back and your feet forward while creasing at the hips. When you feel comfortable, straighten your arms at your sides. If you need to, sink farther so that your hips are at a right angle. Reach your arms away from your shoulders at your sides. Hold here, or, for a greater challenge, slightly decrease the angle of the fold.



### **Exit Strategy**

Grab on to the fabric with your hands and bend your knees.



Take out your legs one at a time to come into a seated position.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Reclining Hero

Prerequisite: wrist wrap

*Caution: This move can put strain on the knee. If you have had a knee injury or feel strain during any portion of this movement, it is recommended that you refrain from performing this pose.*

**1** Begin on your knees, holding on to the fabric in either a wrist wrap or a regular hand grip.



**2** Straighten your arms and lean back. Allow your hands to slide down the fabric as needed as you continue to lower towards the floor. Drop your sit bones right in between your feet, and then curl the rest of the torso down.



- 3** Continue sliding the hands down the fabric until you are either all the way down to the ground without arching your back beyond natural curvature or you have reached the spot that maximizes the stretch through the tops of the thighs.



### **Exit Strategy**

Pull your torso up using your arms as well as your stomach muscles.

### **Body Awareness**

As you lower your body;

- ◆ Keep your pelvis tucked and lower abdominals pulled in as if you are zipping up some tight pants.
- ◆ Aim for landing your buttocks right on your toes but your heels should fit right on either side of the buttocks. If you need to adjust your legs as you start to lean back, do so. You can open the knees away from each other, but make sure that the thighs stay as parallel as possible. Do not allow your knees to open too much wider than your hips.
- ◆ While you are holding the position, focus on sinking the tops of the thighs deeper into the pelvic girdle. You can lift the knees off the floor slightly and then relax to ease into this position.
- ◆ During this entire movement, keep lifting and tucking the sit bones away from tailbone. Do not allow the lower back to curve too much. Ideally, you want to lay flat on the ground with your back as if you were lying on the ground without your legs bent underneath you.

🌀 End of Movement 🌀

# Plow

Prerequisite: none

- 1 Lay down on your mat underneath the loop.



- 2 Using your hands as support underneath your hips, lift your legs up and through the loop so and you can rest the top of your ankles on the loop. Point your toes. Press your ankles into the loop.



- 3 Keep your neck long, shoulders relaxed. Squeeze your elbows towards each other. Flex your feet. Lengthen through the backs of the legs.



**4** Release your hands to your sides, and bring your head up as you release your pelvic girdle towards the floor. Keep the distance between your nose and knees as minimal as possible as you release.



**5** Set your feet on the floor, and take a moment to relax your back.



❧ End of Movement & Chapter 2 ❧





# Chapter 3: (Flying) Standing Poses

*Tree*

*Big Toe Grab*

*Chair*

*Warrior I*

*Mountain*

*Warrior II*

# Tree

Prerequisite: standing

**1** Start by standing on the loop.



**3** Bend your knee up towards the ceiling. Clasp the front of your ankle or calf with your hand. Make sure that your arm passes in front of your bent leg.



**2** Shift your weight to one foot. Take the other foot back behind you, and bring the same arm as leg forward in front of the fabric while continuing to hold on with the other hand. Make sure that one arm stays behind the fabric at all times while the opposite arm travels to the front.



**4** Using your hand to guide your foot, place the sole of your foot as close as you can to the inner groin. Press your whole foot into your inner thigh while your thigh presses back, and point the toes towards the floor.



**5** Remove your hand that was holding to the fabric, making sure that it is still passing behind the fabric, while your other arm is still in front of the fabric. Press your hands together and hold for up to one minute.



### **Exit Strategy**

Replace your hand on the fabric while your other hand assists in the release of your bent leg. Replace your second hand on the fabric and return to standing.

### **Body Awareness**

- ◆ The rim of the pelvis should remain neutral throughout this position. Do not allow it to tip backwards, forwards or favor one side.
- ◆ Lengthen your tailbone towards the floor. Draw your navel in towards your spine.
- ◆ Press the entire foot into the inner thigh. Oppose this push with the firming of the outer leg.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Big Toe Grab

Prerequisite: tree

**1** Start in a standing position on the loop. Shift your weight to one foot. Take the other foot back behind you, and bring the same arm as leg forward in front of the fabric while continuing to hold on with the other hand. Just as in tree pose, keep one arm in behind the fabric as the other arm travels forward.



**2** Bend your knee towards the ceiling and lift your leg out to the side. Reach in front of your knee to grab on to your big toe with your first two fingers. Alternatively, you can clasp your foot or ankle with your hand.



**3** Straighten your leg out to the side.



**4** Bring up the other arm so that both arms are in mirror symmetry. Try to bring your leg up so that your arms can be completely horizontal.



### **Exit Strategy**

Bend your knee and return both hands to the fabric.

### **Body Awareness**

- ◆ The rim of the pelvis should remain neutral throughout this position. Do not allow it to tip backwards, forwards or favor one side.
- ◆ Lengthen your tailbone towards the floor. Draw your navel in towards your spine.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Chair

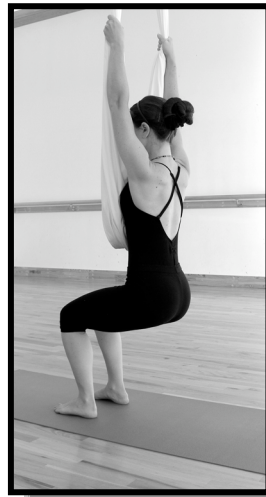
Prerequisite: standing

## *Grounded Chair*

**1** Begin by standing facing the fabric. Hold on with arms slightly bent but above your head.



**2** Lower your buttocks towards the floor as you straighten your arms. Remember to keep those shoulders in neutral. Place your knees above the middle of your feet, which are firmly planted into the floor. Share the weight equally between your quadricep muscles and your grip.



### **Body Awareness**

- ◆ The thighs should be parallel to each other as you hold this position. Place your knees directly over the middle of your feet.
- ◆ Seat your shoulders into your back, and press your arms slightly in front of you. As you place your weight in your hands, focus on the connection of your grip to your latissimus dorsi. Imagine that it is really your mid to lower back that is holding up your weight, because it is! (At least, it is when you are keeping this connection active.) Keep your neck long with a bubble of space under your ears, between your neck and arms.

## *Flying Chair*

**1** Start in standing position on the looped fabric.



**2** Placing your hands on the fabric next to your head, lower your buttocks. In doing so, share weight equally between your quadricep muscles and your grip strength. Slide your hands down until your thighs are parallel to the floor, or where you feel comfortable.



### **...Body Awareness continued**

- ◆ As you take your tailbone towards the floor, slightly tuck it in towards your pubis in order to keep the natural curve of the lower back present in your spine. Pull your navel in towards your spine.
- ◆ One thing you want to try and feel is the release of the top of the femur bones (thigh bones) toward the earth. Against this release, lift the sit bones toward the top of the pelvic girdle.
- ◆ While this move mentions sharing weight equally between your quadricep muscles and your grip, feel free to shift to favor one or the other depending on your specific fitness goals.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Warrior I

Prerequisite: none

**1** Position one foot in the loop. The loop should be around the back of your ankle.



**3** Bring your hands down to the mat (or fingers). Now press the front of the ankle into the loop as you draw your hips towards the floor.



**2** Turn away from the fabric. You can use little hops to help you accomplish this, but just make sure that your knee always bends over your toes to stay in correct alignment.



**4** Place your hands on your knees as you lift your heart up.





**5** If you are stable, reach your hands up over your head. Continue to lift the heart.



**6** Interlace your fingers except keep your pointer fingers and thumb pointing up towards the ceiling. Look up with your eyes. Try sinking deeper into your front leg by bending more as you elongate your back leg. Don't forget to switch sides when you are done.



**Exit Strategy**

Lower your hands back to the ground and release your back leg from the loop.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Mountain & Warrior II

Prerequisite: standing

**1** Stand on the loop.



**3** Lift your weight into your hands as you press out with the outside of the foot. Keep pressing until you are almost standing on that foot. Slide your other foot up and prepare to stand on it as well.



**2** Pick up one foot as high as you comfortably can and place the outside of the foot against the fabric.



**4** Come up to standing with your legs wide. Have your weight mostly in your feet.



## Adding On: Warrior II

**5** Replace all your weight in your hands, slide your legs out farther and restand.



**6** You can turn to face the side, bending the front leg.



## Another Variation

*This variation works well if your fabric is slightly shorter and you cannot get as much height in the mountain pose.*

**7** If your feet are slightly closer together, you can turn to the side, keeping one arm bent in front of you, while pushing out the opposite arm behind you. In this variation, your front knee can be placed on the outside of the fabric and then squeezed in to line up over your toes. In this way, you have more stabilization, but that doesn't make this pose any easier.



### Exit Strategy

With your hands holding at shoulder level, put your weight in your hands and gently slide your feet together. Lower yourself back down to standing position.

🌀 End of Movement & Chapter 3 🌀



# Chapter 4: Core & Planks

*Seated Series*

*Boat*

*3 Legged Cat/Cow Series*

*Front Hip Lift Series*

*Table Top & Shoulder Shrugs*

*Warrior III*

*Front Armpit Harness Plank Series*

*Back Armpit Harness Plank Series*

*Chair Arch*

# Seated Series

Prerequisite: none

**1** Sit on the floor with your legs bent in but not crossed; both legs should rest fully on the floor. How you place your hands will depend on the height of your fabric. If your fabric is low, place your hands in a wrist wrap. If your fabric is high, simply place your hands on the loop.



**3** Pull your navel into your spine and lift the front of the torso to return to the neutral seated position.



**2** Reach forward, bending from the hips not the waist. Do not curve your back, but rather reach your spine out from your pelvic girdle and press your hands into the loop towards the ground.



**4** Using your deep abdominal muscles with your arms sharing some of the weight, go backwards. Use your abs as much as possible without overly rounding the spine. Keep your legs fairly relaxed.



**5** Gently continue back towards the ground until your arms are straight.

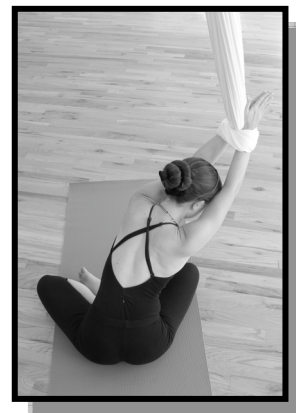
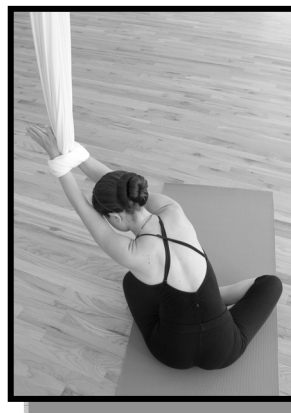


**6** Using your abs and arms once more, return to a neutral seated position and repeat the sequence.



### Adding On: Side-to-Side

**7** As you reach forward in this position, you can take your hands to the side for a great stretch. Keep your torso facing the ground. If your fingers are touching, do not allow your fingertips to separate.



### Body Awareness

The key to this move is to keep your legs almost completely relaxed. This exercise helps you to build independence from your hip flexors with your abdominal muscles. Your biceps are substituting as the helper muscle, and have them pick up wherever your abdominal muscles leave off. If you could do this move to perfection, then your legs would remain completely relaxed as you roll back without putting weight into your arms. Your hip flexors would gently firm to support the abs, but would not move the legs from their position. If you try this without the fabric, you may notice that your legs want to lift and your back must round to help maintain balance as you lower towards the ground. The fabric helps isolate the abdominals, promoting a healthy back while gaining abdominal muscles that are not overly dependent on the hip flexors.

🌀 End of Movement 🌀

# Boat

Prerequisite: seated position

**1** Begin in a seated position on the loop.



**2** Hold on to each fabric slightly above your ears. Now lean back, straighten the arms, engaging the abdominal muscles and firming all the way through the legs. Hold this position.



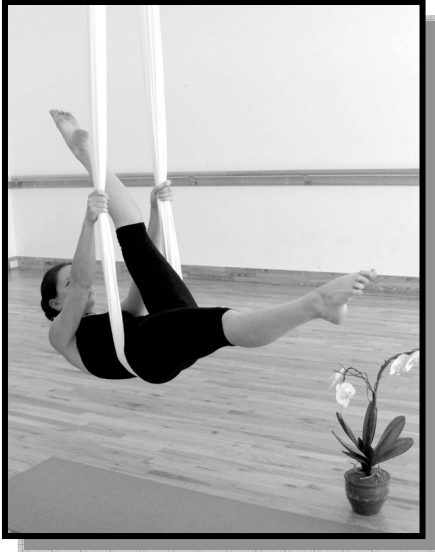
**3** To make this position more challenging, scoot your bum off towards the ground and lean back again. This time, start your legs at a higher angle, but gradually bring them lower.





## Adding On: Boat Kicks

**4** From the boat position with the fabric on the top part of the buttocks, bring one leg up toward your nose. First point, then flex both feet.



**5** Switch to bringing the other leg toward your nose and point your toes. Flex your feet and repeat. Do 5-10 repetitions.



### Exit Strategy

If you didn't scoot too far, you can easily return to the seated position. If you have been working in the deeper position, it may be easier to exit directly to the ground rather than return to sitting. Bend your legs and lower them one at a time to the ground, making sure to keep the engagement of the abs to protect your back.

### Body Awareness

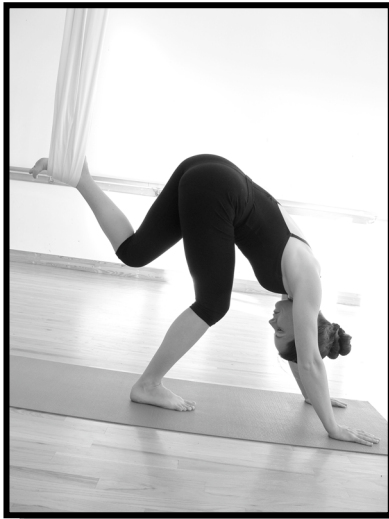
- ◆ During the position, you may find your shoulders creeping up towards your ears. Be mindful of where your shoulders are at all times, and draw the shoulders down into your back, keeping them wide.
- ◆ While the abdominals should be engaged, the belly should not tighten and bulge outward. Instead, imagine engaging muscles deep under the surface, and flatten the belly. Keep the lower belly relatively soft. While this position does the work the abdominals, it is actually focusing on the hip flexor muscles to keep the legs lifted.
- ◆ Tilt the chin slightly towards your chest so that the back of the neck lifts away from the tailbone, bringing length into the spine. Do not tuck the chin too much. Notice how the position of your head affects the amount of air you bring in, and find the spot that maximizes the amount of air flowing in and out. Breathe easily.

∞ End of Movement ∞

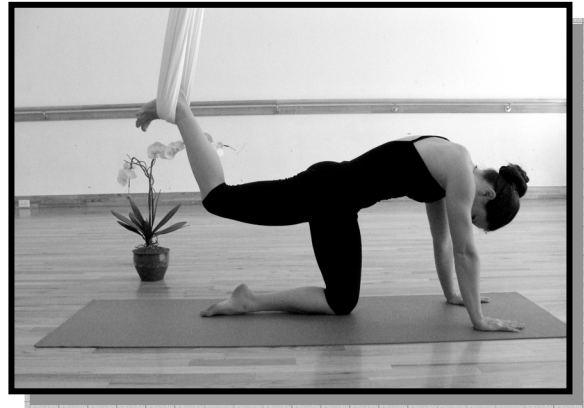
# 3 Legged Cat/Cow Series

Prerequisite: none

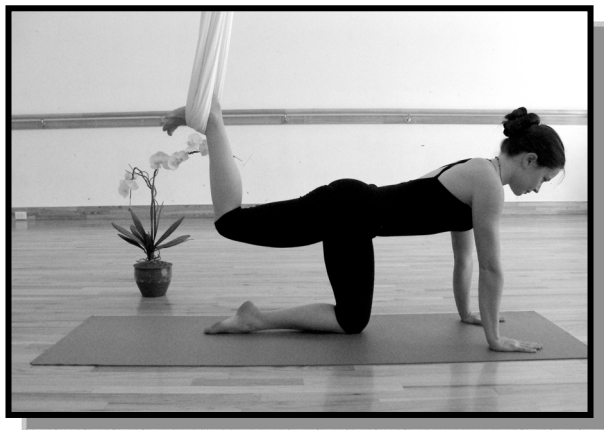
**1** Placing your hands on the ground for stability, place the top of your ankle in the loop.



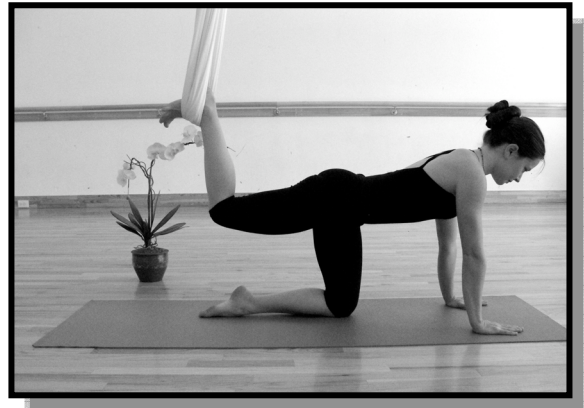
**3** Inhale and tuck the pelvic girdle under pulling your navel in towards your spine, as if you are tucking your tail between your legs. Lift the upper back towards the ceiling, rounding the spine. Release the head but do not force the chin to your chest.



**2** Place your knee on the ground at a ninety degree angle. Place your hands on the ground, shoulders over elbows over wrists, and your spine in neutral “tabletop” position. Place the head in line with the spine, gazing at the ground.



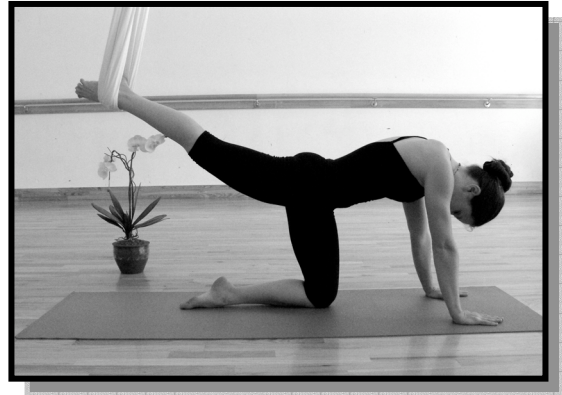
**4** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**5** Inhale and lift your sit bones and chest towards the ceiling. Allow your belly to sink towards the floor. Be firm, but do not tighten your core.



**8** Repeat the cat portion of the sequence with the straight leg: Inhale and tuck the pelvic girdle under pulling your navel in towards your spine, as if you are tucking your tail between your legs. Lift the upper back towards the ceiling.



**6** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**9** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**7** Extend your back leg straight behind you, pressing your ankle firmly into the fabric.



*Continues on next page... →*

**10** Repeat the cow portion of the sequence but this time sink your hips towards your heel as you lift up: Inhale and lift your sit bones and chest towards the ceiling. Allow your belly to sink towards the floor. Be firm, but do not tighten your core.



**11** Return to a neutral spine, but continue to reach your hips back towards the ground behind your heel. Press your hands into the floor.



### **Exit Strategy**

Return the neutral tabletop position. Point your toe and lift it out of the loop.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Front Hip Lift Series

Prerequisite: none

- 1** Lay down on your mat underneath the loop so that you are within an arm's reach of the loop.



- 2** Roll up your bent legs so that you can put your feet between the fabrics over your hands.



- 3** Remove your hands as set down your ankles. Keep your entire core engaged as you move throughout these positions. Press your ankles into the fabric.

*As a side exercise, hold yourself in this position with as little pressure as possible on the ankles.*



- 4** Straighten your legs. Point your toes and feel long from your toes to the base of your neck. Feel the entire shoulder blades resting on the floor and the neck long. If this is a challenging position to hold, stay here and then proceed to exit. Do not move on until you have built up strength holding this position.



*Continues on next page... →*

*Modification:* Place your hands under the top of the buttocks with your elbows resting directly below your hips. You can proceed to the next section with this modification if preferred.



*With Modification:*



## Adding On: One Leg

**5** Press your arms into the floor as you remove one leg. Bend it and bring your toes to your knee.



**6** Extend the leg at a ninety degree angle. Feel the back of your knee lengthen. Keep your hips lifted. Do not sink.



**7** For a deeper stretch in the back of the leg, flex the foot.



**8** Return to pointing your foot and lift your leg higher. Imagine your foot going right over your head. Feel the length in the back of the leg. Do not allow the hips to shift out of their neutral position. Don't forget to repeat with the other leg.



## Adding On Again

**9** With both ankles resting firmly on the loop, bring your arms out to the side. Then, use your arms to swing your entire body from side to side.



### Exit Strategy

Flex the feet and turn them out so that the top of your feet catch on the fabrics as you begin to lower your pelvis. Don't miss out on the subtle details of this exit; this can be a wonderful spine lengthener when you take your time to rest each vertebra on the mat, proceeding one at a time. Draw your tailbone away from the base of the neck. Feel your shoulders relaxed on the ground as you slowly lower the pelvis. Keep the pelvic girdle tucked until the last step of the release. After releasing the last part of the tuck, remain laying on your back for about one minute to allow the work you've done in the spine to settle in. Gently roll over on your side to exit from here.



∞ End of Movement ∞

# Table Top & Shoulder Shrugs

Prerequisite: wrist wrap

**1** Begin in a seated position with your wrists wrapped.



**3** Allow your shoulders to release as you let gravity sink your chest towards the ground. (Yes, this is a position instructors normally tell you not to do.)



**2** Press your entire feet into the floor to lift your hips into a plank position parallel to the floor.



**4** Lift your heart to pull your shoulders back into their neutral position. Hold this position for up to one minute.





### **Exit Strategy**

Sink in the hips to come back to sitting on the ground, and remove the wrist wraps.

### **Body Awareness**

- ◆ As you perform these shoulder shrugs, be mindful of the isolation taking place. A common error is sinking and lifting the stomach during this sinking/lifting action. Do not change shape anywhere else in the body except the shoulders. Stay lifted in the middle.
- ◆ When you pull the shoulders back to neutral, pretend that you are pressing them into the floor as if you were lying on the floor.
- ◆ Be sure to balance your shoulder muscles by performing a pushing movement such as regular push-ups on the ground after these shoulder shrugs.

🌀 End of Movement 🌀

# Warrior III

Prerequisite: forward fold

**1** Start in the forward fold position.



**3** Flex the foot. Continue to draw the hip of the leg that is up towards the ground.



**2** Lift one leg straight back so that your spine is in one long line that continues through your leg to the tip of your pointed toe. Stabilize and firm your body from head to toe. It helps to fix your gaze on a single spot.



## Body Awareness

Have someone else examine the lines of your body so that you can be positioned correctly according the following guidelines:

- ◆ Arms → Your arms should be straight, not hyper-extended nor above your head. Bring your arms into the correct position, which may not feel like the correct position at first. Feel all the fingers in the fist helping to press the fabric towards the ground.
- ◆ Head → Keep the neck fairly relaxed in a neutral position.
- ◆ Rib Cage → Do not sink towards the floor. Keep your chest pulled in, and lift the heart towards the ceiling through your upper back.
- ◆ Spine → Feel long throughout your spine from the top of your head, through your tailbone and all the way through the legs.
- ◆ Middle → Do not overly tighten the abdominals, but do pull in the navel towards the spine. Keep the breath moving through the belly.
- ◆ Back of the legs → Lengthen through the back of the legs.
- ◆ Hips → Of the leg that is on the ground, make sure this hip is staying over the foot, and continue to feel your entire foot planted into the ground. There is a tendency to lift the hip of the leg that is up. To combat this, pull the hip towards the ground. Note that this may intensify the stretch in the standing leg.
- ◆ Legs → In regards to the leg in the air, check that the knee is in line with the hip and that it is facing the ground. Give the standing leg a slight bend to make sure its not locked too tight. Then imagine lifting the thigh up away from the knee. Focus your gaze on a spot on the ground to help find a calm stability so that the standing leg feels firm.
- ◆ Feet → The top of the foot in the air should be facing the ground when pointed. When you flex your foot, make sure to point the toes directly towards the ground. Of the foot that you are standing on, continue to maintain a balance of your weight equally throughout the entire foot, while keeping your ankle pulled up so you have a natural arch.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Front Armpit Harness Plank Series

Prerequisite: none

- 1** Lean your torso over at a ninety angle and place the loop across the top of the sternum.



- 2** Reach your hands down to the ground. Bend your knees, bringing weight into the fabric to help secure the placement under your armpits.



- 3** Continue bring your weight back until you are leaning back with your body in a plank position. Send the energy out from the top of the head. Reach your hands towards your feet. Do not let the fabric crunch the shoulders in. Keep your chest open wide. Press the entire foot into the ground.



- 4** Bend your knees and take your body forward. This time, reach your arms towards the ground or open your arms out to the side. For a challenge, reach your arms above your head. You can also vary the level of difficulty by how high you lift your heels. The higher you lift onto the balls your feet, the harder it is to hold the position.



**5** Another position that is done with the front armpit harness is a variation of chair pose. Place your knees over the middle of your feet. Engage your thighs so that your weight transfers out of the armpit harness as much as you can. You have to work for this position. Do not hang from your armpits.



### **Body Awareness**

The harness can cut off circulation to the arm. Depending on the strength of your circulation, you may feel a tingling in the arms letting you know that circulation has decreased. If you feel this, stop the sequence and rest, allowing normal sensation to return in the arms before continuing. It helps to lift weight out of the loop whenever possible. For example, during the last step, really press into the ground using your quadricep muscles to take weight off of your armpits.

🌀 End of Movement 🌀

# Back Armpit Harness Plank Series

Prerequisite: none

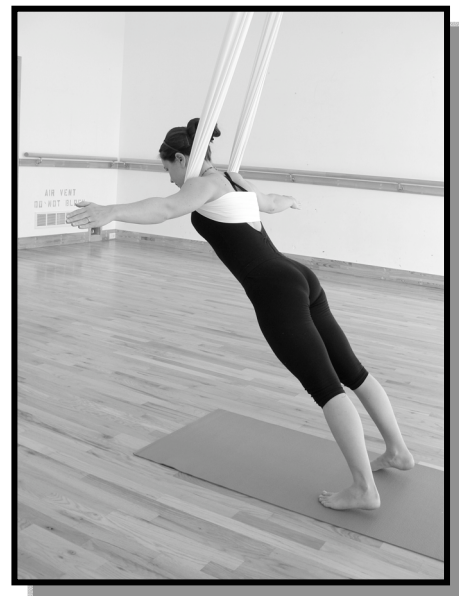
**1** Place your arms between the fabric behind you and then sink your weight adjusting as needed so that the fabric passes comfortably underneath your armpits and across the upper back.



**2** Push the soles of your feet into the ground and take your weight back. Keep your chest open. Reach your arms towards your feet or out to the side.



**3** Bend your knees and shift your weight forward. Lower your hips so that your body is in a flat plank position from the top of your head to your heels. Lift the heels for a more challenging hold. Lower the heels to ease the pose or to get a stretch in the back of the calves.



*To make this step more challenging,  
raise the heels higher.*



### **Exit Strategy**

Bend your knees, stand up and remove your arms from the loop.

### **Body Awareness**

The harness can cut off circulation to the arm. Depending on the strength of your circulation, you may feel a tingling in the arms letting you know that circulation has decreased. If you feel this, stop the sequence and rest, allowing normal sensation to return in the arms before continuing.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Chair Arch

Prerequisite: back armpit harness

**1** Place your arms between the fabric behind you and then sink your weight adjusting as needed so that the fabric passes comfortably underneath your armpits and across the upper back. (This is the back armpit harness.)



**2** Place your arms above your head, and slide one palm over the top of the opposite hand. Your fingertips should match with your thumbs on either side of your sandwiched hands. Squeeze your elbows together so that your head can gently rest in between.



**3** Lift your heart to reach your elbows back towards the ground beneath you. Draw your tailbone towards the ground. Lengthen the belly. Do not allow the rib cage to “pop.” Keep the rib cage connected in the torso as you go “up and over” to arch back.





## Adding On: Side to Side

**4** Lengthen one side of your torso as you draw your shoulder and your hip away from each other for a gentle side stretch.



### Exit Strategy

Lengthen your back and replace your hands on the fabric. Find your footing underneath you to stand up out of the back armpit harness.

🌀 End of Movement & Chapter 4 🌀



# Chapter 5: Inversions

*Reverse Straddle*

*Frog*

*Crocheted Legs*

*Pigeon*

*Eagle*

*Pike*

*Bow*

## **Reminder regarding inversions**

Inversions are not for everyone. Make sure you have checked with your doctor or health care practitioner to make sure it is okay for you to invert. (See the introduction for more information regarding this topic.)

When coming up from an inversion, make sure to do so slowly every time. Notice how the fluids of your body shift as you come up. This will help you to stay in tune with your body. Give yourself plenty of recuperation time between each inversion. Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water prior to a workout, but do not eat or drink too much in the hour prior to going upside-down. Do not remain upside-down for very long. A beginning student should stay upside-down for a maximum of one minute, and less when first trying the poses.

If you do choose to invert, invert responsibly.

# Reverse Straddle

Prerequisite: none

**1** Put your arms through the fabric as if you were getting on a swing, but only put your arms through. Situate yourself so that the fabric is at your back, supporting your ribs with the looped fabric. Extend your legs in front of you so that you are now leaning your weight into the loop. Hold the fabric with bent arms, elbows at your sides.



**2** Think of pulling up and at the same time pushing your hands toward your toes as you engage your abdominal muscles to pull the legs up. It helps to bend your knees when you first start. As you raise your legs, keep them open, making sure that they pass on the outside of the fabric as you rotate back.



**3** Once you have the fabric comfortably positioned on the pelvic bone, open your legs outward. Warning: DO NOT PUT YOUR LEGS THROUGH THE LOOP! Use your lower abdominal muscles to help rotate the pelvic girdle so that the knees stay facing the ground.



**4** (*Optional Step*) This step is applicable if the loop is still around your stomach rather than your hips. The reverse straddle will not be comfortable until you find just the right position of the fabric around your hips.

A) Place your legs against the outside of the fabric while sickling your feet so that your toes pull in to meet each other.



B) Allow your hands to slide down the fabric as you push your hips forward while pushing your feet into the fabric. Keep your toes together and make sure that you do not push your hips too far. (Warning: DO NOT ALLOW YOUR BUM TO SLIP THROUGH THE LOOP.) It is helpful to push one hip at a time through the loop to find just the right adjustment. Once the loop is adjusted, open your legs to the side.

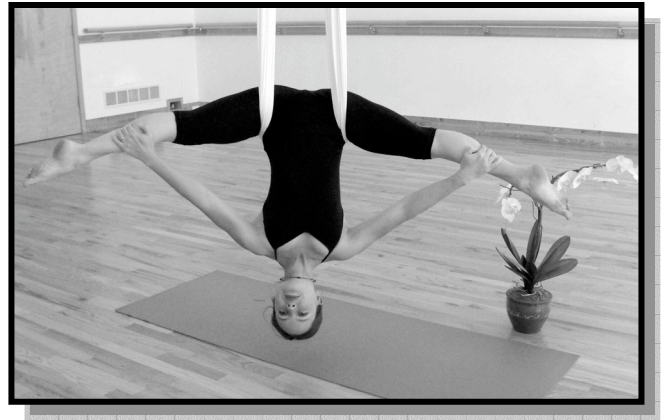


**5** If you have the correct position in the reverse straddle with your legs open wide, knees facing the ground, you can remove your hands for the basic reverse straddle hang.

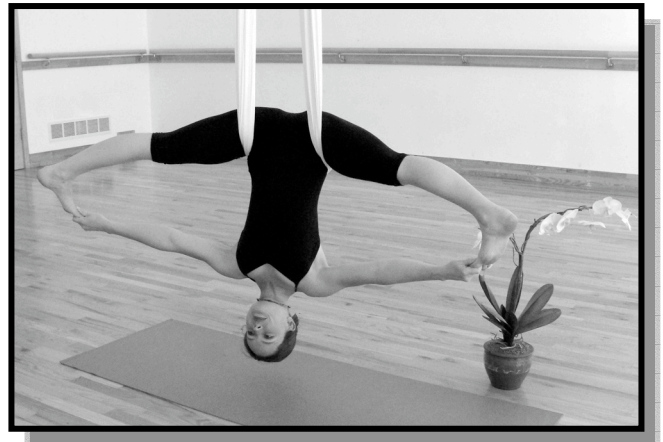


## Adding On: Hold Behind Calves

**6** Do a mini-sit up and grab hold behind your calves with your hands. Help your legs rotate even more towards the ground as you gently pull on your legs. Hold on as you relax back, and pull your legs farther down.



**7** To deepen the stretch even further, flex your feet and grab on to your toes. Pull your toes toward the back wall to combat the tendency to sickle. Focus on flexing the entire foot.



*Continues on next page... →*

## Exit Strategy

For either exit option, the key concept is the same: Keep your core engaged and your stomach slightly concave as you come up. Do *not* arch your back and place your feet down before your head is up. Instead, lift first with your head and torso, and keep the legs pulled up as you re-invert, then set your legs down.

**Exit Option 1:** Keep your legs in a split and hold for a moment before bending your legs and releasing to the ground.



**Exit Option 2:** If you are not quite strong enough to keep your legs held in the middle split as you come up, then option #2 is for you until you get strong enough. You can also perform this when you are transitioning in and out of other poses and do not have the energy for option 1. However, do option 1 whenever possible.

In this option, keep your legs bent. Come up with bent legs and then pull your knees in towards your chest prior to releasing. Exiting in this manner helps to protect your lower back from injury.

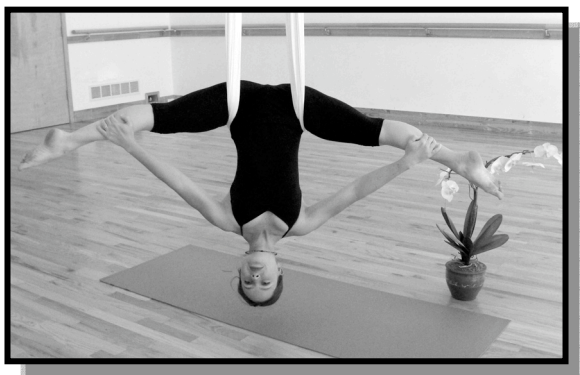


∞ End of Movement ∞

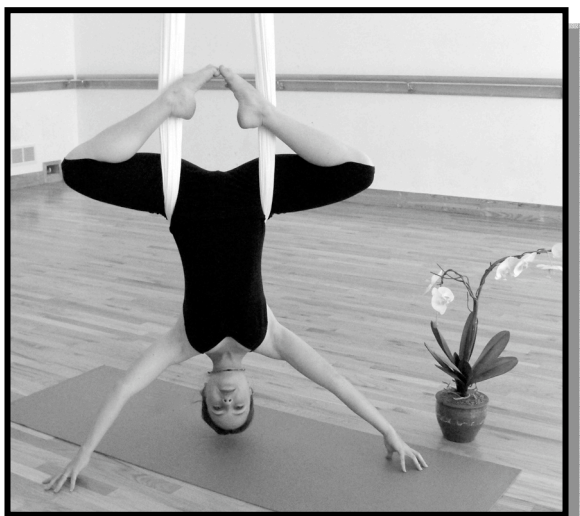
# Frog 🐸🐸🐸

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Begin in reverse straddle. Make sure to tilt your pelvis so that both knees face the ground.



**2** Bring both feet in front of the fabric (on the side closest to your nose). Point your toes. You can take pressure off your hips by placing your hands on the ground, and press in varying degrees.



**3** Hook your feet by taking your toes between the fabrics and flexing your feet around the fabric.

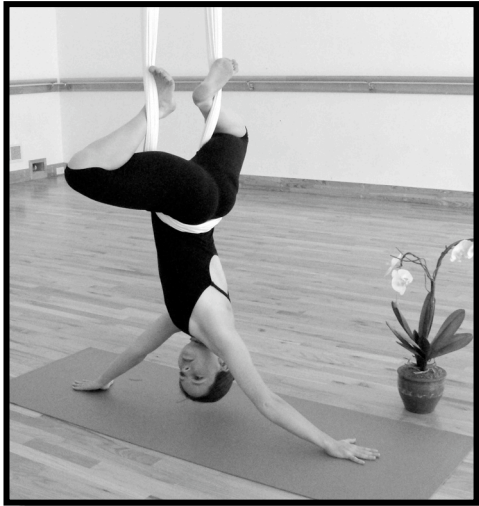


*There are several ways to add on that will be highlighted on the coming pages. Make sure that you do not attempt all of these in one upside-down session. Come up and rest between movements.*

*Continues on next page... →*

### Adding On: The Torso Twist

**4** To add on to this movement, place your hands on the ground on either side of your head. While pressing your hands into the ground, twist one way and then the other.



### Adding On: Prayer Stretch

**6** Place your fingertips together behind your back and face them towards the ground. Continue matching finger to finger until you are matching palm to palm. Do not force anything. Work at your own pace. This is an excellent stretch for aerialists.



### Adding On: Shoulder Stretch

**5** Clasp your hands behind your back and allow gravity to pull your hands down towards the ground. You can help gravity by gently engaging your shoulders.





## Adding On: Frog Handstand

**7** Press the bottoms of your feet together while pressing your knees apart from each other. Place your hands on the ground directly underneath your shoulders.



**8** Press into your entire hand including all five fingers and knuckles. Send your feet back towards the wall behind you as you press up to a handstand.



### Exit Strategy

Remove your legs from the front of the fabric, and return to the reverse straddle position. Grab onto the fabric with both hands and proceed to slowly rotate upright. A few things to remember every time you come up from a reverse straddle-type position such as the frog: (1) Press your shoulders away from your ears, keeping them “seated” into the torso, (2) Keep your abdominal muscles fully engaged until you have returned completely upright, and (3) In order to gain strength, keep your legs as high as you can for as long as you can (or at least a couple seconds) before releasing your legs to the ground.

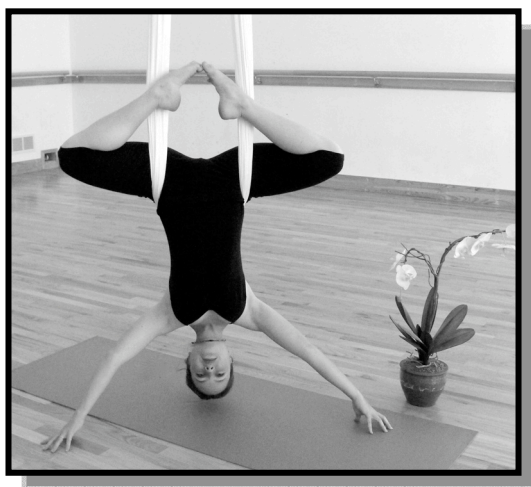


✧ End of Movement ✧

# Crocheted Legs

Prerequisite: frog

**1** Begin in a variation of frog, where both of your feet are in front of the fabric.



**2** Hook one foot on the fabric and straighten your leg, rotating the leg into parallel (knees facing forward). Then, repeat for the second leg.



**3** Once both of your feet are hooked, double check that your legs are in parallel so both of your knees face the same direction as your eyes are gazing. You can place your arms at your sides if you feel comfortable hanging in this position.



*Remember to rest before incorporating add-ons into your workout.*

### Adding On: Inverted Sit-Ups

**4** Engage your abdominal muscles, and pull your chest up towards your knees. Focus on not crunching, but rather lengthening the spine and reaching the top of your head towards the ceiling. Keep your shoulders back.



### Adding On: Handstand Push-ups

**5** To perform handstand push-ups from this position, place your hands on the floor directly below your shoulders. Remember to press into the entire hand. Focus on lifting the palm to strengthen the wrist area.



### Exit Strategy

Slowly bend your knees, returning to the frog position. From there, exit as usual from a reverse straddle-type position. Remember to come up slowly as fluids take time to shift throughout your body.



∞ End of Movement ∞

# Pigeon

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Begin in reverse straddle.



**2** Take one leg and bend it in on the side of the fabric closest to your head. You can grab on to your calf to make sure you have done this correctly.



**3** With the second leg, rotate it in the hip socket so that it reaches behind you, with your knee now facing the ceiling.



**4** Bend the leg behind you. Then, reach the same arm as leg to grab hold of your foot. Reach the other arm out.



**5** Switch to a deeper stretch: Reach the opposite hand back to your foot as you reach the other hand forward.



**6** Switch to an even deeper stretch for both your shoulders and your quadricep muscle: Reach both hands back behind you and interlace your fingers. Then place your foot into your hands. Press your foot gently into your hands. Repeat this pose with both flexing and pointing your foot.



### Exit Strategy

Reach up, placing both hands on their respective side of the fabric. Release the leg over the fabric. Put your legs in the wide straddle position. Proceed to slowly come up just as you do from reverse straddle. Perform this exit with your entire core fully engaged. This will truly strengthen you if you take this opportunity every time you come up from an inversion.

∞ End of Movement ∞

# Eagle

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Begin in reverse straddle and cross your legs. Note: You do not necessarily need to be concerned with fully “popping” your hips through for this pose. It can be helpful to place your hands on the ground to lift your hips into a comfortable position with the looped fabric.



**2** Continue the intertwining of the legs by crossing your foot behind your calf. Do your best to keep your feet pointed towards the ceiling.



**3** Cross your arms. Nudge one elbow in the crease of the other.



**4** Continue the intertwining of the arms by bring your hand around your opposite wrist and reach for matching your palms completely together including the fingertips. Raise the arms towards the floor so that they are perpendicular to your torso. After resting, repeat the pose, crossing the arms and legs in the other direction.

### Exit Strategy

Release the arms. Release the legs.  
Regrab the fabric with both hands and  
SLOWLY come upright.

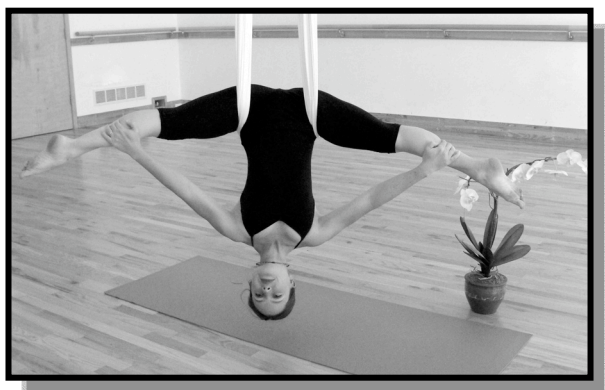


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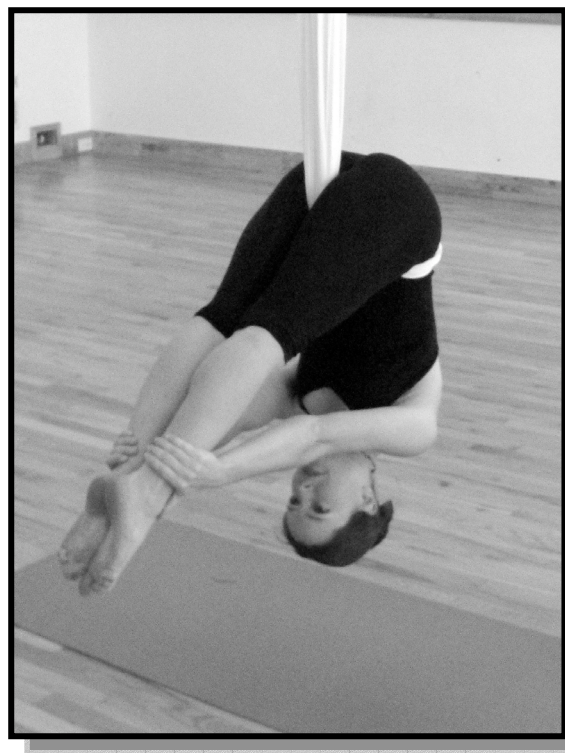
# Pike

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Begin in reverse straddle.



**2** Use your hands on the back of your legs to help pull your heels together. Lengthen the back of your legs and bring your legs towards the ground.



## Exit Strategy

Open your legs back to reverse straddle. Exit as usual from a reverse straddle-type position. Remember to take your time.



## Body Awareness

Draw your sit bones away from your head; draw your heart away from the backs of your knees, and draw your navel to your thighs. Remember to keep your shoulders wide and seated in their neutral position.

 End of Movement 



# Bow

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Sit on the fabric spread out in a hammock. Sit somewhere around the middle of the hammock.



**2** While holding on with your hands, lean back so that you are in a modified version of boat.



**3** Gently let your head back as you lift your hips. Point your toes.



**4** Continue to let your hands slide as you lift up and back, helping the fabric to slide down to the base of the sacrum.



*Continues on next page... →*

**5** Gradually release your hands down to the ground. Point your toes towards the ground as well. If you can reach the ground, go ahead and give yourself a little lift by pushing into the ground with your hands. Also, you may need to use your hands to pull the fabric off your leg so that it is simply covering the buttocks.



**6** Reach your arms back and clasp on to your ankles. Gently press your ankles into your hands.



**7** Flex your feet.



**8** Release your hands back to the ground. If your back is feeling warm and limber, bring your foot towards your head and grab on to the top of your toes. Repeat on the other side if there is no strain in the back.



## Adding On: Frog Variation

**9** Open your legs wide and bring them around the front of the fabric for a variation of frog.



*Hint: If you do this step before doing the bow, it can help set the fabric in just the right placement over your bum.*

## Exit Strategy

Grab your hands back onto the fabric and using your abdominal muscles, sit back up in the hammock to exit.



🌀 End of Movement & Chapter 5 🌀



# Chapter 6: Flying Poses

*Happy Baby*

*Floating Plank*

*Fish Out of Water*

*Manta Ray*

*Front Hip Balance*

*Diaper Wrap*

*Diaper Pike*

*Diaper Straddle*

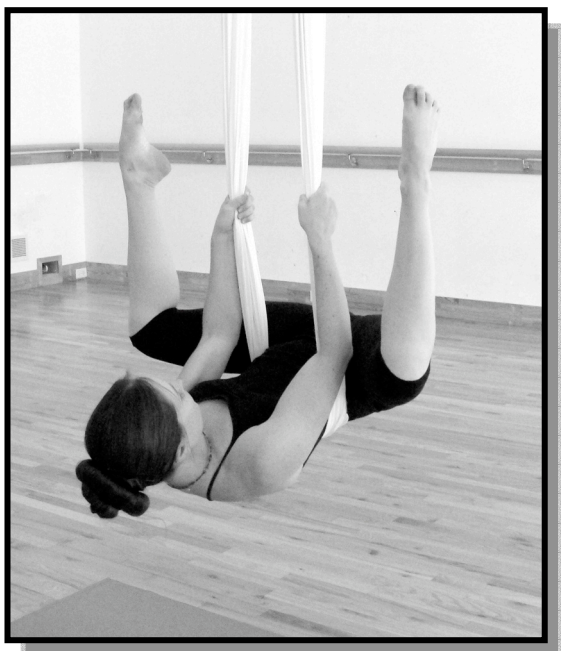
# Happy Baby

Prerequisite: reverse straddle

**1** Begin in reverse straddle.



**2** Lift up in your torso as if you were going to exit reverse straddle. Bend your legs so that your toes point up towards the ceiling. Make sure that your shoulders are seated in your back.



**3** Open up your elbows and nestle them on the underneath side of your legs, close to the backs of your knees. Flex your feet.



## Exit Strategy

Release your elbows and continue coming up from reverse straddle, keeping your core engaged until your feet are back on the floor.

 End of Movement 

# Floating Plank

Prerequisite: standing

**1** Begin standing in the fabric. Pick up one foot, and turn yourself in the fabric so that you are standing on one foot, and that foot is turned out. (Your heel is on the inside, and your toes are on the outside.) Place one hand on the fabric above your head and the other on the opposite fabric.



**2** Pick up your free foot and using the arch of a turned out foot, push the fabric away from you as you lean back into the fabric. Pick a side for your head. It doesn't matter which side you put your head on, just make sure that you switch next time you do this move!



**3** Push the front leg straight into the fabric, as you push your shoulder into the fabric in opposition. Bend the leg that is now underneath you, and slowly take your weight off this leg.



*Continues on next page... →*

**4** Pick up that leg you were bending underneath you and place it on top of your other foot with the arch of the foot pressing into the fabric.



**5** While pressing the arches of your feet into the fabric on end and your shoulder pressing into the other, lift in the middle. Squeeze your body so that you are balancing on these two end points. If there is too much weight on your shoulder, scoot yourself so that you become slightly inclined with your feet lower and your shoulder higher.



## Adding On: Circle

**6** Create a circle with your fingertips around the fabric to work on balance before fully letting go.



## Adding On: Rest the Neck

**7** Place your hands behind your head to release your neck muscles. Firm your abdominal muscles to hold still and strong. Do not pop the rib cage to bring the arms back. Keep your rib cage in neutral.





## Adding On: Arms Overhead

**8** Extend the arms overhead. Do not allow the rib cage to pop as you do so. Maintain a solid core.



## Adding On: Back Arch

**9** Hold the fabric firmly with body hands. Lift weight into your hands and then arch your back by lifting your heart. Keep weight in your hands at all times during this position.



### Exit Strategy

Allow your weight to sink in the middle. Bend your knees so that you are in a comfortable seated position in the fabric. From here, place a hand on the fabric underneath your feet and press out so that you can release your feet with control. Release your feet to the ground, and step off the loop.

✧ End of Movement ✧

# Fish Out of Water & Manta Ray 🐟🐟🐟

Prerequisite: standing

**1** Begin in a standing position on the loop. Pick up one foot and place your toes on the back side of the fabric. Press your heel forward.



**3** Remove the other leg as you lean into the fabric with your backside. Make sure that the fabric remains in one of your armpits.



**2** Using your hands to take some of your weight, push the arch of your foot into the fabric.



**4** Slide, wiggle and scoot until your leg pressing into the fabric is almost, but not quite, parallel to the ground.



**5** Remove the free arm (the one that doesn't have fabric in the armpit) and place it on the fabric at the side of your thigh. Press into this fabric as you also press into the fabric with the arch of that foot. Do this so that you are able to slide your bum off the fabric towards the ground



**7** Arch your entire body. Point your toe and reach your free arm away from the opposite toe. Face the palm of your hand up to the ceiling.



**6** As you let your bum drop slightly off the fabric, lean back to counterbalance the weight you are letting down.



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## Adding On: The Manta Ray

**8** Bend your free leg. Reach your free arm to your toes.



**9** For a deeper twist of the torso, switch your grip to the outside of your foot.



### Exit Strategy

Sink your pelvis, creasing your body in the middle, and allow your knees to bend. Bring your free leg up to the fabric and switch your feet. Press the top leg into the fabric and release the bottom leg down towards the ground. Release the second leg to exit.



∞ End of Movement ∞

# Front Hip Balance

Prerequisite: hip hang

- 1** Begin in the hip hang and reach your hands back to the fabric.



- 2** Engage your stomach muscles to protect your lower back as you lift up. Lift your legs and your torso. Energize your entire body from the top of your head to the tips of your pointed toes. Squeeze your legs together.



## Adding On: One Arm

- 3** Reach one hand to the side of the body. For a more challenging position, reach out the arm straight ahead of you. Be sure to maintain the strength throughout your entire back to lift the arm. Switch arms to practice both sides.



## Adding On: Both Arms

- 4** Carefully let go with both hands and progress to reaching above your head. Start by holding your hands underneath your chest, and then lift overhead with control.



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### Exit Strategy

Replace your hands on the fabric. Release your muscles gradually to lower back into hip hang. (Proceed to exit from hip hang as usual.)



∞ End of Movement ∞

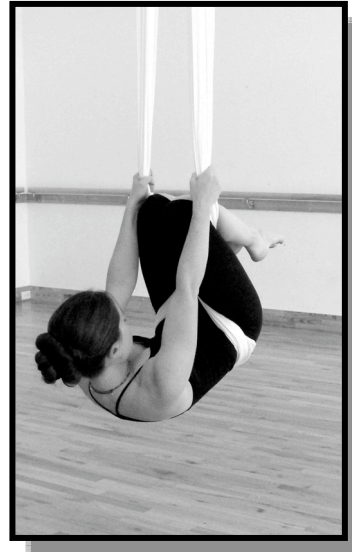
# Diaper Wrap

Prerequisite: crocheted legs

**1** Begin by crocheting your legs. Bend one leg so that the back of your knee is on the fabric.



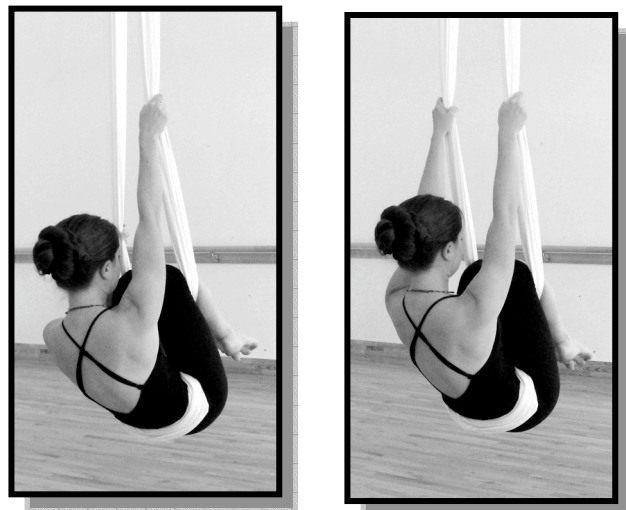
**3** With a little beat back to build momentum, swing up and grab on to the fabric above your knees.



**2** Then, bend the other leg.



**4** Using a bit of momentum initiated in your center, reach your arms up as high as you can one arm at a time.



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**5** Pull your body up, opening your legs into a horse position. Then, reach your arms up high.

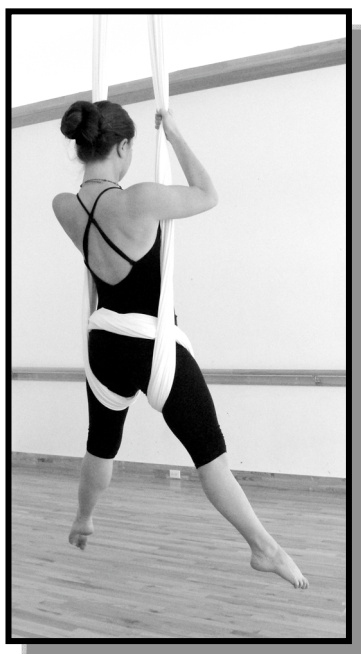


### Adding On: Diaper Pike

**7** Slightly lean back and bring your legs together in a pike in front of you. Point your toes.



**6** Pull up again so that your weight is in your grip and straighten your legs.



**8** Flex your feet.





**9** Reach forward with one arm, placing your hand on the bottom of your feet. If you cannot reach the bottoms of your feet, simply reach as far as you can. Don't forget to repeat on the other side.



### Adding On: Diaper Straddle

**10** Open your legs as far as possible, and imagine that the floor is below you to help position your legs. Keep some weight in your hands to stay lifted and keep from sinking.



### Exit Strategy

Hold the fabric at your sides. Sit back and sink your weight down to lower yourself out of the position. As you come back to the inverted position, bring your legs between the fabrics and then open your legs to reverse straddle to come up.



*Modifications on next page... →*

## Modifications

If it is too difficult to sit up from the crocheted legs position, you can also start in frog position. Reach your arms above your feet to the fabric, push your legs between the fabrics and then proceed as usual from step 4.



♪ End of Movement & Chapter 6 ♪

# Chapter 7: Hammock Poses

*Cradle*

*Leg Stretches*

*Relaxation Pose*

# Cradle

Prerequisite: none

*This movement works best with fabric whose height is just above the knee.*

- 1** Spread out the loop and step one leg through the loop keeping the fabric as wide as possible.



- 2** Sit in the loop so that the fabric is spread underneath your thighs and bum.



- 3** Gather the fabric in front of you together in both hands.



- 4** Bring your legs in one at a time, crossing your ankles just below your hands. Sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis while drawing the sitting bones away from your head, lengthening the spine.



 End of Movement 

# Leg Stretches

Prerequisite: cat's cradle

**1** Begin in cat's cradle.



**2** Straighten one leg into the fabric, allowing the fabric to open just enough to accommodate the leg. Interlace your fingers behind your leg while holding your calf with your thumbs if possible. Sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis while drawing the sitting bones away from your head, lengthening the spine.



**3** After switching and doing single leg stretches on both sides, bring both legs forward into the fabric. While holding your hands behind your legs, continue to sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis while drawing the sitting bones away from your head, lengthening the spine.



 End of Movement 

# Relaxation Pose

**Prerequisite:** none

*This move is likened to the corpse pose lying on the floor from traditional yoga, but don't let that trick you into thinking that they are the same pose. The hammock does not give support to your bones in the same way that the floor does. So do not think of this pose as a "replacement" for the traditional corpse pose. Rather, enjoy each in its own way.*

**1** Spread out the loop into a hammock and sit on about half of the material. Open the fabric with your arms and make sure that the fabric covers your shoulders with enough extra for your head.



**3** Stretch your legs by bringing one leg at a time toward your nose. Hold on to your leg as you straighten it and then release it. Continue to press with the opposite leg into the fabric.



**2** Holding your excess fabric above your head, lay back into your hammock. Use your feet to open up the rest of the fabric so that your entire body is lying inside. Adjust so that you are comfortable.



### Exit Strategy

Use your feet to move the fabric behind your knees. Sit up and exit just as you came in.

**4** Release the legs and relax but do not sink in the middle. Feel the backs of your legs pressing into the fabric equally with your torso. Lift in the middle to help accomplish this.

### Body Awareness

While you are in any relaxation pose, it is helpful to have a systematic thought process to help your body relax. The general idea is to consciously bring your thoughts to each part of your body. For example, you can gently engage a muscle and then release it for a deeper relaxation. More specifically, you can take your mind and body through these steps to help your entire body release undo tension:

- ◆ Pick up your pelvis and place it back into the fabric, softening the lower back as you do so.
- ◆ On an inhale lift the arms up towards the ceiling and replace them back at your sides on an exhale, releasing any tension in the arms. Allow the chest to widen as much as possible in your cocoon.
- ◆ Let your sense organs relax. Relax your eyebrows, especially the space between the eyebrows. Let your eyes sink back into their sockets. Feel the tongue and jaw soften.
- ◆ When you have finished taking your mind through each body part, turn your focus to your breathing. Notice the ebb and flow, the rising and falling of each breath.



∞ The End ∞





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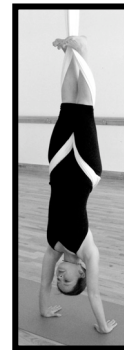
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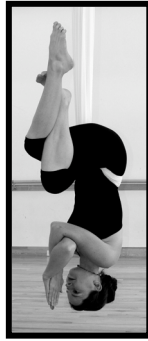
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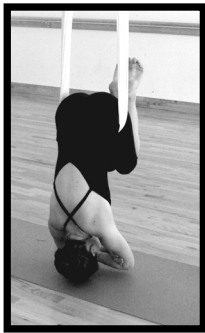
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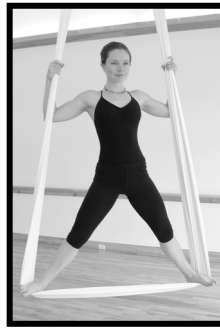
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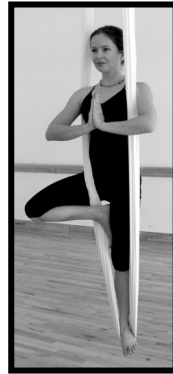
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# Acknowledgements

As usual, a huge thank you goes to my husband, Matt Leach, for his continual support of my favorite hobby, for his continual patience in taking thousands of pictures day after day to get just the right ones, for allowing me to take over the computer for long hours every day doing editing for these books, and for bringing me cookies while I am there.

I would like to also make a special thank you to Joni, one of my first students to complete an aerial yoga program one-on-one with me. She was returning to dance after quite some years off, and she was my test-subject for developing a gentle yet effective program. I admired her coming back week after week despite the bruises that can often accompany a beginner's experience. Persisting through the discomfort, she gained a great deal of impressive strength by the end of the course. As a teacher, my greatest joy is witnessing this sort of transformation in a person. Thank you for coming back each week to press on.

All pictures for this manual were taken at the Boulder Circus Center in Boulder, Colorado. We are very thankful for the use of their studio for this manual and other aerial dance endeavors.





# About the Author

Rebekah Leach is both a performer and teacher of aerial dance. Her aerial journeys have taken her all over the country and as far as Russia; performing in aerial dance companies such as Daughter of Zion Aerial Dance Company; performing at everything from high school dance shows, to performing at benefits or symphony orchestras with Aerial Experience Productions, and her favorite, to simply aerial dance as a way to worship God.



Performing led to teaching which eventually led to the opening of her aerial dance studio in Ojai, California. Out of her love for creative movement, Rebekah developed and implemented a unique curriculum designed for kids and adults to explore dance in the air. What you have in your hands is one result of the exploration to create a working aerial program which integrates many movement forms. Rebekah designed this program from her knowledge and experience of various movement disciplines, and she continues to explore in and outside the box.

*This manual is part of a series that Rebekah is writing covering the aerial arts. For more about these books or aerial dance resources, visit [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com).*

*To follow Rebekah's aerial adventures, visit [www.rebekahleach.com](http://www.rebekahleach.com).*



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