

## SAFE YOGA FOR BONE HEALTH

By Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, RYT

Yoga done properly can improve your strength, flexibility and balance. However there are some ways of doing yoga that could put your bone health at risk, especially if you have osteoporosis or are risk of breaking a bone. So whether you are a longtime yogi or just looking for your first class, consider these guidelines when practicing yoga.\*

### GETTING STARTED

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Yoga is best learned by choosing the right studio and teacher. Consider these guidelines:

- The school you select should have you fill out a health history that includes questions about your bone health.
- Your health history should be reviewed by your teacher prior to your first class.
- Postures should be taught with detailed instruction, the use of props (blocks, blankets, chairs etc.) and the precautions for each pose should be made clear to you.
- The teacher should be circulating the classroom giving instructions and not doing their own yoga at the front of the class. Corrections should be verbal with agreed upon light touch, but no sudden or forceful movements.
- Students should be encouraged to ask questions, and comfort and control should be emphasized above looking just right or performing some perfect pose.

If any of these guidelines are not followed, shop elsewhere for your yoga instruction.

### DOING YOUR YOGA

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Safety and non-violence is the first and most important principle in yoga. You should always feel balanced and under control, though you may be working fairly

hard. You should not experience pain during or after class. Talk to your teacher if you feel overwhelmed or have any pain. Keeping control and comfort in mind at all times, which postures are best for bone health and what should you avoid?

### POSTURES TO AVOID

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First realize there are several types of postures you should avoid. Ask your teacher to use the common names so you can recognize the following postures to avoid:

- Headstand
- Plow
- Shoulderstand
- Forward bends
- Downdog with a rounded low back
- Deep twists with a crooked back
- Jumping between poses
- Balance poses that feel out of control
- Abdominal crunches (these aren't yoga but should be avoided)

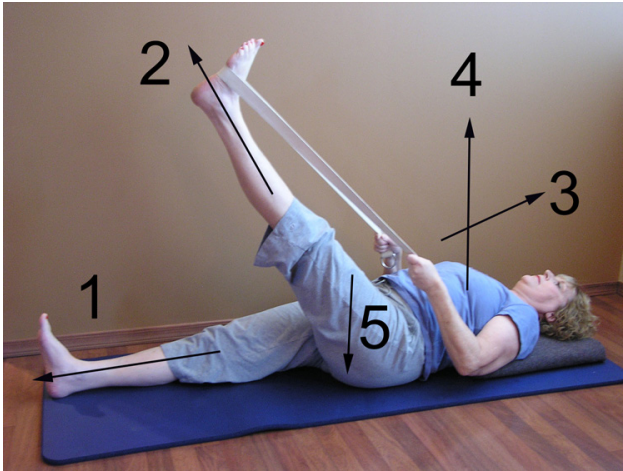
### PRINCIPLES FOR ALL POSTURES

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All poses should be taught with the focus on good alignment, correct muscle use, a sense of balance

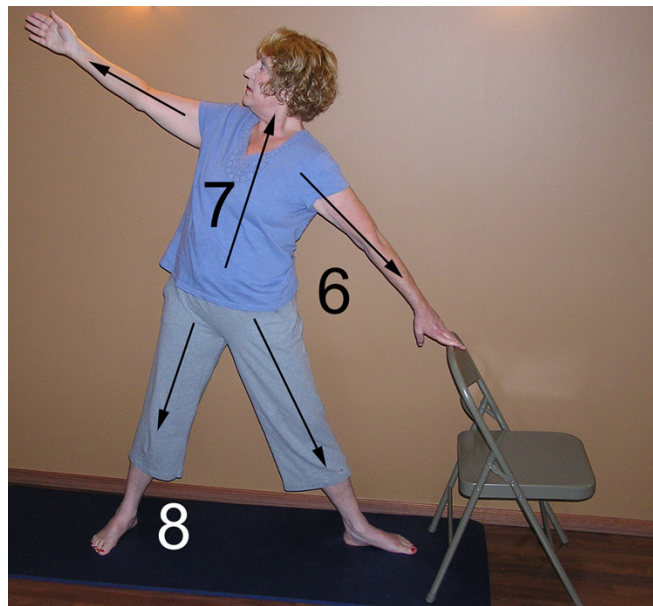
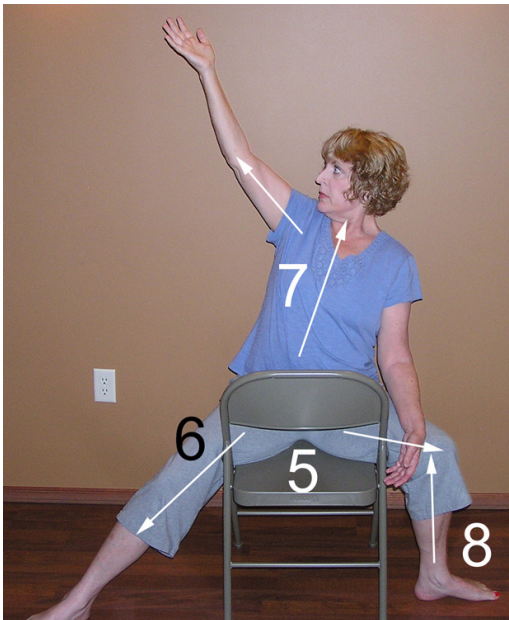
on the parts of your body touching the ground and smooth, steady breathing. Since many movements in yoga postures involve lying on your back or stomach, standing, forward bending and seated and twisting, the following photos provide the basic principles to maintain bone health and safety when you are in these positions during yoga.

Just match the number on the picture to the following numbered descriptions. Please remember that these are just principles. These are not instructions for doing specific exercises or poses.



## WHEN DOING ANY POSTURES THAT REQUIRE YOU TO LIE ON YOUR BACK OR STOMACH

- 1-3. Keep steady effort out through the limbs and spine as though growing longer in all directions. Use a belt to extend your reach and do not collapse the spine by over-reaching.
4. Keep a natural curve in the low back and the heart up slightly.
5. Stay balanced and in contact with the floor on all parts of your body making contact (heel, calf, buttock, upper back and head.)



## WHEN DOING ANY POSTURES WHERE YOU ARE STANDING

6. Same as # 1 above, substituting blocks, walls and chairs to prevent collapse and over-reaching. Any standing or balance poses should be under control with smooth, steady breathing. If not, ask for support!
7. Keep a long, straight spine with any twists or sidebends, watching to avoid collapsing the rib cage on either side.
8. Keep big toes and outer heels grounded with arches lifted.

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### WHEN DOING ANY POSTURES THAT HAVE YOU BENDING FORWARD WHILE SEATED OR STANDING

9. Learn to bend at the hips with pelvis moving on the thigh bones while keep the spine long and strong.

10. Bend the knees and hips to maintain #9 rather than trying to look like the yoga pictures. You should never bend forward at the waist with straight legs.



### TWISTS

11. Light twisting can be done safely. Twists are best done with less compression by gravity. Lying on your back is best, then standing and using the most caution with any seated twists. The emphasis should be on maintaining all of the above points and restricting effort to 70% of your maximum turning ability. You should not feel a strain or stretch in your torso or neck as you twist. If you feel any strain or stretch, you are twisting too far.

For more information about Matthew J. Taylor, visit [www.drofyoga.com](http://www.drofyoga.com)

\*All individuals should check with their healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program. If you have any chest pain, stop exercising and see your healthcare provider before exercising again.