

YOGA DETOUR PRESENTS

the

TOP 8 FOR 2018

Information, tips and
ideas to take your
teaching up a notch.

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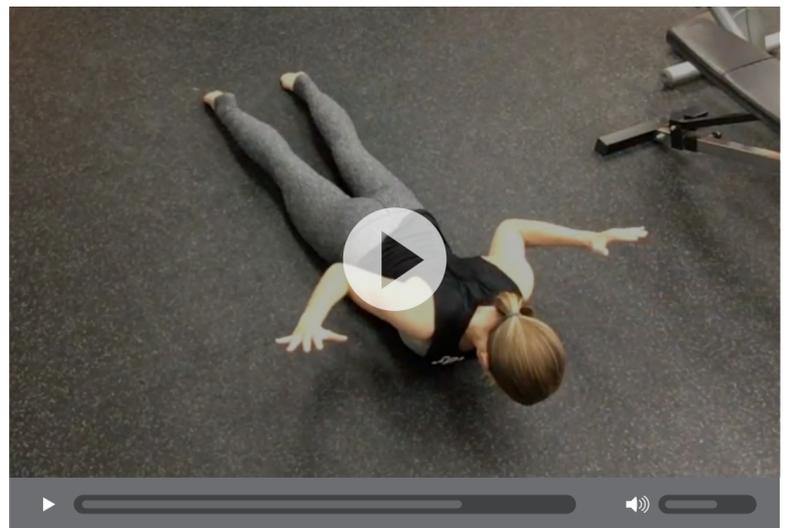
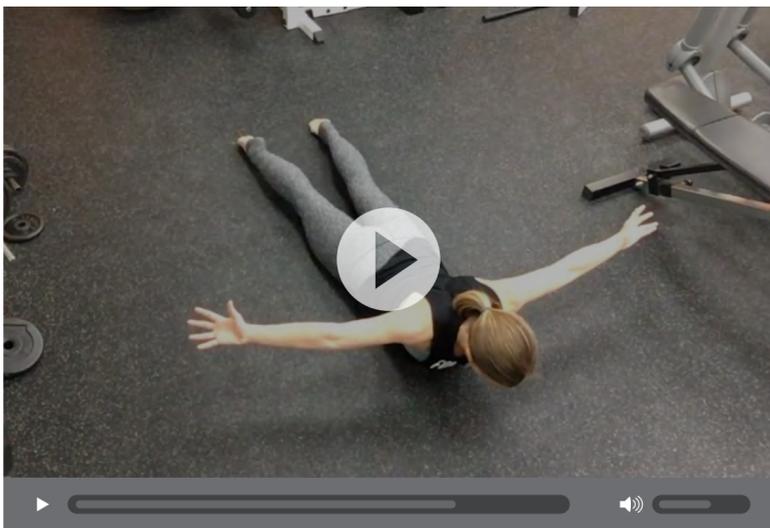
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How to make upward dog feel good for your body

Realistically we could spend a lifetime exploring the upward-facing dog posture, breaking it down and figuring out how to get all the pieces of this pose to work together most effectively. But what I want to do is give you **just TWO areas of focus**. If you work on these in your own practice as well as with your students you'll notice a massive difference.

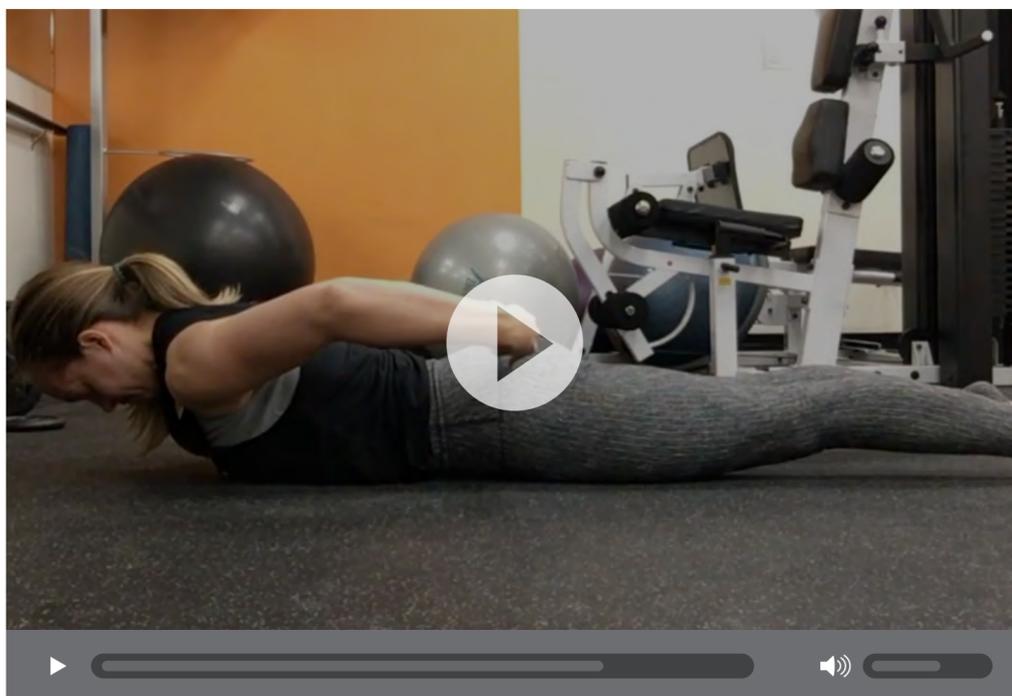
#1 External rotation of the shoulders. This is what's missing in any upward dog posture that looks like [this](#). In the two videos below you'll see how we can **stop neglecting the backside of the shoulder** and start feeling all kinds of new things (like work! and muscle activation!) before we even enter the pose.



WHEN YOU'RE TEACHING EXTERNAL ROTATION, THESE CUES MIGHT HELP:

1. Visualize a spiral starting from the shoulder blade, traveling all the way down the arm into the wrist, that would end up turning your fingers outward if they weren't grounded on the floor
2. Elbow pit will rotate forward in any position like tabletop, plank, upward dog etc.
3. Think of pulling the hands toward the back of the mat while at the same time engaging in that spiral/corkscrew action. This will help to stabilize the shoulder blade and keep any laxity out of the elbow joints.

#2 HIP EXTENSION. This is the best way to mitigate pain in the lower back. **Get your glutes and hamstrings to do what they're designed to do so that the lumbar spine doesn't end up working like a hinge.** When we combine hip extension with thoracic mobility (moving into the backbend from the upper spine as opposed overdoing it in the lower back), your upward dog will feel like a **WHOLE NEW POSE.**



WHEN YOU'RE TEACHING HIP EXTENSION, THESE CUES MIGHT HELP:

1. Think of trying to smooth out the creases in the front of your hip, right where the hip would bend in a forward fold. See if you can use the engagement of the glutes and hamstrings to make that happen instead of just increasing the backbend in your lower spine.
2. Use the glutes in a way where you can feel them working enough to drive the hips forward into extension, but not enough to crack a walnut in your butt cheeks. Learning to intelligently fire the glutes so that there's more than just an all or nothing response takes practice!

[**BONUS:** If you want to make any posture that requires weight bearing on the hands feel better, start incorporating **wrist prep**. Upward dog requires the wrists to extend. This is a movement prerequisite that the majority of workaday humans are lacking. When the wrists aren't taught to a) move and b) weight bear in various positions, they start to hurt. It's that simple. **It's not that something is wrong with the wrists when they become injured - it's just that they haven't been given the tools to help them perform** the tasks you're asking of them. Start with [this video](#) for wrist mobility and then [try this](#) one for wrist strength. Making these movements a regular part of your practice will pay off big time.]

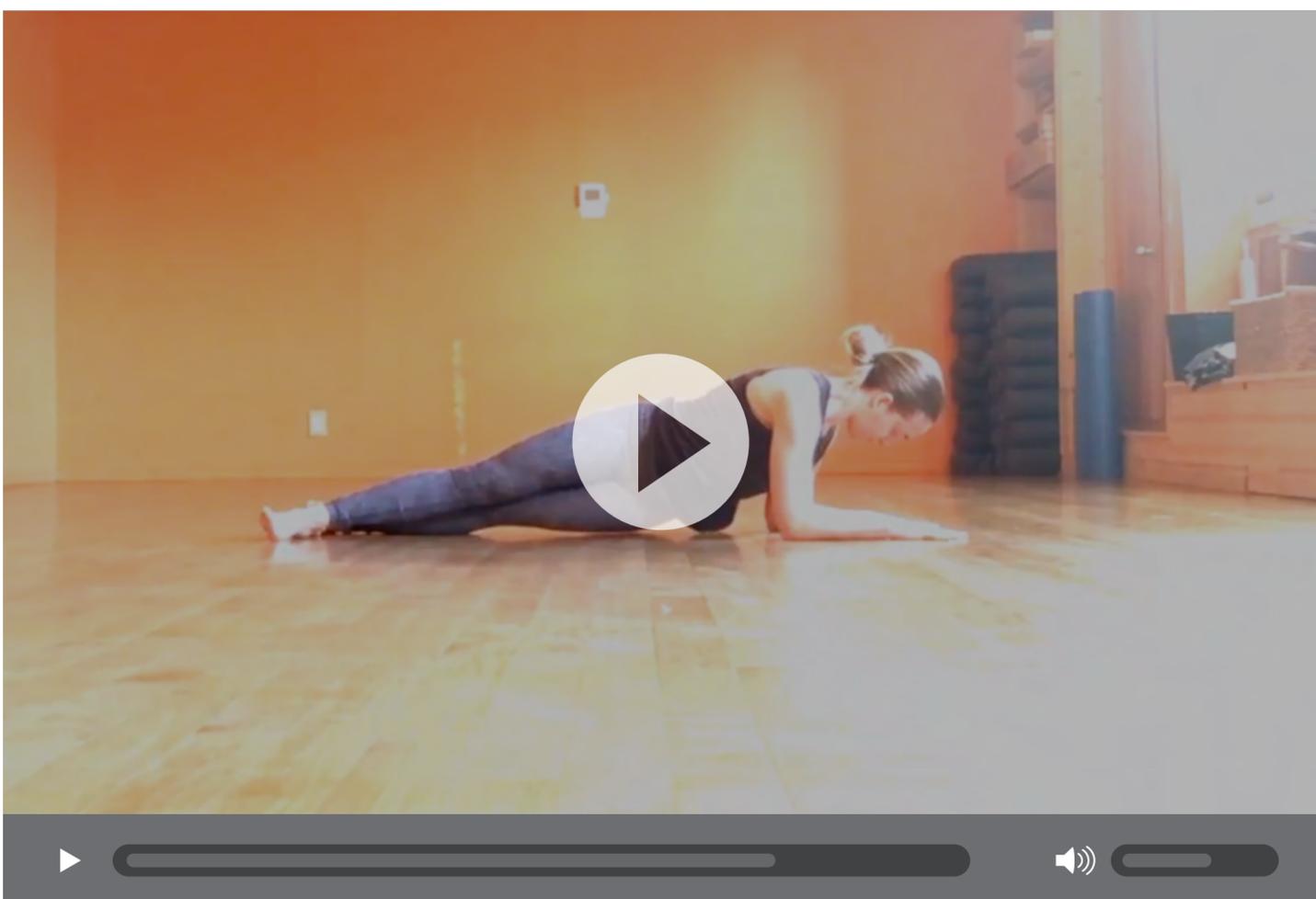


How to create a flow combining postures like side plank, triangle pose and half moon while integrating functional movement and corrective activation

What one thing do side plank, triangle pose and half moon have in common?

OBLIQUE ACTIVATION.

For most humans, the obliques are offline - long forgotten, tight, underused muscles. When we wake 'em up, we do our bodies a favour by engaging muscles key to spinal stability and as a bonus we get to **experience these postures in a whole new way**, through the lens of "woah...I've never felt that before...is that what this pose is actually for?!" I'll talk you through the sequence below.



WHEN TEACHING A FLOW LIKE THIS, THESE CUES MIGHT HELP:

1. Every time the hand goes to the waist, feel the space between your hip and your low rib. Can you contract that space under your hand? Does it engage in a way that helps to straighten your spine?
2. Imagine there are strings attaching each of your ribs on the top side of the torso to the ceiling. Feel them lifting away from the floor, without allowing the spine to move into a side bend.
3. If someone goes deep into triangle or extended side angle pose, they'll likely lose the connection to their obliques on the top side, in which case I'd say: Think of lifting out of the pose just enough to feel those obliques engage - sometimes if they're in more of a stretched position it's hard to get them to turn on.
4. In half moon pose, once balance is steady, you could bring your hand to the topside of the waist again and think of lifting up into that side of your body. At the same time, shift some weight back into your heel (without locking the knee) and look for the hamstrings to engage with that action - they'll help add more strength and support to the pose as the hand lifts off the ground.



How to wake up your clients' balance skills without just doing the same old balance poses

My approach to balance looks like this:

A) Get people to start using their feet with more awareness. Try out this audio session which focuses on finding balance from the foot's foundation.



Listen: Foot Foundations

SOME KEY CUES TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Bring awareness to the three points of your "foot tripod"
- Imagine suction cups on the bottom of the foot

B) Wake up the hip stabilizers. Yes, it's a good idea to do all sorts of exercises that isolate these muscles ([like the ones I did here](#)) but when it comes to balance, we also need to use them in a way that incorporates the righting reflex aka the ability to keep yourself upright. That's why I love [this exercise](#).



Listen: Hip Proprioception

SOME KEY CUES TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Visualize the muscles on the outer edge of the hip engaging to keep the pelvis from drifting to the side
- Use the inner thigh to hug the leg toward the midline

C) Integrate new movement tasks in conjunction with balance. That's what makes the "Block Drop" drill so awesome and effective. It targets both the left and right brain, provides a new focus (the block) rather than making the focus just about balance, and it keeps the body moving and therefore constantly correcting (righting) itself. Here's an audio guide that will take you through the exercise.



Listen: Block Drop

SOME KEY CUES TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Keep placing the block somewhere new - experiment with bringing it to the sides, or behind you, as well as in the space in front of your mat
- Keep the standing foot pointing forward while allowing the rest of the body to move any way it needs to in order to a) keep the balance and b) retrieve the block
- Stand all the way up every time in order to maximize the work coming from the hips and hamstrings



How to make your hip flexors feel better without stretching them - ever

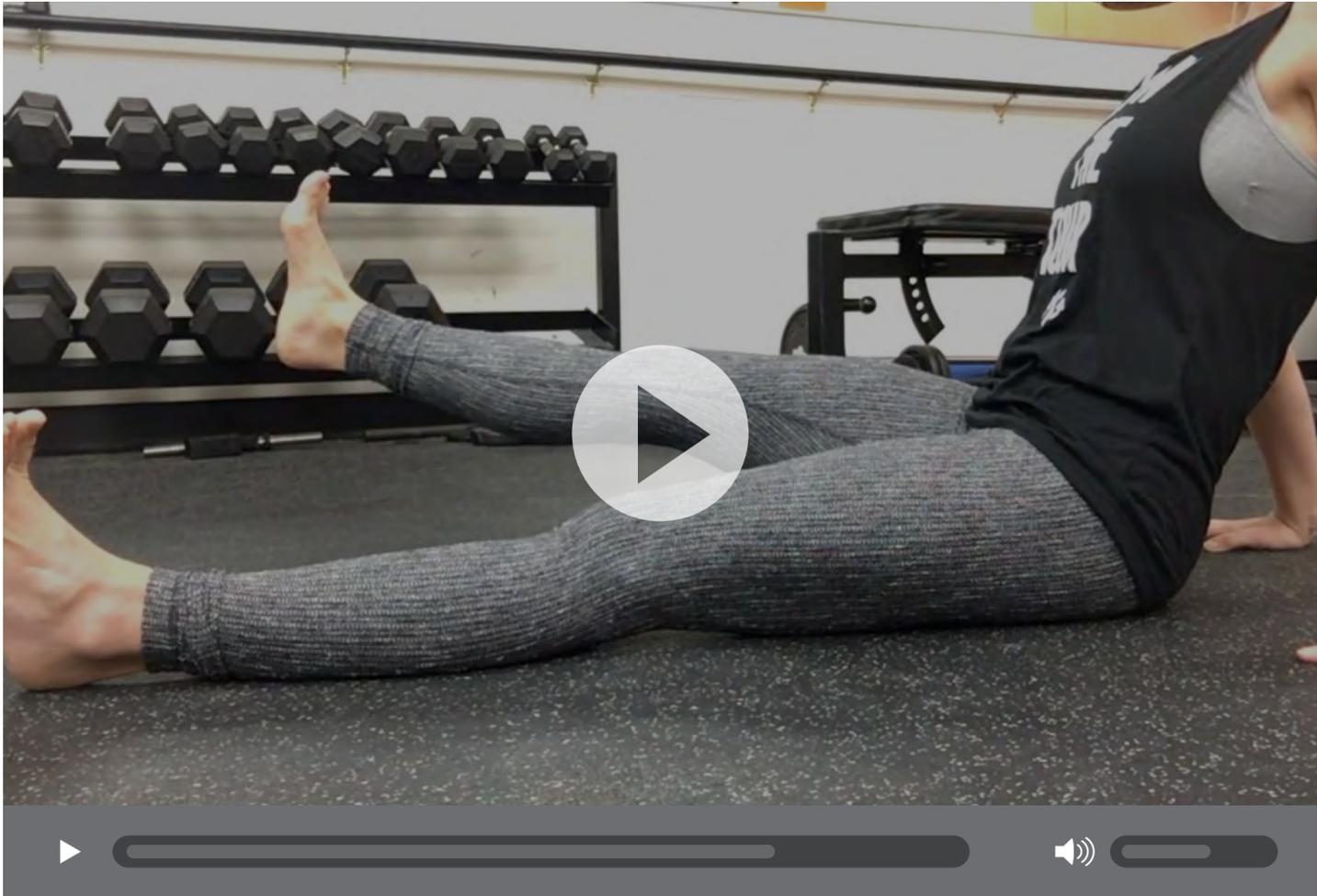
Like my friend Clayton says, [muscles are designed to contract](#). They're happiest when they get to do their work! But for some reason when we experience muscle "tightness" or discomfort, our first inclination is to stretch it out, massage etc. - not ask it to contract. That's why in so many yoga classes we see a hell of a lot of [this](#).

When people come to me complaining of tight hip flexors, I tell them to start strengthening them.

If you wonder why you feel your hip flexors on overdrive in postures like navasana (boat pose), it's NOT because they're trying to do the "core work" for you. It's because that part of the body is meant to do the heavy lifting in that pose, but it's likely not strong enough (yet) to handle that load. Same goes for hip flexor "tightness". Yes, you likely have tightness from sitting too much and not using your hips the way they're designed to operate (which means doing more than just flexion and extension). That said, **tight does not equal strong**. Tight does not always need to be stretched. Tight needs to be strengthened.

[Side note: The same rule applies to the hamstrings. If you're always feeling like the hamstrings are super tight, stretching the hell out of them isn't going to help matters. Start strengthening them in isometric, concentric and eccentric activations. For more on that, check out [this](#) and [that](#).]

So...how can we start strengthening the hip flexors? Check it out...

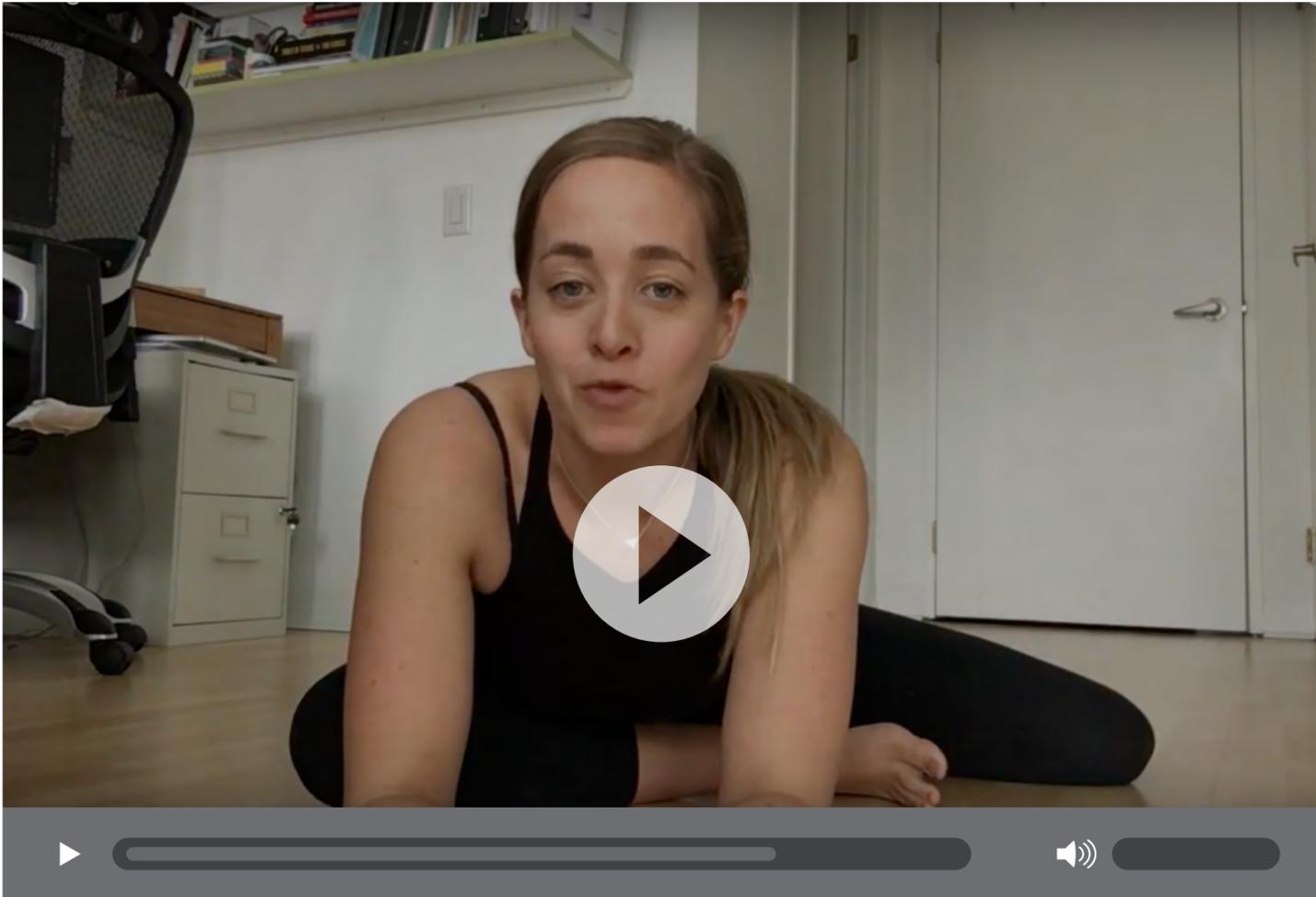


SOME HELPFUL CUES AND PROGRESSIONS:

- Quad cramp? Totally normal. Cramping is part of the process. My friend Sam says that **cramps are like crying**. Crying is cathartic and helps us grow. Our muscles want to grow.
- The same work can be done standing. I showed a variation of that [in this post](#) - I chose to do it in external rotation but the same could be done with the thigh right in front of you. If you really want to get a sensory-rich experience, try this with your leg straight.
- To back off the intensity further, try lifting one knee while seated in a chair. If that feels ok, lift the knee and then straighten your leg. Repeat 5+ reps per side while maintaining a neutral spine.
- Look for opportunities for active hip flexion in your yoga practice. Some poses where that can occur include: **crow/crane, standing hand-to-big-toe balance**, and **boat pose**. When you do these poses and feel your hip flexors working, you're doing it right!



How to break up with chaturanga and feel really good about it



IN GENERAL, THESE ARE THE KEY POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Why do we practice chaturanga? If the answer to that question sounds anything like "To get stronger" there's likely a more efficient path to get you there.
- Building upper body strength through chaturanga can lead to over-loading unprepared tissues (=injury) and/or reinforcing compensation patterns through repetition (=imbalances, maybe also =injury).
- That said, there is nothing inherently wrong with this position. We just need to prep our tissues and build strength in a more effective way so that this posture, and any others that load the shoulders, can be done safely.

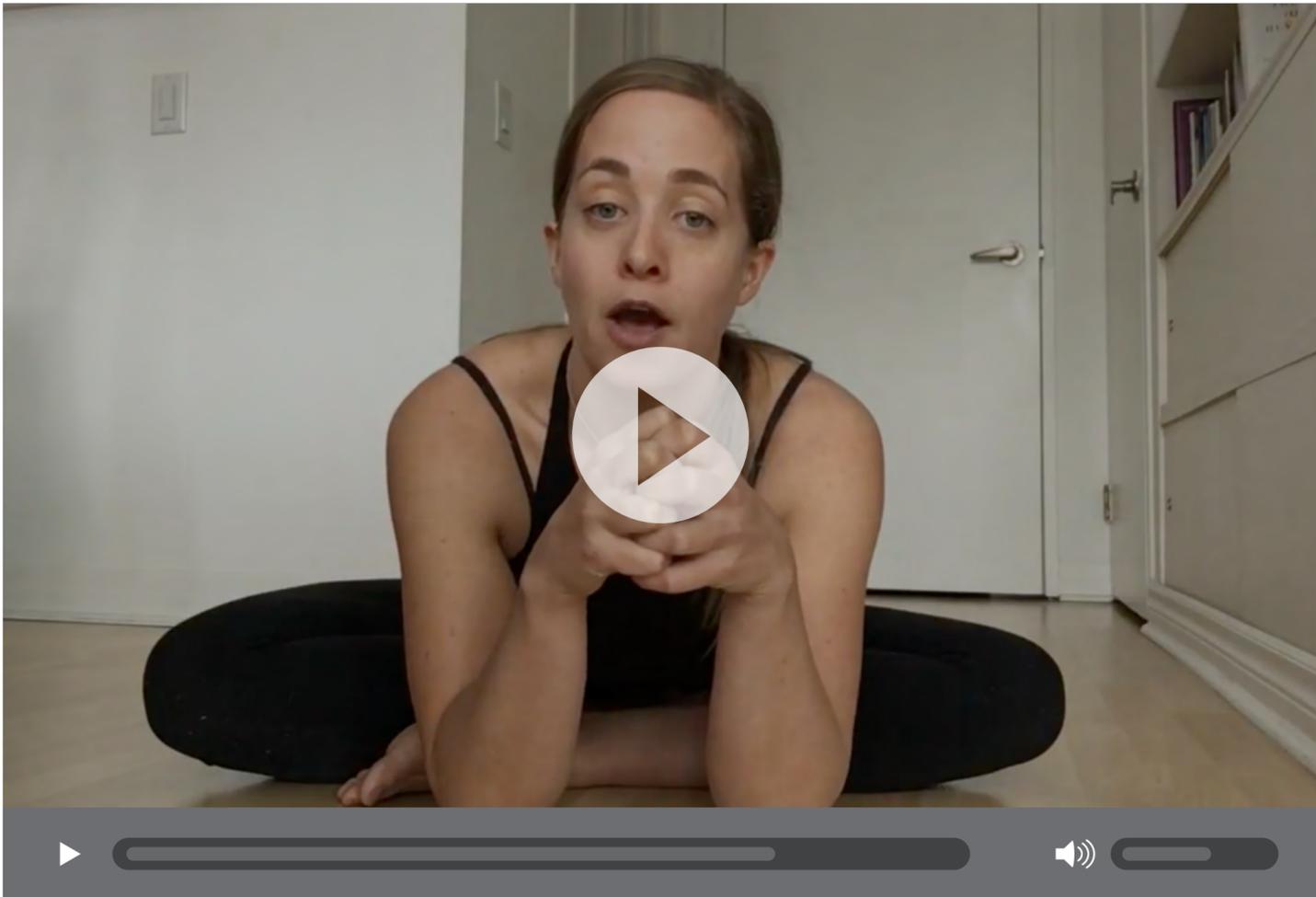
AND A FEW MORE...

- Implement push-ups. Start with incline push-ups and work up to sets of 10. This could be at a wall, then using a countertop or bench, then maybe a step. Progress slowly, giving your tissues time to adapt.
- Once you're working at a low incline with less effort, begin to explore the horizontal pushup. Emphasize the eccentric portion of the movement (lowering to the floor). Lower slowly (10-30 seconds), aiming for 3-5 reps at a time. Focus on PULLING yourself down rather than just sinking into it.
- Eventually, the eccentric strength will make the concentric portion (pushing up) much more accessible. Once you're performing full-depth push-ups for reps, chaturanga can become one of your movement options again and will likely feel far stronger when doing it.

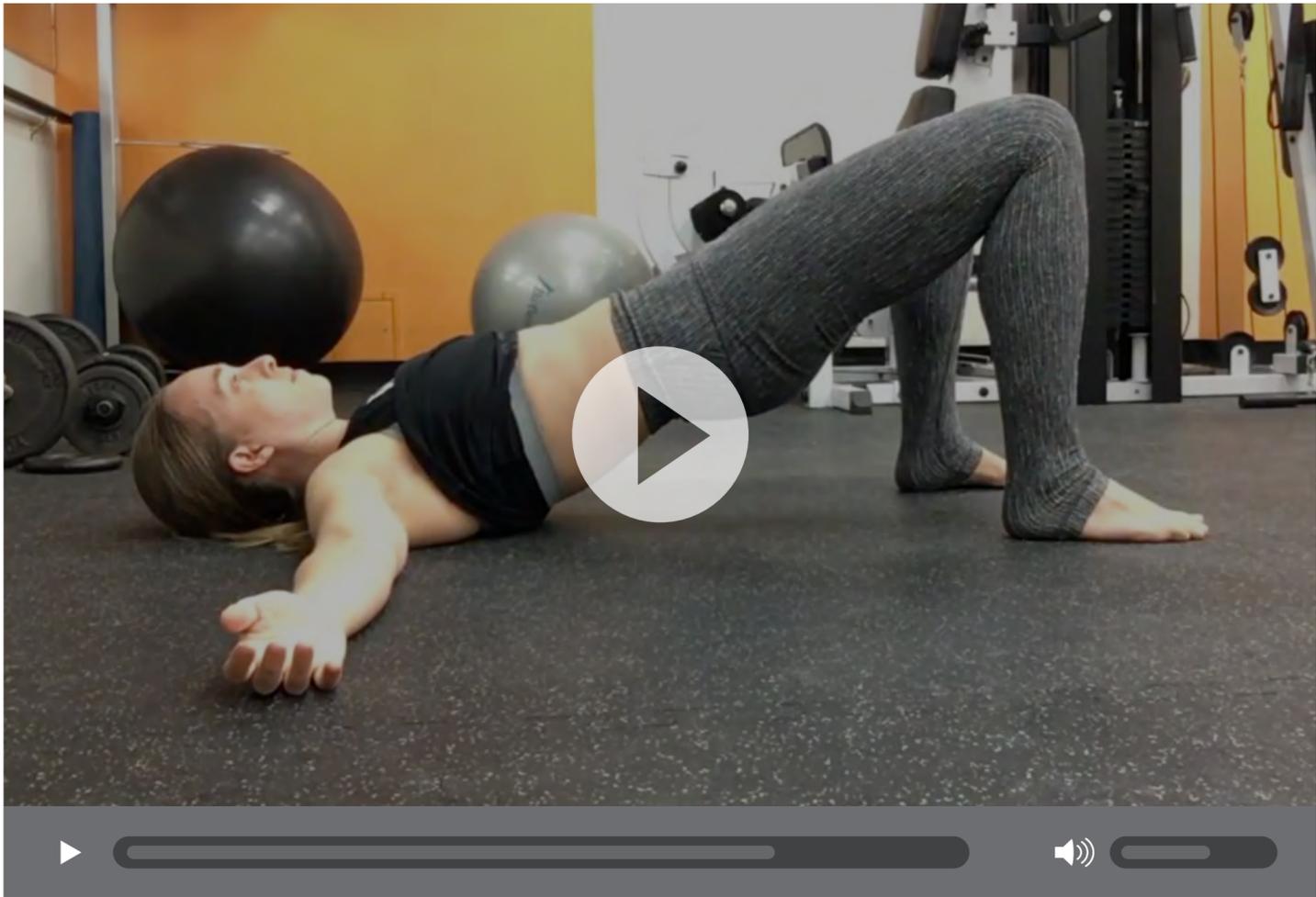


How to make backbends safe for those who want to practice them

I give this talk during every Teacher Training program.



I'm still constantly surprised at the number of students (and teachers) who are under the impression they should be softening their glutes when backbending. The short answer to why that's a bad idea is that **your glutes help to extend your hips**. When we do backbends, the hips extend. If we don't support that with the appropriate muscular contractions, the other places that extend into backbends (aka your spine) will do more work than necessary. Distribute the work evenly and your back will thank you.



The other half of the safe backbending equation relates to spinal mobility. If your lower back/lumbar spine moves A LOT and your thoracic spine is totally locked up, that lower back will once again be doing more than its fair share of backbending. Start **moving your spine in various different ways** - segmental cat cow, **segmental isolations**, lateral flexion (side-bending) and rotation are all elements of healthy spinal mobility. In other words, **there's more to backbending than backbends.**



The main reason why so many yogis suffer from shoulder injuries and how to be the exception

First off, remember [her](#)? Well...here's her [cousin](#).

The main reason why there are so many shoulder injuries in the yoga world is this: we spend too much time loading the shoulders and not enough time preparing them for this load. And not only do we load shoulders that aren't prepared - we do it repeatedly.

Focus on these three things and I promise your shoulders will start to move, feel and work better:

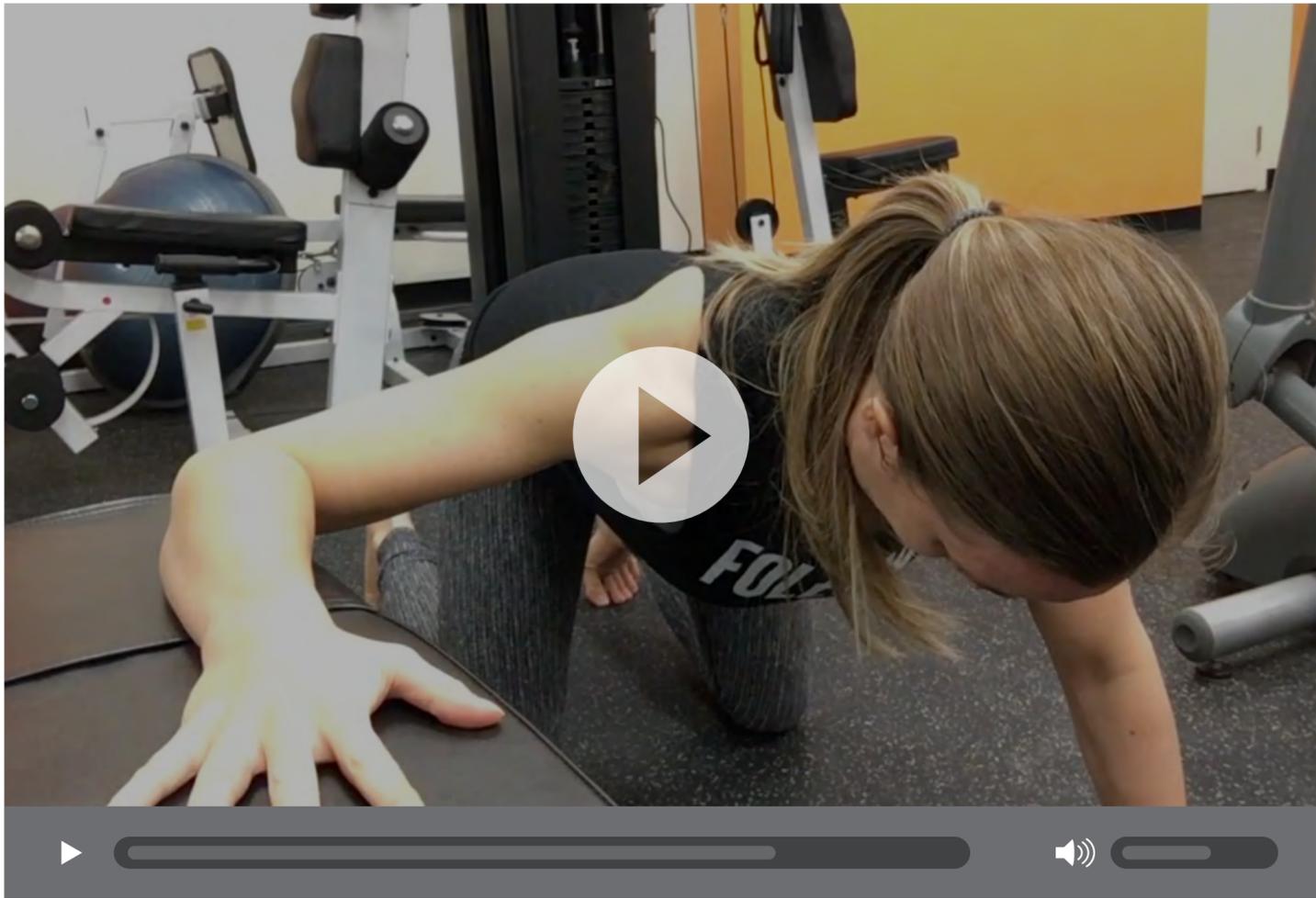
a) Move your shoulders through their full range of motion. I posted a variation of shoulder CARs (controlled articular rotation) [using a Swiss ball](#) and [another with yoga blocks](#). Doing this type of movement everyday is non-negotiable.

b) Hang. Start small - 10 to 30 seconds at a time, keeping some of your weight in your feet (don't just dangle from a bar right away). Overtime, increase the time you're hanging up to 60 seconds. Then start to add more load, eventually taking the feet off the floor/whatever they're on so your hands and shoulders are bearing 100% body weight. Do this gradually or your tissues won't have time to adapt.

c) Continue to reinforce shoulder external rotation like what we did in #1. Here's another one of my favourite ways to reinforce this action:

And lastly,

c) Continue to reinforce shoulder external rotation like what we did in #1. Here's another one of my favourite ways to reinforce this action:





How to cue the breath in a way that won't put you or your students at risk of dysfunctional breathing

Make yourself comfortable and enjoy this last audio segment on breathing.



Listen: Breathing

WHEN CUEING THE BREATH, THESE CUES MIGHT BE HELPFUL:

- Observe your breath - watch where it's moving in the body. If you feel like your breath is trapped in the upper chest, place a hand on your belly, or both hands around your waist/low ribs, and try moving the breath down there.
- Relax your belly. Constantly drawing in the navel can make it hard to keep the breath from driving up into the chest.
- Look for a pause between your EXHALE and your next INHALE.
- Trust your body to take in only as much air as it needs. Try not to over-breathe.

So...what's next?

If I've done my job right, this program has left you wanting more. To keep this party going, here's what you can do next:

1. [Book an online session](#). We can tackle your specific questions regardless of whether they're related to the practice, the business of yoga or teacher training.

2. Experience the Yoga Detour Online Immersion! Regardless of where you're located, this course will take you through the four central modules of the YD method, each of which explores a specific area of the Detour approach. To be at the front of the line next time this course launches add your name [here](#).