

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Surya Namaskar

A Beginner's Guide to Sun Salutations

The twelve-step sequence, a gentler beginner version, safety notes and a four-week plan

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General education only. Not medical advice. Speak with your doctor before starting any new practice.

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1. What Surya Namaskar is

Surya Namaskar, or sun salutation, is a flowing sequence of yoga poses linked with the breath. The name means "salutation to the sun". It is one of the most widely practised sequences and is used as a warm-up or a short practice in itself.

Different schools teach slightly different versions. The classic one has twelve positions. This guide gives a simple version and a gentler one for beginners.

The short answer

Surya Namaskar is a flowing sequence of about twelve poses linked with breath, often practised in the morning. Beginners should learn it slowly, in a gentler version, with knees bent and rests as needed.

2. Before you begin: safety first

- Check with your doctor first if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart condition, back, wrist, shoulder or knee problems, osteoporosis, glaucoma, or have had recent surgery.
- Warm up for 2 to 3 minutes before starting.
- Stop with sharp pain, dizziness or breathlessness.
- Practise on an empty stomach or about two hours after a meal.
- Do not rush. A slow round done well is better than many fast rounds.

3. The twelve positions

#	Position	Breath	Beginner tip
1	Prayer pose (standing, palms together)	Exhale	Stand tall, feet together or hip-width.
2	Raised arms (gentle back bend)	Inhale	Lift the chest, do not over-arch the lower back.
3	Standing forward fold	Exhale	Bend the knees if hamstrings are tight.
4	Low lunge (right leg back)	Inhale	Knee can rest on the floor.
5	Plank	Breathe naturally	Drop the knees if needed.
6	Eight-point pose (knees, chest, chin down)	Exhale	Elbows close to the body.
7	Cobra	Inhale	Lift only a little.
8	Downward dog	Exhale	Knees bent, heels need not touch.
9	Low lunge (right foot forward)	Inhale	Step forward gently.
10	Standing forward fold	Exhale	Soft knees.
11	Raised arms	Inhale	Lengthen the spine.
12	Prayer pose	Exhale	Pause and notice the breath.

This completes half a round. Repeat with the left leg stepping back for a full round.

4. A gentler beginner version

Step	Position	Breath
1	Mountain with palms together	Exhale
2	Raised arms	Inhale
3	Forward fold with bent knees	Exhale
4	Half lift, flat back, hands on shins	Inhale
5	Hands and knees (tabletop)	Exhale
6	Cat and cow	Breathe naturally
7	Child's pose	Exhale
8	Back to tabletop, then stand	Inhale
9	Raised arms, then palms together	Inhale, exhale

5. How many rounds?

Week	Rounds	Version
1	2	Gentle version, slowly
2	3	Gentle version
3	3 to 4	Add plank and cobra, knees allowed
4	4 to 6	Classic version, only if comfortable

6. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Moving too fast	Slow down. Match each movement to a full breath.
Locking the knees or elbows	Keep a slight bend.
Collapsing in plank	Drop the knees.
Rounding the back in the forward fold	Bend the knees and fold from the hips.
Holding the breath	Breathe easily. If you cannot, slow down.

7. What to expect, honestly

Surya Namaskar is a moderate form of exercise that warms the body and links movement with breath. It is not a complete fitness or weight-loss programme. Benefits depend on regular, comfortable practice.

8. Preparing to practise

A warm-up makes the sequence safer. Spend two to three minutes on gentle neck turns, shoulder rolls, wrist circles and a few cat and cow movements on hands and knees. Make sure your mat does not slip. A folded blanket under the knees helps if the lunge positions are uncomfortable.

Choose a place with enough room to step back. If you are practising in a small space, use the gentler beginner version, which does not need as much room.

9. Breath through the sequence

The classic pattern pairs movement with breath: inhale when you lift and open, exhale when you fold and close. Beginners often struggle with this. If the pattern feels rushed, use this rule instead: let the movement wait for the breath, never the other way round. If you need three breaths in a position, take them. Over time the movement and breath begin to match naturally.

10. Learning each part separately

Part	How to learn it
Standing parts (1 to 3, 10 to 12)	Practise slowly without the floor poses. Add the breath.
Lunges (4 and 9)	Learn the step back and forward on its own. Place the knee on the floor if needed.
Plank, chest-down and cobra (5 to 7)	Practise each separately, with knees down. Do not rush into them.
Downward dog (8)	Practise with bent knees and a long spine. Heels do not need to reach the floor.

11. Different versions you may meet

Teachers teach Surya Namaskar differently. Some use a lunge with the back knee down, some use a half plank, some include a low push-up called chaturanga. These variations are not better or worse. The safest version is the one that suits your body today. If a teacher offers a variation, ask what it is for and whether there is an easier option.

12. Troubleshooting

Situation	What to try
My wrists hurt	Do the plank on the forearms, or use the gentler version without weight on the hands.
My lower back aches in the arch	Reduce the back bend. Keep the hands lower and the elbows bent in cobra.
I feel dizzy when I come up	Slow down. Pause between rounds and rise slowly.
I get out of breath	Take a rest in child's pose and slow the pace.
My knees hurt in the lunge	Rest the back knee on a folded blanket, or skip the lunge and use the gentler version.

13. Questions people ask

What is the best time to practise?

Many people like early morning, ideally facing the light, but any time on an empty stomach works.

How many rounds should I do?

Two to six is fine for beginners. Many online claims about large numbers of rounds are not needed.

Can I do it with back problems?

Talk to your doctor or physiotherapist first. The gentler version with bent knees and no deep back bends is a safer start.

Is it a religious practice?

Traditionally it has a devotional aspect, but it is widely practised simply as exercise.

14. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Surya	The sun.
Namaskar	Salutation.
Tabletop	Hands and knees position.
Vinyasa	Linking movement with breath.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Rounds done	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				