

Wood Chopper

Level 3 to 4 / Posture 73

Benefits:

Loosens & strengthens lower back, spine, neck, shoulders, breathing muscles, hamstrings and abdominals.

Time to Do: 3 minutes

Body Parts Used by This Posture:

Arms, shoulders, chest, spine, lower back, abdominals, hamstrings

Build Up to This Posture with:

Complete Breath, Supported Back Bend, Leg Clasp, Back Stretch, Leg Stretch, Wide Angle Pose.

This Posture Builds You Up for: Better breathing, Sun Salutations, Lunges.

Energy Centers Used: Belly, Solar Plexus, Heart, Throat

Who Should Not Do This Pose Pregnant women – it can compromise your spine and lower back during the back bend and compresses the belly too much during the forward bend. However, you'll hardly need the warning, since there's not much chance you'll want to do it after the fourth month!

The Wood Chopper kick starts your breathing at the beginning of the day. It loosens many key areas that tend to hold tension. It gets your spine flexed, ready for action, releasing tension and energizing. It's one of the postures of the Sun Salutation, so it's good to get to know the movements of the Wood Chopper in details so that you can do them with confidence during the Sun Salutation.

Yoga Snack

A good break any time you have a minute. Refreshing!

Start

- Standing in Mountain Pose
- Arms by your sides
- Legs together

Then bring your hands in front of you into Namaste (prayer) position.





Key Before you begin it's important to do a slight pelvic tilt and elongate your spine. Keep these in place throughout the posture. These actions will protect your lower back and give you better extension during the pose.



Next

Stretch your arms up over your head. Link your fingers together. Pause and take the time to feel fully stretched upward. (This helps elongate your spine and protect your back.)

Pause



Next

Stretch up and back.

You will feel this in
Your abdominals
Your back
Your shoulders & arms
The front of your neck

Pause

Safety Tip & Key

It's important to keep the stretch in your arms as you bend backward. This will allow you to bend back farther and protects your back.



If you feel stress, straining or pressure in your lower back, try stretching your arms more. Also, be sure you have your pelvic tilt in place. If you're still feeling the stress, strain or pressure, you've gone too far and need to come up a bit.

Reverse your movements, returning to an upright position.

Be sure your arms are still well stretched and your pelvic tilt is still in place.



Stretch your body forward and down.

Keys Fold at the waste like a door closing, (not hunching your body over). If you do this well, your body and arms will stay straight, in line with each other.

Keep your arms in line with your ears.

Keep your arms well stretched as you come forward.

Bring your hands to the floor.



Your hands should fall directly down from your shoulders.

If you need to bend your knees to do this, that's OK – but bend your knees only as much as necessary.

Let your weight rest evenly between your hands and your feet.

See that the weight on your feet is resting just in front of your heels and is even between the left and right foot.

Usually, you hold this position for several breaths.

Notice that when you breathe out, your upper body relaxes and drops downward, allowing you to bring your body more and more toward your hands, allowing you to rest more and more of your hands on the floor, until, on a good day!, your palms will be flat on the floor, or your elbows are well bent. **For the extreme position**, bring your elbows and lower arms and hands behind your legs.

Also notice that, as your upper body is relaxing and sinking toward your hands, your legs can straighten. If your hips are already straight, you can feel your hips stretching more and more toward the ceiling, increasing the stretch in your hamstrings.

During the Sun Salutation, you normally just pause in this position before continuing to the Lunge, Dog or Puppy.

Release



Advanced – Reverse your movements to come up. Only do this if your lower back is very strong. Even then, remember to protect it by keeping your arms well stretched.

Beginner – Come up like a rag doll, knees slightly bent. This protects your lower back.



Common Errors



- Hunching over while folding forward.
- Allowing weight to fall too far forward or too far back on the foot. This will make you tip.
- Dropping the arms while folding forward. Keep your arms in line with your ears as long as possible.
- Dropping the head back during the back bend. Keep your head & ears in line with your arms throughout the back bend.



Modifications

If your back is not ready for the back bend, you can leave it out, or you can use as supported back bend, shown here.

Symptoms & Remedies

Tipping over backward during the back bend.	Weight is too far back on the foot. Bring your weight to rest in the middle of your foot, just in front of the heel.
Tipping forward during the forward bend.	Weight is too far forward on the foot as you fold forward. Bring your weight to rest in the middle of your foot, just in front of the heel.
Back hurts after doing this pose.	You're bending back too far during the back bend or pushing yourself into too much of an extreme during the forward bend. Ease up on the back bend and / or watching for your back and hamstrings limits during the forward bend. Even bend your knees a little during the forward bend.

Breathing



Breathe in & out settling into place.



Breathing in as you stretch up.
Pause the breath & the stretch.



Breathing out stretch back.
Pause the breath & the stretch.



Breathe in to stretch up again.
Pause the breath & the stretch.



Breathing out as you fold forward.



Finish breathing out as your weight settles into your hands.

Breathe in & out as you hold the pose.



Breathing in & out to return upright. Return to Namaste or go directly into next round.