

## Examples of Modified Yoga Poses for Rehabilitation

by [Lisa Mercer](#), Demand Media



Regaining range of motion is one of the primary goals of injury rehab. Yoga, with its breathing, relaxation techniques and static stretches, can help you achieve this goal, but some poses might actually exacerbate an injury. Instructors trained in therapeutic yoga know how to modify these postures by altering the body position, or by using an assortment of yoga props.

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### Importance of Modification

Asana, the original Sanskrit word for a yoga pose, means "steady comfortable posture," physical therapist and yoga instructor Lori Rubenstein told the American Council on

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Exercise. If you struggle to get into or sustain a pose, it is not a true asana. Instructors must therefore modify painful postures to suit the needs of their students. The Extended [Fish](#) pose, for example, is performed in a supine position: The back is arched, and the neck is hyperextended so that the top of the head rests on the floor. Meanwhile, the legs are lifted and extended at a 45-degree angle. People with back and neck injuries must modify this posture.

## Modifying the Extended Fish Pose

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While the Extended Fish pose is a bit extreme, certain types of back and neck problems require extension exercise. The modified Fish pose counteracts the adverse effects of a chronically flexed seated posture. Since weak core muscles sometimes accompany a back problem, keep your legs extended and on the floor. Prop yourself up on your elbows and forearms, and point your fingers toward your hips. Draw your chest upward as if someone had a string attached to your breastbone. Rest the top of your head on the floor, and hold the position for one minute.

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## Props

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Iyengar yoga often uses props, which provide an effective means of yoga posture modification. Sri B.K.S. Iyengar introduced these props as a means of enabling anyone, regardless of physical condition, to reap the benefits of yoga practice. Examples of yoga props include straps, chairs and sticky mats. In addition to modifying some of the poses, yoga props help you maintain optimal postural alignment. When performing a supine hamstring stretch, for example, many people distort their upper body alignment while reaching for their legs. The yoga strap helps keep your neck and shoulders relaxed, and provides leverage as you pull the leg toward your body.

## Seated Cat and Camel

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Physical therapists often use the yoga-inspired Cat and Camel to increase spinal mobility, but people with blood pressure issues or [knee injuries](#) might find it difficult to kneel on all fours. Physical therapists at Beth Israel Hospital modify this

exercise by using a chair. Sit upright at the edge of a chair. Inhale and arch your upper back. Exhale, tilt your pelvis forward, round your upper back and bring your chin toward your chest. Unlike many yoga exercises, the Cat/Camel is not a static stretch. Establish an even, flowing rhythm as you alternately arch and round your back.

## Using Yoga Blocks

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The Warrior pose strengthens the leg muscles and enhances external hip rotation. The posture might benefit people in the latter stages of recovery from a [knee injury](#), but they must prevent the knee from driving forward beyond the toes. Physical therapists at the Stonybrook Department of Outpatient Physical Therapy place a yoga block against the wall in a horizontal position. The other side of the block is positioned at the top of the shinbone. As the patient bends her knee, the yoga block keeps her from going beyond a safe range of motion.

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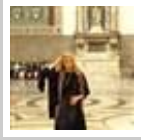
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In 1999, Lisa Mercer's fitness, travel and skiing expertise inspired a writing career. Her books include "Open Your Heart with Winter Fitness" and "101 Women's Fitness Tips." Her articles have appeared in "Aspen Magazine," "HerSports," "32 Degrees," "Pregnancy Magazine" and "Wired." Mercer has a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from the City College of New York.

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