



Virabhadrasana II

Tight hip flexors may cause your back hip to lift, but you want to keep your hips even.



Catch a Wave

Pretend you're on a surfboard, and watch your alignment improve in Warrior II

by Kristin McGee

I've always wanted to learn to surf. As the Beach Boys sing, "Catch a wave, and you're sitting on top of the world." I think surfing is sexy in a very athletic way—and it has much in common with yoga. Both require a constant play between effort and ease, contraction and expansion, intense focus and the total exhilaration of freedom. You have to let go both on the board and on your yoga mat to experience the excitement of being at one with a wave or in an asana. Both activities also call for a significant amount of core work.

I have an opportunity to learn how to surf off the incredible beaches of Kauai next January. Michaelle Edwards,

the founder of YogAlign in Kauai, has invited me to her teacher-training program, and she promises to hook me up with the best surfing teachers. In the meantime, the closest I'll get to the sensation of being on a board is in my yoga practice as I surf my mat in Warrior II (Virabhadrasana II).

As I flow through my postures and open into Virabhadrasana II, I imagine I'm on a surfboard ready to catch a wave—and there I am in alignment. Before I found my surfer's stance, I used to tilt my back hip higher than my front hip, and I notice many of my students doing the same thing. This is often due to tight hip flexors and psoas muscles in the anterior thigh of the

back leg. If we positioned our hips like this on an actual surfboard, its nose would crash down into the water, and we'd topple over. Aligned hips would have us gliding smoothly over the waves (see "Dropping In" sidebar, below, for alignment tips).

Before you try your Warrior II, I recommend warming up with the following poses:

Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose) will open up your inner thighs, hip flexors, and groin muscles. Sit tall with your spine straight, and bring the soles of your feet together, letting your knees open to the sides. Engage your lower abdominal muscles and relax your shoulders as you keep your spine straight and lengthen forward over your legs. Keep pressing into all four corners of your feet and gently ease your inner thighs open. Hold for 5 to 8 breaths.

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose) will also open your inner thighs and hips and get even deeper into your psoas muscles as you recline back and expand the front of your abdominal region. From Baddha Konasana, lie back (use a block under your head if you'd like) and let your inner thighs continue to fall away from the midline.

I also love doing what I call a wide Buddha stance. Start in a **Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide Legged Forward Bend)** stance, then narrow your feet slightly and turn them out like a ballet second position. Bend your knees deeply into a squat as you roll your inner thighs out and keep your knees moving toward your little toes (not rolling in). This pose definitely opens your hips, inner thighs, groins, and psoas, and builds strength in your gluteals and quadriceps muscles, all of which aid in holding Virabhadrasana II.

Along with its many physical benefits of stretching and strengthening your legs, hips, and thighs, Virabhadrasana II can help you develop courage and focus as you enter each wave of adversity. You can harness your core power through Warrior II as you surf the mat and ride the pipeline to inner peace. Hawaii, here I come! 🌊

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Dropping In

The professional surfers I've seen bend both knees, and even their hips so they can effortlessly balance on their boards. Next time you come in to Warrior II, try this:

- Lift up a little from the bend of your front knee, and bend your back knee slightly. This releases the tension in your hip flexors and psoas muscles and creates space in the groin. Then, you'll be able to drop your back hip rim (iliac crest) level with the front iliac crest.
- Keeping your hips level, bend your front knee deeply so it is directly over your front ankle. Notice the openness in your back thigh and hip socket.
- Now, your hips are even and your stance is steady. You're ready to fight off any upcoming waves or battles that could knock you off your stance. With your psoas released, you will feel more in control of your abdominals, have better access to the deep core and pelvic floor muscles, and really anchor yourself from your internal strength.

Warrior II Benefits:

- builds confidence, courage, focus strength, and stamina
- opens hips, thighs, and groin muscles
- tones leg muscles and ankle joints