

# THE HOLIDAY

# stretch

No time to work out?  
**OUR FAST YOGA ROUTINE FIRMS,  
 DE-STRESSES, AND EVEN BANISHES CRAVINGS.**

'Tis the season of extra calories:

Cocktails and cookies aside, your workout routine often gets lost in the holiday shuffle, so you're not only eating more, you're burning less. Not to mention the usual stress, which can trigger the body to release excessive amounts of cortisol, the "cravings" hormone that makes you reach for comfort foods high in fat and sugar.

The perfect antidote? Our quick and easy yoga routine. "Yoga not only reduces stress, but it may also help lessen emotional eating," says Bruce W. Smith, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at the University of New Mexico. His preliminary study found that yoga diminished binge eating by 51%, with participants losing an average of 6 pounds in 8 weeks. It may also help on a biochemical level. Researchers at Jefferson Medical College drew blood samples from 16 yoga novices and found that cortisol levels dropped by about 15 to 20% as early as day one.

Start today and you'll be ringing in 2009 calmer, happier, stronger, and untouched by holiday weight gain.

by **HOLLY ST. LIFER** ■ photographs by **JOHN DOLAN**

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## WORKOUT at a glance

**WHAT YOU NEED:** A yoga mat or carpeted space.

**HOW TO DO IT:** This 30-minute plan is designed to flow from one pose to another, so do the moves in the order given, taking time to breathe evenly and fully. When Downward Facing Dog is used as a transition, hold the pose for just a few breaths, then ease into the next move. Repeat the routine 3 times through. You can do this practice daily, but try to do it at least 3 times a week. (In a pinch, do our "10-Minute Stress Buster" on p. 98.) Begin with the Main Move. If it's too tough, do the **Make It Easier** option.

**THE EXPERT:** Tom Larkin, owner of Sanctuary for Yoga, Body and Spirit in Nashville, created this workout. He teaches Vinyasa yoga, which focuses on the integration of breath and movement to help reduce stress.

## the moves

### 1 active cat

*Firms arms, chest, back, abs, butt, legs*

**KNEEL ON ALL FOURS** with arms straight, wrists beneath shoulders, and knees aligned under hips. Inhale and extend right leg behind you, parallel to floor. Exhale, bend elbows, keeping close to body, and draw torso forward, lowering upper body toward floor. Inhale, and in one motion with abs tight, press torso back, rounding spine while bringing right knee to chest. Repeat 6 more times; switch sides.

**Make It Easier:** Don't raise leg at beginning of move; keep both knees on floor while drawing torso forward.



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## BODY BY DESIGN

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### 2 downward facing dog

*Stretches and firms shoulders, torso, legs*

**KNEEL ON ALL FOURS** with knees beneath hips, hands 3 to 5 inches in front of shoulders, and toes tucked. Keeping abs tight, tuck pelvis, inhale, and straighten legs by lifting hips until body forms an upside-down V. Exhale and lift hips higher by pressing back from hands; lower heels toward mat. Hold for 5 breaths. Inhale, look forward, and walk feet up to hands. Exhale and roll up to stand.

**Make It Easier:** Keep heels lifted and knees bent while in upside-down V position.

**LOSE WEIGHT WITH YOGA!** For more tips, poses, and belly-flattening workouts, go to [prevention.com/yoga](http://prevention.com/yoga).

STYLING BY KAREN BUCHHEIMER; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JESSIE WELLS; TOP BY ATHLETICAL HABIT BY JORDAN

## THE SECRET to calm

Why is yoga such an effective stress buster? It's all in the breathing. "Long, slow exhalations can quiet the sympathetic nervous system, which is part of the flight-or-fight system, and activate the parasympathetic one, an important part of your body's relaxation response," explains Roger Cole, PhD, a scientist based in Del Mar, CA, and a yoga instructor at Yoga Del Mar.

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### 3 extended side-angle

*Stretches and firms shoulders, chest, back, abs, butt, legs*

**STAND WITH FEET** about 3½ feet apart, right foot pointing out, left one turned in slightly. Inhale and lift arms out to sides at shoulder level. On an exhale, bend right knee 90 degrees and hinge to right from hips, extending torso over right thigh. Inhale and place right hand on floor behind right foot, extend left arm overhead, palm facing down. Look toward left hand; hold for 5 breaths.

**TRANSITION:** Place both hands on floor on either side of left foot. Step left foot back toward right. Exhale and press hips up to Downward Facing Dog (p. 97). Move to Side Plank from here.

**Make It Easier:** Place elbow on knee instead of bringing hand to floor.

## 10-MINUTE stress buster

No time for a full workout? That's just when you need it most. Our mini routine will help you recharge and unwind—without having to slip into workout clothes.

- 1. HEAD-TO-KNEE POSE** *Targets lower back, legs*  
 Sit on floor with right leg extended in front of you, foot flexed, left leg bent so sole of foot gently presses into right thigh; arms at sides, palms down. Inhale, lift chest, and lengthen torso. Exhale, twist torso slightly to right, and fold forward over leg. Hold and breathe for about 1½ minutes. Inhale and sit back up. Repeat on other side.
- 2. COBBLER'S POSE** *Targets abs, lower back, legs*  
 Sit with soles of feet together, hands on floor behind hips. Inhale and lift chest without arching back. Take 10 breaths, then relax, hugging knees to chest. Do 4 times.
- 3. CHILD'S POSE** *Targets back, shins, tops of feet*  
 Begin on all fours, then sit back on heels. Lower forehead to floor, bringing hands next to feet, palms facing ceiling. Rest for 10 breaths.
- 4. CORPSE POSE** *Targets entire body*  
 Lie faceup, legs extended, arms at sides, palms up. Breathe deeply as you focus on and relax one body part at a time from your legs to your head. (If thoughts come to mind, acknowledge them, then let them drift away.) Relax in this pose for at least 3 to 5 minutes.

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### 4 side plank

*Stretches and firms arms, chest, back, waist, abs, legs*

**FROM DOWNWARD FACING DOG**, inhale and lower hips into plank (forearms on floor, elbows under shoulders). Exhale as you rotate to right, turn left arm forward, stack legs, and extend right arm. Hold for 5 breaths, then rotate back to plank. Repeat to left.

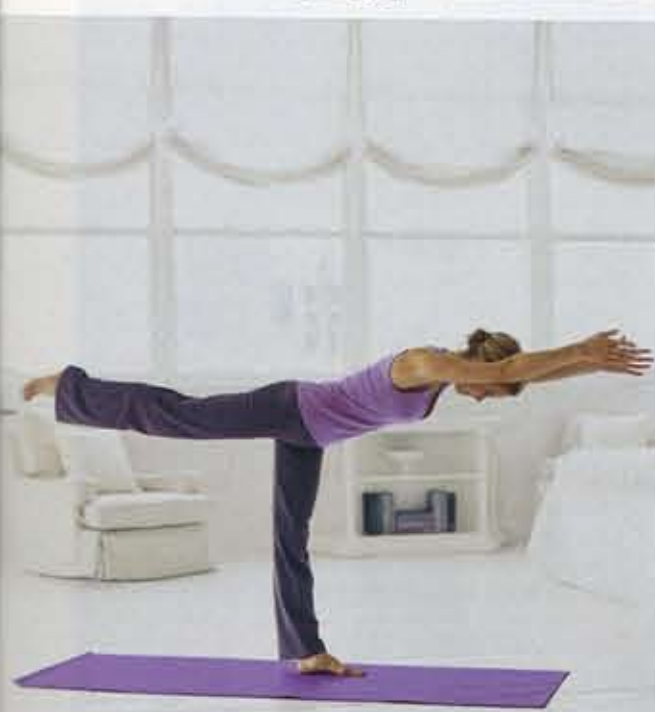
**TRANSITION:** From plank, exhale, lift hips, and straighten arms into Downward Facing Dog (p. 97). **Make It Easier:** Bend bottom leg and rest foot on floor behind you.



### 5 warrior 3

*Stretches and firms arms, chest, lower back, butt, legs*

**FROM DOWNWARD FACING DOG**, inhale, look forward, and walk feet up to hands. Exhale and roll up to stand with feet together. Bend forward and place fingertips on floor. Inhale and lift right leg behind you, abs tight. Inhale and lift chest and arms. Hold for 5 breaths, trying to lift leg and chest higher. Switch sides. **Make It Easier:** Keep fingertips on floor, and slightly bend standing leg.



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## BODY BY DESIGN

### 6 yogic bicycles

*Firms arms, chest, back, abs, butt, legs*

**LIE FACEUP** on floor with hands behind head, knees bent 90 degrees, and head and shoulders off floor. Exhale, twist right shoulder toward left knee, and extend right leg (be careful not to pull on neck). Inhale and return to start; repeat to left for 1 rep. Do 10 times. **Make It Easier:** Keep knees bent.



## 3 more ways to CONQUER CRAVINGS

"Stress can affect how you sleep and eat, and binge eating may be a result of your body's natural rhythms being disrupted," explains Cynthia Bulik, PhD, author of *Crave: Why You Binge Eat and How to Stop* and director of the Eating Disorders Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These three strategies will keep your body in sync:

■ **VISUALIZE YOUR LAST MEAL.** A recent British study found that women who were asked to write a detailed description of what they'd eaten for lunch that day snacked significantly less in the afternoon than those who didn't focus on their last meal. Researchers speculate that recalling a specific, vivid memory activates the hippocampus, an area of the brain believed to be responsible for both decision making and memory recall, giving would-be snackers better appetite control.

■ **TRY MEDITATION.** It not only increases activity in parts of the brain associated with positive emotions, research shows, but it may also boost production of the crave-controlling neurotransmitter serotonin. New to this relaxation technique? Sit in a quiet place with legs crossed, palms on knees, chest lifted, shoulders back and down. Close your eyes. Inhale and exhale 5 to 10 times, focusing on your breath. Shift your attention to your back. Inhale, visualizing your breath rising up your spine to

the crown of your head. Exhale, watching it fall back down. Repeat for 5 to 30 minutes.

■ **GET ENOUGH SHUT-EYE.** Researchers at the University of Chicago found that just two sleepless nights (4 hours or less) dropped the satiety-signaling hormone leptin by 18% and boosted levels of gherlin, an appetite trigger, by about 30%. Those two shifts caused participants' cravings for starchy foods like cookies and potato chips to jump 45%. Aim for at least 6 (ideally 8) hours of sleep regularly.

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