

Yoga Tips for AS and Hypermobility



YOGA FOR AS

ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS
AXIAL SPONDYLOARTHRITIS



By **Maria Harding** - Yoga teacher who has AS.

This is for people who have hypermobility syndrome. Check out: <https://www.hypermobility.org/what-are-hypermobility-syndromes>

This PDF covers the main areas of hypermobility and how to modify your Yoga for AS.

Elbows

Cat / cow - Whilst in table top position, turn the elbows in to face each other and have a bend in the arms so that your arms appear straight. It will feel odd to start with as you will want to lock out your arms and feel the full extension but it's important to get out of that habit.

Downward facing dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana) - Same as cat / cow, this will also help to avoid over extending our shoulders too.

Hips

Pigeon pose - when in the forward bending version, do not go to full range, even if you don't feel the stretch. Avoid collapsing down on your chest, instead prop yourself up on your elbows. Also keep your front foot away from the knee and more towards the body. I know it's tempting to want to move it so it's more level with the knee so we can feel more deeply into the stretch but for us, it's not a good idea as we could be inadvertently overstretching our already flexible ligaments which could lead to injury 10 years down the line.

Lunges - as in the Salute to the Sun sequence. Be careful not to drop your pelvis and hips down too low, it's easier to sink into a lunge like this but then we are not engaging our glutes and thigh muscles to support our hips.

Warrior poses (Virabhadrasana 1, 2 and 3) - use your glutes rather than hip flexors, so avoid dropping down too low in the hips and concentrate on grounding down through the feet and using those glutes and thigh muscles for strength and support. Actively engage the leg muscles. Feel strong and grounded like a warrior!

Seated forward bend - avoid collapsing down on your chest, instead rest on your elbows to support yourself in a more active strength building mode. Drawing the abs in towards the spine will get the feeling that we are rounding and stretching in the spine.

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Knees

Triangle pose (trikonasana) - Keep a micro bend in the knee. Press firmly into the feet including the ball of the foot to ground down whilst engaging the leg muscles. Avoid coming down too low in the side stretch and instead use your core muscles to hold you.

Mountain pose (tadasana) - Engage the core, engage the leg muscles and imagine they are 'hugging the bones'. Keep a micro bend in the knees.

Back

Any seated pose - there is a tendency for us to hyperextend our backs in this position without realising it, the fix is to think about tucking the ribs down and in and imagining the spine in a straight line.

Cow face pose - tilt the ribs down and in to avoid over extending in the middle back. Also, to avoid shoulder issues - the top elbow needs to be pointed directly up towards the sky and in line with the ear, avoid extending it back behind the head.

Seated forward bend - same as in the hips advice, do not go full range. Draw in the abs for back support and round through the back, rest elbows if need to be keep the body more upright and prevent your chest from collapsing down.

Wheel pose (Urdhva Dhanurasana) - I would not recommend this if you have AS (it's too compressing in the spine and could potentially aggravate our inflammation). In a general class, we need to ensure the yogi has sufficient strength in their core stability muscles in the back, glutes and shoulders before doing this pose. Half bridge is a good one to build up strength for this as well as plank pose for shoulder and wrist strength.

Plank / chataranga - Putting your knees down can help mitigate the excessive arch, so you can engage the lower belly and keep the spine supported. This will be helpful in preparing to lower to the floor toward or to chaturanga. Then as you get better, there's no reason you can't do the full pose and it's just a matter of engaging the lower belly at all times and consciously remembering to not let the belly drop down + don't forget the elbows! (turning inward towards each other and slightly bent).

