

YOGA HAS YOUR BACK

Building back strength, while working on mobility and flexibility, will help us to feel strong in the water says personal trainer Liz Lowe

Liz is a fitness professional living in Somerset. She runs outdoor bootcamp sessions, circuit training and yoga workshops in Freshford, near Bath. Liz can also be booked for personal training sessions. Visit her website, lizlowe.journoportfolio.com, to find out more.

When it comes to backs, we want to build strength while also working on mobility and flexibility. This is especially key for swimmers. Strong, healthy backs support us in the water and help maintain good posture in daily life. Here are a few yoga poses that can help.

CAT COW

Mobilises the back and is a great addition to a swim warm-up or cool-down.

Begin on all fours – wrists under shoulders, knees under hips. Inhale to prepare, then exhale to push the mat away, lower the head, tuck the tailbone and curl vertebrae one-by-one so your back is arched like a cat. Inhale to come into cow – tilting the tailbone, lowering the belly, lifting the gaze, feeling the chest open and shoulder blades draw together. Be mindful not to overextend the neck. Move between the poses several times.

If kneeling is problematic, try standing with palms pressing against thighs and move the spine in the same way.

Staying on all fours, try moving the spine, hips and shoulders in any way that feels good (the kids call this one ‘disco cat’!).

BRIDGE

This both strengthens and mobilises the spine.

Lie down, knees bent, feet between hip-width and the width of yoga mat apart. Adding additional width and turning feet out slightly can feel more comfortable.

With active feet and strong legs, lift the pelvis to bring the torso to a 45-degree slope. Keep lower body and core engaged to hold the position. Hands can be interlaced underneath or lightly pulling on the mat’s sides (this engages the thoracic spine more).

Repeat several times, holding for a few breaths.

LOCUST

A great strengthener, this pose can be developed progressively. Think about evenly distributing the backbend across the spine and take care to avoid compression in the neck or lower back. There’s no need to lift too far off the mat.

Lie face down, arms by sides, palms down, legs pressed together lightly. Engage the core and glutes to support the back. Exhale and initially just raise torso and arms.

If this feels ok, try raising the



Yoga position: Cat Cow



Yoga position: Bridge



Yoga position: Locust

legs as well. Hold for a couple of breaths, extending up to five breaths as you progress. Repeat 2-3 times.

As you get stronger, try positioning legs hip-width apart, maintaining the activation in the back body as you raise them.

To finish, lie down with knees

bent, and ‘windscreen wiper’ legs from side to side.

NB: if you have any back issues or pain, please consult a health professional before trying new exercises.