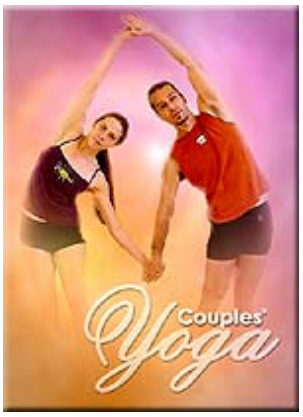
Partner Yoga

By Baxter Bell, MD, RYT500

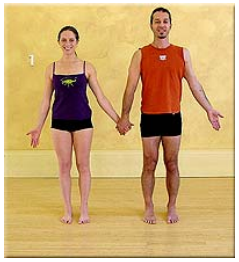


Instead of that typical box of chocolates or bouquet of flowers, why not give your partner something that will last both of you a lot longer and truly make your relationship tastier: a series of partner yoga classes! Partner yoga – in which two people work together in various yoga postures- is not a new concept, but has been a growing trend in the past several years with the yoga explosion in the US. Even though the majority of yoga students in this country are women, partner yoga provides the perfect entry point for men to discover the amazing benefits of hatha (physical posture) yoga, not only for their health, but for the vitality of their relationship. And it's really fun!

Within the partner yoga practice, you will at times act as an assistant to your partner, support your partner's yoga postures and vice versa, and at times create new yoga postures with equal input from both of you. Both partners have the opportunity to support and be supported in the practice. Skills of observation and of verbal and non-verbal communication are enhanced, and the qualities of trust and vulnerability, so vital to deepening intimacy, are nurtured in this unique practice.

Look around your community and you'll probably find a teacher (or maybe two working together), offering this unique way to explore yoga- in which two partners engage in what Oakland teacher Richard Rosen, author of "The Yoga of Breath", calls a "yoga dialogue".

Pictured below are a few poses you can try at home with your sweetheart. Agree before you start to communicate candidly, not only with words, but also through touch and breath, appreciating the special qualities your partner brings to your relationship.



Pose 1-Chandrasana (Moon) Pose with Partners.
Picture 1- Stand side by side, inside feet about 3 feet apart. Hold inside hands. Take the outside arm up and overhead with an exhalation. Keep the spine extending upwards, avoiding any collapse of the inside waist.

Picture 2- Side-bend towards your partner, allowing your hips to move slightly away from your partner. Hold outside hands above your heads. Breath into the outside ribs and belly. Stay in the pose for 4-6 breath cycles, repeating the pose on second side.

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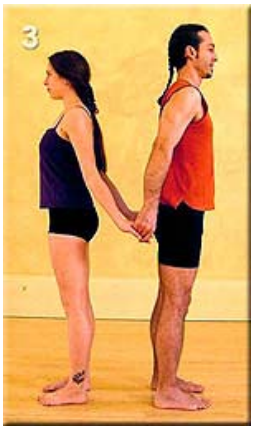
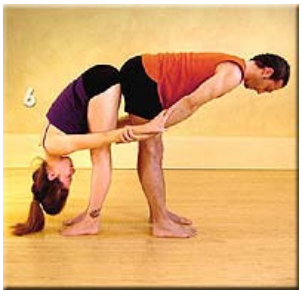


Partner's Padahastasana.
Picture 3- Stand back to back, heels about 12-16 inches apart. Hold hands. Inhale, standing tall, then exhale coming slowly into a forward bend.

Picture 4- Stop half way down, lengthening the front of the chest as you press your sitting bones into your partners.

Picture 5-Gently pull on your partner's arms to bring buttocks in contact. Maintain firm contact. Gradually move hands to hold your partner's forearms as you go deeper into the forward bend.



Picture 6- (Variation)- Partner 1 inhales and lifts his or her torso parallel to the floor as Partner 2 exhales and goes deeper into the forward bend. Then Partner 2 inhales and lifts his or her chest parallel to the floor and Partner 1 folds down into the forward bend. Take your time to feel and listen to your partner in order to maintain your balance. Work for 1-2 minutes before carefully coming up together.

Partner's Child's and Fish Pose.
Picture 7- Partner 1 comes into Child's pose with blanket under his or her legs. Partner 2 sit on Partner 1's buttocks, facing away from partner.

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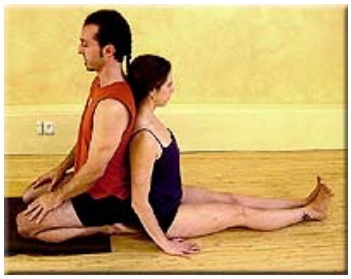
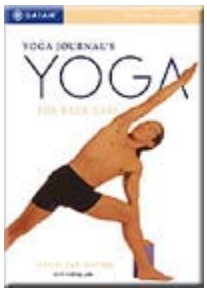
Picture 8- Partner 2 slowly rolls back over Partner 1, moving with awareness, especially if Partner 2 is heavier.

Picture 9- Once Partner 2 is all the way back, hang out for 6-10 breaths, then Partner 2 takes his or her arms overhead and Partner 1 reaches up and holds Partner 2's wrists and slowly lengthens his or her arms out. Gentle verbal feedback is good here!



Picture 10- To come out, Partner 2 remains passive while Partner 1 uses his or her hands under shoulders to push up to sitting as Partner 2 slides off Partner 1. Both partners should then sit back to back for a few breaths before changing to second side.

Baxter teaches public classes and well as specialty Back Care yoga classes in Northern California, leads yoga retreats in Northern California. He has taught yoga throughout the US and in Cuba and is a contributing writer for *Yoga Journal Magazine* and the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*. He appears on the recently released Yoga Journal DVD "*Yoga for Back Care*" with Rodney Yee.



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