

A SEQUENCE TO PREPARE FOR

Crow Pose

BY MARY DANA ABBOTT

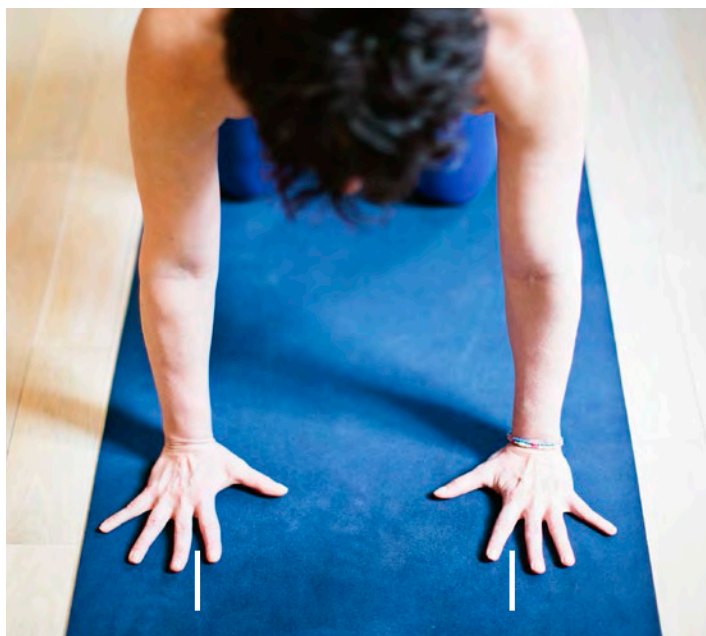
Ready the body for one of the most common arm balances through this invigorating core- and arm-strengthening sequence.

Crow Pose allows us to explore the physicality of being on the edge or on the brink. It is one of the scarier arm balances because you risk falling forward. This sequence works the arms and side body to give a sense of being grounded as the body travels and floats onto the hands.

There are two types of vinyasas in this sequence that should be employed before, after, and between sides. They are present to build strength, stamina, and prepare the body for Crow Pose. Feel free to interchange or omit any of them based on what your body tells you. Remember to let your breath guide you throughout this sequence, connecting your movements with deep inhalations and exhalations. Enjoy!

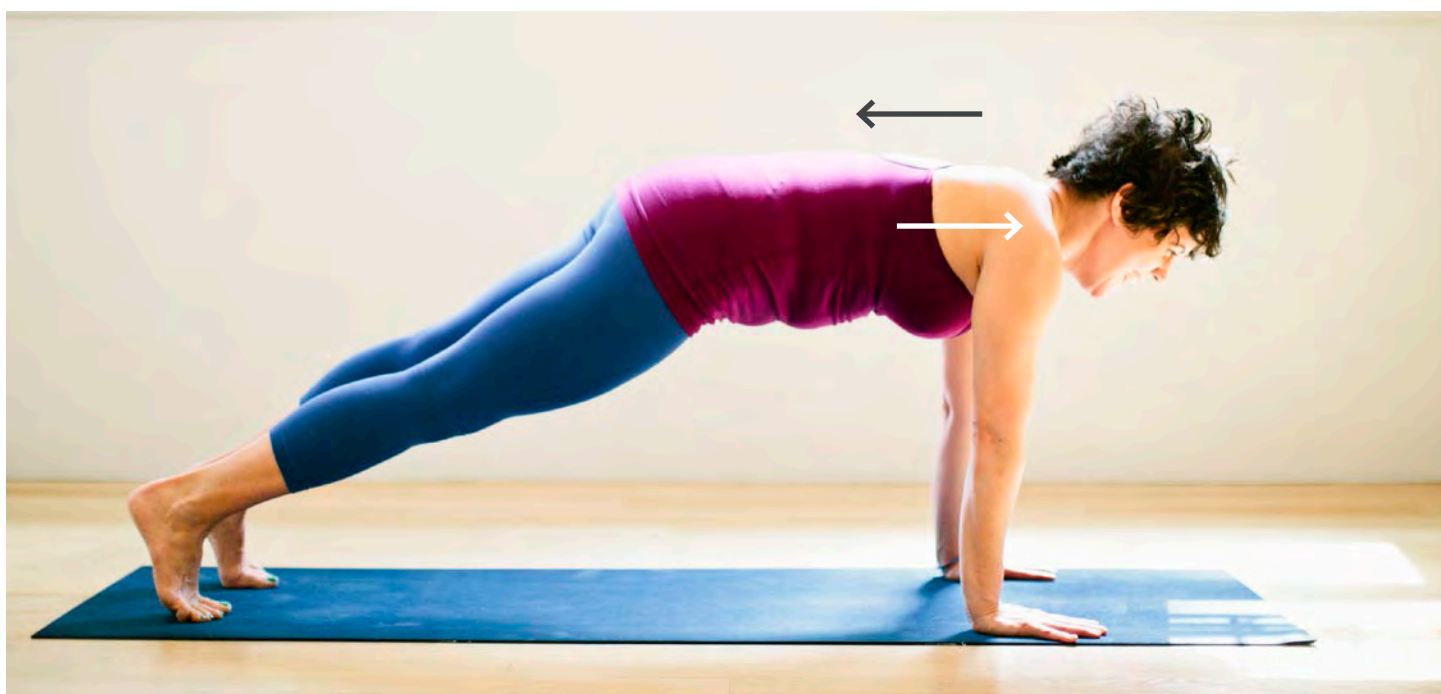


SETTING UP THE PROPER FOUNDATION



The placement of the fingers and palms in Plank, Chaturanga, and Downward Dog help set the stage for Crow Pose later on.

To set up a proper foundation, come onto hands and knees, stacking shoulders over wrists and hips over knees. Imagine there is a line bisecting the index and middle fingers, parallel to the outer edges of the mat. Focus on pulling chest forward through the arms, and make sure triceps face thighs and biceps face the front of mat.



FINDING A STABLE BASE

To balance in Crow Pose it's essential to set up a stable base with your arms. This requires strength in the biceps and triceps, but it is also as much about shoulder stabilization and coordination. I find a good trick to creating this stability is tuning in to the "armpit-shoulder connection." When your arm is at your side extended long and down, locate the uppermost point of the armpit crease—in Plank, Chaturanga, and Crow Pose this point should move forward as the triceps move back to create a stable base. In Crow you will draw the shoulders down and back away from your ears. Engage the muscles in the side body and draw the biceps forward and outward, away from the midline. Make sure the index fingers and thumbs are firmly rooted. This action is referenced in many of the poses in this sequence, will ensure that you build a strong side body that will support your arm-balance practice.

VINYASA 1



DOWNWARD DOG

Press hands into the ground as if you could push the floor forward.



PLANK POSE

Inhale and shift forward into Plank with a focus the armpit and shoulder connection, and finger placement.



LOWER DOWN

Exhale and lower all the way to the ground, keeping the upper arms parallel with the ground and the palms flat.



COBRA

Lift up into Cobra with pinky toes heavy and chest reaching through the arms. Keep the shoulders away from ears.



THREE-LEGGED DOG

Keep hips square, lift from the inner thigh and elevate opposite heel while pointing gaze between thumbs.

PENDULUM SWING

Bring knee to back of the arm. Let shin swing outward while keeping the knee still. Lift navel to draw shin in. Repeat three times, moving the leg out on the inhale and in on the exhale. Keep the knee and rest of the body still throughout.





Pendulum Swing Modification: If necessary, drop back knee.



WIDE LOW LUNGE

From Pendulum Swing, step foot outside hand for Wide Low Lunge. Drop back knee.



RUNNER'S STRETCH

Sit halfway back (keep back hip stacked on top of back knee), flex front foot, and rotate hip externally.

Bend elbows to lower forearms to the ground as you exhale. Draw chest forward as you inhale.

Top view: forearms on the ground.

Repeat vinyasa 1 and then do sequence on opposite side.



DOWNWARD DOG



PLANK POSE



CHATURANGA

OR



SUPPORTED PLANK



SUPPORTED CHATURANGA



UPWARD DOG



WARRIOR II



WARRIOR II WITH PRAYER HANDS

Press sternum into thumbs and lift chest up. Armpits are lifting side body towards ceiling; shoulders are drawing down towards ground.



Aim armpit toward knee and hook onto knee, lengthening the side body. Find armpit-shoulder connection.



EXTENDED SIDE ANGLE

Open arms and let outer upper arm slide slightly onto inner thigh above knee. Lengthen the side body as you inhale. Press arm firmly into thigh as you exhale.



SIDE PLANK

This is the perfect counter pose to Extended Side Angle, as it opens the previously compressed part of the body, and also builds arm strength necessary for Crow. Focus on armpit-shoulder connection and finger placement. Draw the navel in for stability on each exhale.

Repeat vinyasa 2 and then do sequence on opposite side.



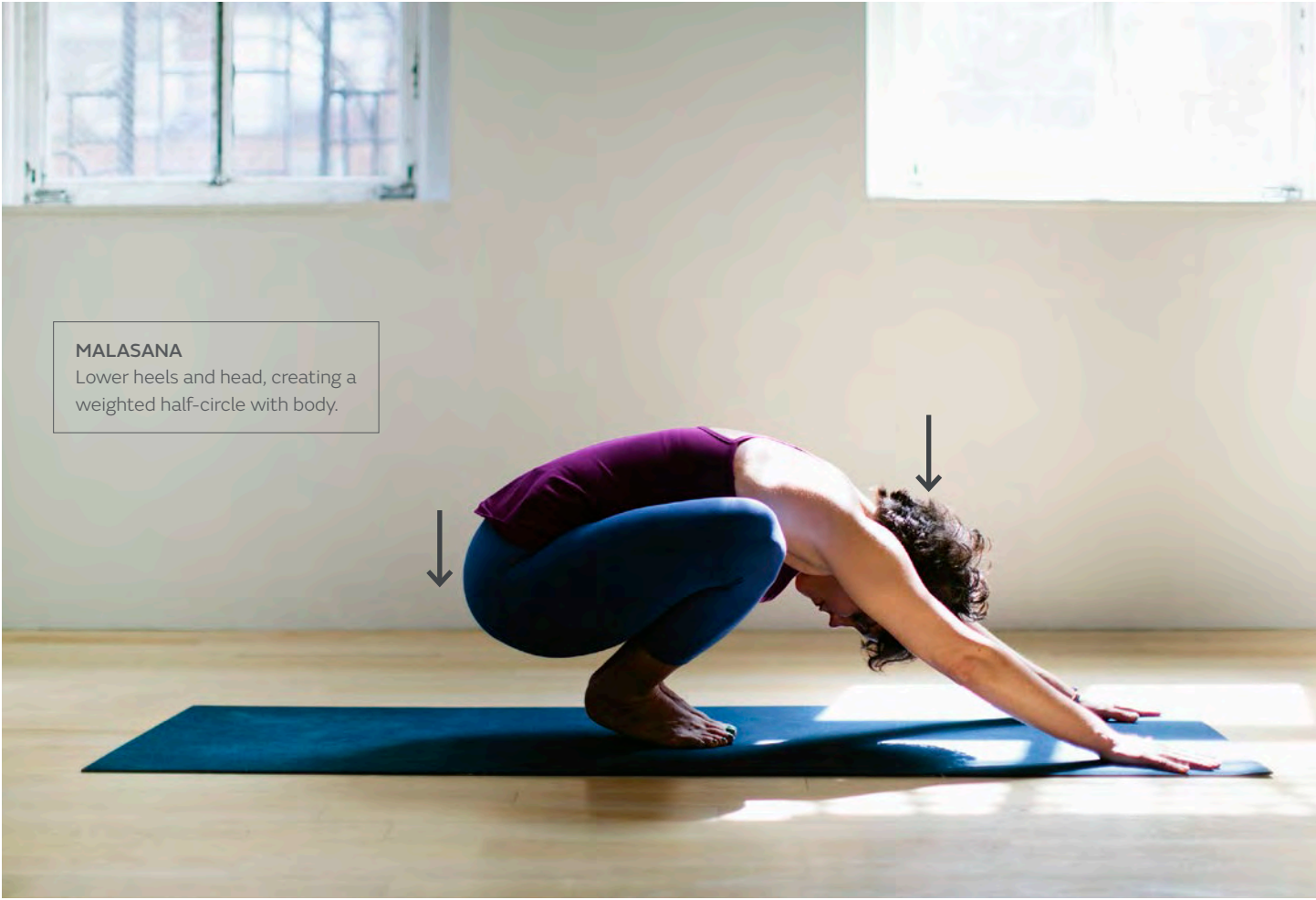
CROW PREP FROM STANDING

Tent fingers or use blocks under hands to pull chest forward toward arms. Pull chest forward toward arms and bring shoulder blades back away from the ears.

Try to keep upper body still as you lift heels.



Lower hips, widen knees, keep inner edges of feet touching.



MALASANA
Lower heels and head, creating a weighted half-circle with body.





BOAT POSE

Lower hips for Boat Pose and lift legs, keeping knees bent or straight. Draw your navel in on your exhales and lengthen the side-body on your inhales.



Take Vinyasa #2, and then repeat the sequence beginning with Warrior II to other side adding Vinyasa #2 after side-plank.



CROW FROM SQUAT

Inhale to lift heels and bring arms back to place knees directly in armpits. Exhale and plant hands to ground, focusing on finger and palm placement. As you press triceps into knees, focus on armpit-shoulder connection.

Lift hips and bend elbows.



CROW POSE

Inhale as you lift hips and bend elbows. Exhale and shift weight forward while keeping your arms actively pressing back into knees. Inhale and climb high on tiptoes. Exhale to lift navel toward back of spine, rounding middle back.

Inhale to aim tailbone toward heels. Exhale to lift heels into sitz bones.

If you are having trouble lifting, try Crow with a block!



STANDING FORWARD BEND ON BLOCK

Put block between feet and step balls of the feet on block.



CROW PREP ON BLOCK

Widen and bend knees, bringing them into armpits.



Bend elbows and shift weight forward, keeping tippy toes on block.



Lift one foot to test balance.



Try lifting both feet and send the chest forward.

Photos by Hailey Wist