

ASANA ALIGNMENT GUIDEBOOK

UNDERSTANDING
YOGA POSTURES

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INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Cathy Madeo, and I want to thank you so much for downloading this guidebook and spending some time with me! In this guidebook, I go over 3 common yoga poses and focus on one area in each that they are commonly misaligned. You'll learn what to look for in your own body while practicing these poses and ways to align your posture to feel the benefits of the pose in a safe and healthy way!

My approach toward alignment has evolved over my 26 years of practice. I used to have a black and white approach, this is right, that is wrong. I used to try to move my body into what I was told an Ideal pose should look like even when it didn't feel right. But over my 16 years teaching and having the honor of seeing thousands of yoga students, I learned firsthand how unique we all are, and found a much more sustainable approach for myself and for students to fit the pose to our body rather than the other way around.

Now I'm much more curious and tend to ask why? Why this alignment and not that? What is the purpose of aligning a pose in one way or another? What anatomically is happening in the body? Are there benefits to practicing the same pose in multiple ways?

So what is alignment, then if it's not so easily defined? I think of alignment now as more of a guidepost. Something that gives us clues as to the direction to go. When I teach yoga postures, I think anatomically in regards to alignment: What is the position of the bones and which muscles are contracting or lengthening? As long as the integrity is there, we are conscious of our body in space, even if visually the posture doesn't reach an aesthetic ideal, I feel confident that my students are healthy.

Please enjoy this guidebook as an introduction or a deepening of how using alignment can set you up for a sustainable yoga practice.

Let's get started!"

XOXO
Cathy



DOWNWARD FACING DOG

adho mukha svanasana

a-dhO mu-kha shva-nA-sa-na

meaning *adho downward mukha face svana dog*



ALIGNMENT FOCUS: **Shoulders**

Your shoulder blades move in 6 different directions, upward rotation when you raise your arms above your head, they go out to the side and up, Downward rotation when you bring your raised arms down they come back down, protraction when your shoulder blades move away from your spine, retraction when they go toward the spine, elevation they move up like when you shrug your shoulders up to your ears or depression when you pull them down.

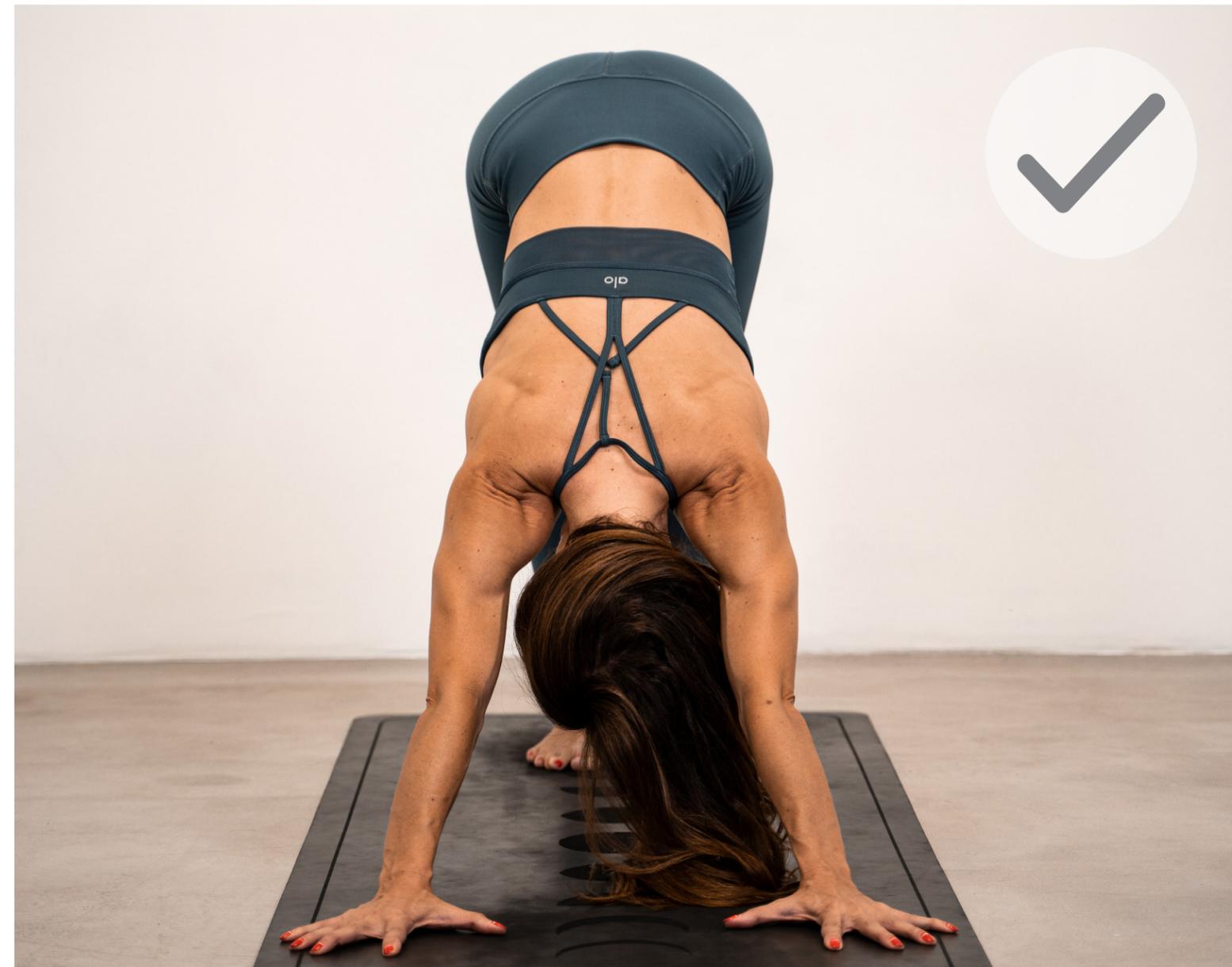
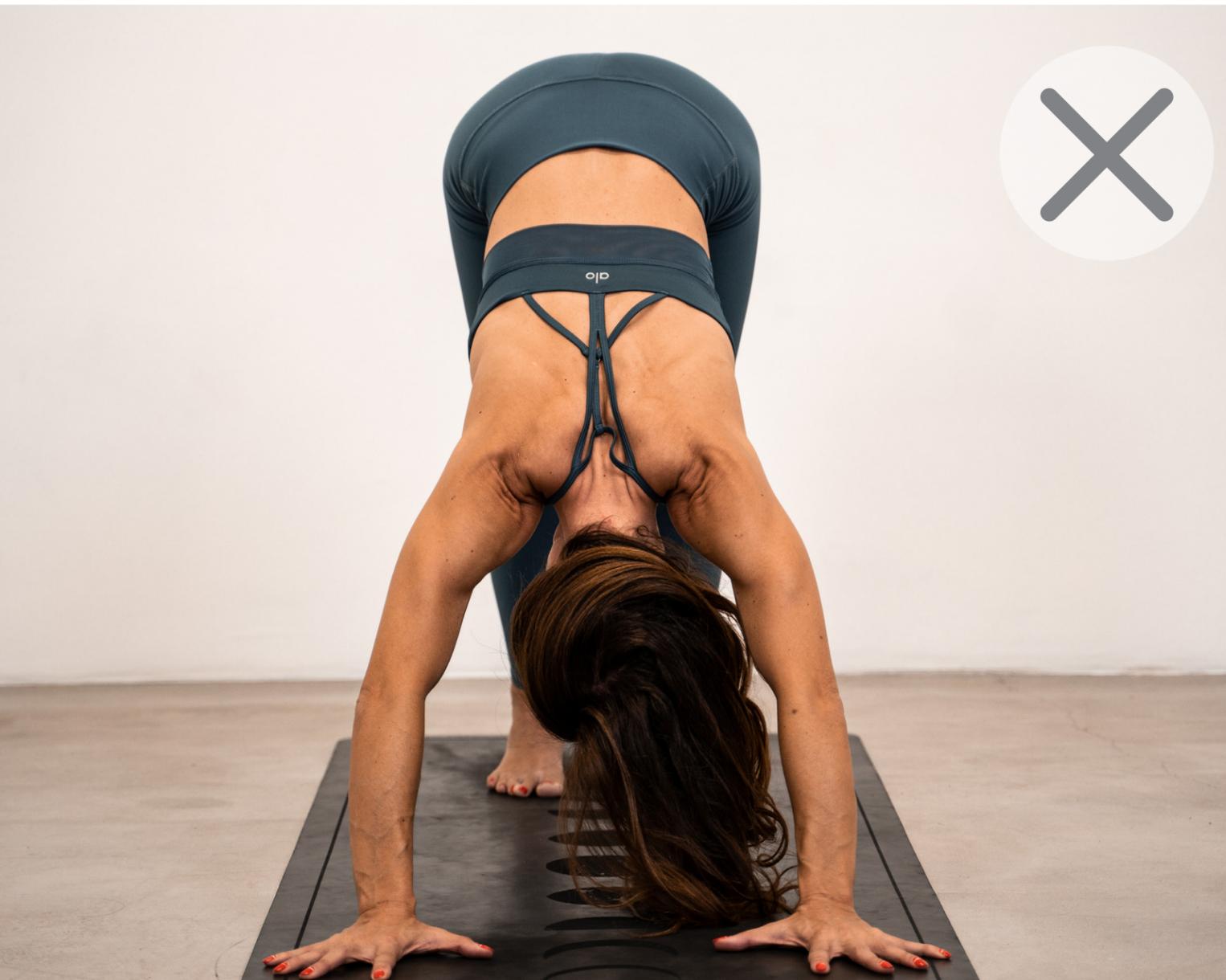
In downward facing dog your shoulder blades go in an upward rotation. Then you push the floor from you working against gravity as you bear weight on your hands and stabilize the shoulder blades.

I think the confusion of bringing the shoulder blades down into depression, rather than elevation comes from conflating the position of the humerus bone, which in downward facing dog should be in an external rotation. So your upper arm bone moves away from your ears.

DOWNWARD FACING DOG

- Avoid squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Avoid roll the upper arm bones inward
It will also cause your elbows to bend
- Avoid pull your shoulders down the back

- Do allow your shoulders to move in their natural upward rotation
- Do externally rotate your humerus bone. That means move your upper arm bones away from your ears
- Do push the floor away from you with your hands to gently elevate and stabilize the shoulder blades
- Sit bones reach up to the ceiling and you bring your low spine in and up



STANDING FORWARD FOLD

uttanasana *oot-tanA-sa-na*
meaning *ut intense tan stretch*



ALIGNMENT FOCUS: **The Pelvis**

When you fold and your torso is far away from your legs you have taken a posterior, or backward tilt of your pelvis which actually shortens your hamstrings, in fact from the low back to the hamstrings everything is shortening- that means your body is doing the exact opposite of what you want it to do in this pose!

In order to forward fold in a healthy position for the spine and unlock your hamstrings so they can begin to stretch. Try this! Place your feet hips distance apart, bend your knees, and move your pelvis forward into an anterior position. This will begin to unlock the muscles around the hips as well as your hamstrings. Bending your knees will also develop compression, that's when your torso and thighs meet. By engaging the muscles that bring your torso to your legs and flex your spine you will stretch the opposite muscles. Core engagement in a flexibility stretch? Yes!

Finally, it's not just your hamstrings stretching in forward fold but the entire back line of your body. So allow your upper back to flex to stretch the muscles of the upper back and deepen your fold.

STANDING FORWARD FOLD

- Avoid folding from your waist.
- Don't straighten your legs if your torso is far away from your thighs
- Don't push your belly out

- Separate your feet hips distance apart
- Bend your knees
- Tilt your pelvis in an anterior position

- The fold comes at the hips
- Tilt your pelvis forward into an anterior position
- Think of pulling your belly in and up toward your spine
- Engage your front body muscles to stretch your back body



BRIDGE

setu bandha sarvangasana

se-tu ban-dhA sar-vAn-gA-sa-na

meaning *setu bridge bandha lock setu
bridge bandha lock*



ALIGNMENT FOCUS: Opening the Thoracic Spine

A common tendency in this pose is to lift the hips up and not bring the shoulder blades into the spine. Think of bridge pose as a thoracic spine opener and a prep for shoulder stand. You want to externally rotate the upper arm bones and retract the shoulder blades toward the spine to extend your spine.

If you can't clasp the hands underneath you try grabbing the side edge of your mat and pulling down. This will engage your latissimus dorsi muscles, the muscles on the back whose job it is to bring the shoulder blades down into depression, this will help lift your chest.

BRIDGE

- Avoid rolling your upper arm bones in
- Don't let your shoulder blades move away from your spine
- Don't not engage your glute muscles

- Grab the outer edges of the mat and pull down
- Roll your upper arm bones away from your body
- Shoulder blades retract in toward the spine
- Lift your chest up

- Externally rotate your upper arms as you roll them away from you and clasp your hands
- Push your arms down into the mat and lift your chest
- Your shoulder blades move in toward the spine
- Engage your glute muscles to lift your pelvis
- Push down through your feet to stretch your quads





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