

Moving from Goddess Pose (left) into Warrior I physically increases your heart rate to help burn calories, emotionally gets rid of pent-up emotions, mentally balances your brain, and spiritually honors your true nature as a beautiful, bountiful, and powerful goddess.

speech, or expression," actually comes from the word "mother." So, as much as those maternal instincts help us nurture and heal others in the most loving way possible, let's turn this onto ourselves—and stop expecting to be so damn "perfect." Instead of looking at others to define for us what "perfect" is, we can look inside at our own inner beauty and truly love what we see.

"Our strive for perfection is leaving us starved for affection," says Sierra Bender, certified Kripalu yoga teacher and creator of Boot Camp for Goddesses®. Through her Sierra 4 Body Fitness & Yoga® program, she brings you to a new level of fitness that goes beyond the surface into the four layers of your being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. "We need to be spiritually connected, mentally focused, and emotionally open and receptive," says Bender. "At the same time, we need to physically possess stamina, perseverance, and discipline."

Her approach for integrating all four layers starts with the spiritual. "Most of us are trained to work with the physical body first and then work up to the spiritual," she says (see "Reclaim, Restore, Rejoice" on page 30 for her daily 10-minute practice ritual). "But this practice works the other way around."

In order to shape up all four layers (also known as *koshas*), these 11 steps help you make the most optimal choices:

11 active ways to tone your body, mind, and soul...and maintain your optimal weight

by Lorraine Shea

Within the 50,000 thoughts a day that fly through your mind, how many of them chastise you for not being the "perfect" weight? Perhaps if you try that new diet and shed a few pounds, you think, all would be perfect. The truth is that not only do each of these thoughts matter, they create more matter...and may be manifesting exactly what you don't want or need. And that may be coming to you in the form of uninvited pounds.

The word "matter," meaning "material of thought,

1. Be present in your body. Start by honoring your own true nature and recognizing your inherent beauty. "The more present you are in your body, the more you make choices that are healthy for you," says Bender, "and you don't listen to the outside world."

2. Trust your instincts and intuition. In other words, turn off that outside static and notice what you really feel, from your gut. "Here's where the negative belief systems that we have to be thin in order to be fit and healthy and beautiful come in," Bender says. "This creates a separation from our higher self, and it shuts down our intuition." By looking inward to your own strength, you can brush off that critical blather and simply listen to your own voice. "Your body has its own intelligence," says Bender. "And when you recognize that you are perfect as you are, then you're not looking for these outside resources to fulfill you."

3. Create moments of silence and stillness. The best way to listen and hear what your intuition is saying is to put concentrated energy into spending a little time each day in silence and stillness. "When you're looking on the outside instead of the inside for answers, your internal clock turns off and you don't know how to take care of yourself anymore or meet your own needs because you're on overload," Bender says. "You need to slow down to catch up."

4. Learn to breathe properly. Shallow breathing uses only one-quarter of your lung capacity. By bringing more oxygen into your body, your metabolism speeds up, you're releasing more serotonin to your brain, and you're burning calories. "When we're not breathing correctly, it puts our adrenal glands on overload and then we crave more sugar and carbohydrates," says Bender.

5. Get out into nature. Notice how content your breathing becomes as you walk through the quiet woods on a snowy day. "As soon as you go out into nature, you breathe," says Bender. "It's amazing." Going back to ancient times, the initiations and rituals related to nature brought people back to their source.

6. Maintain clear boundaries. Sometimes, the inability to say "no" intensifies the desire to eat as a way to numb the nervous system. "When you take on too much of other people's stuff, adrenals go on overload, sero-

tonin is no longer released, and sugar and carbs start looking really good," says Bender. By staying in your center, you learn how to use energy instead of letting energy use you.

7. Keep your adrenal glands healthy. Located just above the kidneys, adrenal glands regulate your flow of energy. Back pain often comes from unhealthy adrenals. Back-bending asanas—such as Reverse Boat, Cobra, Camel, Bow, and Sphinx—all push your core forward and keep your prana flowing. "The more you can squeeze your adrenal glands, the more you're going to release serotonin into the brain, and the more it's going to turn on the internal clock of your intuition and instincts and put you in tune with your body," says Bender. "The more relaxed your adrenal glands are, the higher you'll come up in your postures, and the stronger they'll be."

8. Recognize the frequency of the food you eat. Notice how you feel after you eat something. Does it give you energy? Or does it take it away? Do you have cravings? As Bender says, "Any food that creates mucus in your system desensitizes you and slows down your prana and your metabolism because it brings less oxygen into your body."

9. Don't count your calories. The best food to eat is the food that's good for you. Period. No need to create a caloric bookkeeping system. "Counting your calories keeps you so much in your head that you're not paying attention to what's truly going on in your body," says Bender. "The other thing is a lot of diets are filled with chemicals, and the first thing they take away is protein, which builds muscle."

10. Always eat breakfast. Start your day by setting an intention, tuning into your breath, moving your body (walking, running, asana, anything to get your blood pumping and your inner fire burning), and then enjoying a healthy meal, preferably one that includes protein.

11. Love yourself. We finish at exactly the place we started. When you're present in your body, and attending to your own needs before anyone else's (no, that's not being selfish), you will make the healthiest choices. Being kind and nourishing to your perfect self makes all the difference. And your thoughts will create matter that really matters.

Hara Ha Breath Technique



Bring in the abundance of the universe



Bring in nourishment from Mother Earth



Balance your power

Reclaim, Restore, Rejoice... in 10 Minutes a Day

Sierra Bender recommends this 10-minute morning ritual to help you reconnect with your inner goddess:

1. Spiritual body

Ignite your fire: Light a candle, and say a prayer to honor your true nature.

2. Mental body

Believe in your wisdom: Light some dried sage to release negativity. Set your intention and course for the day. "Don't allow the environment to create your destiny," says Bender. "You have to create your destiny. And then let it go and allow spirit to support you and hold you in that—what you desire, require, and deserve."

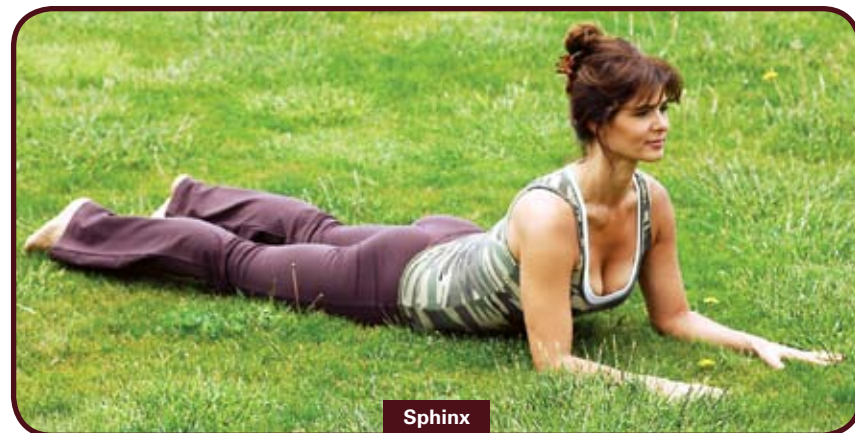
3. Emotional body

Embody your power: Claim your space in the Goddess Posture. Create a filter that sets the boundaries between you and any outside unhealthy influences of your body with the "Hara Ha" breathing technique.

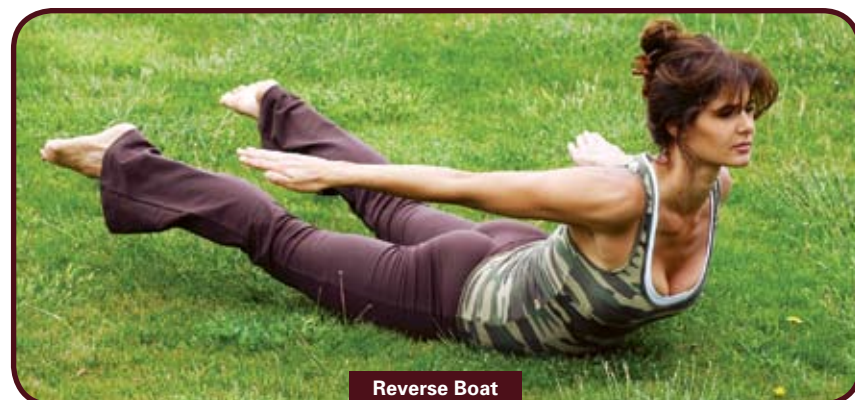
- Stand in Goddess Posture, arms out to your side, elbows bent. Raise your hands above you, to pull the abundance of the universe into your core (also known as the *hara*), and say *HA* aloud 10 times.

- Reach your hands down toward the ground, to pull in nourishment from Mother Earth into your core, and say *HA* aloud 10 times.

- With your hands straight out from your shoulders, to pull toward you and unite both forces within you for a balance of power, say *HA* aloud 10 times. Stand in Goddess posture once again, to claim more space with your body, energy, and mind. Repeat the Goddess Mantra: "I am feminine. I am sensual. I am sexual. I am powerful. Don't ever mistake my kindness for weakness, and don't ever take me for granted."



Sphinx



Reverse Boat

4. Physical body

Embrace who you are: These weight-bearing asanas squeeze and compress internal organs (especially the adrenals), and release serotonin to the brain. They also help regulate sugar, keep your digestive system running smoothly, detoxify your liver, clear your lungs, and bring in fresh oxygen (which burns fat in its simplest form). You also get a great muscle workout for your buttocks, quads, hamstrings, and hips.

- **Goddess Pose:** Standing with your hands in Prayer, step out to your right (bend both knees and bring arms out to sides with bent elbows), then back to center. Repeat on your left side.

- **Warrior I:** Step forward with your right foot into Warrior I, then back to center. Repeat on left side. Do 5 sets of the entire sequence, combining both poses.

Then, do the following five poses in this order, to work your adrenals, speed up your metabolism, release pent-up emotions, and move your energy forward.

- **Sphinx**
- **Reverse Boat**
- **Bow**
- **Lying Down Twist**
- **Camel**

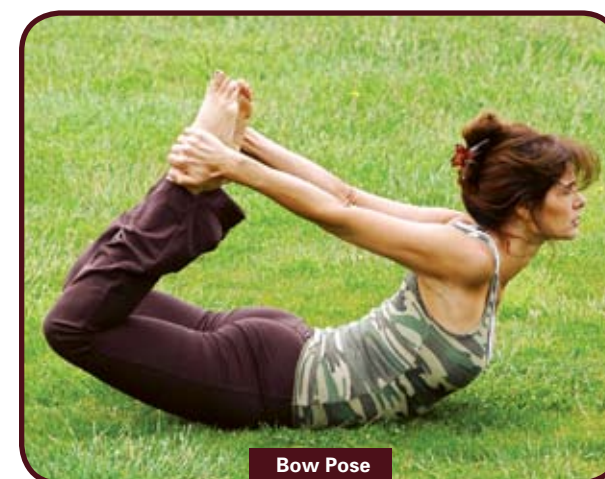
5. Closing

With your hands in prayer, say the following:

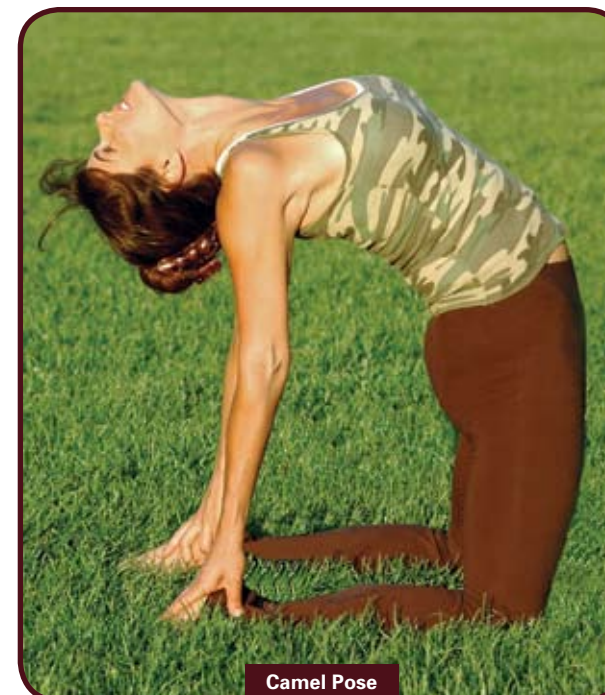
- "May I know my truth" (with hands to crown of head)
- "May I see my truth" (with hands to the third eye)
- "May I speak my truth" (with hands to the mouth)
- "May I feel my truth" (with hands to the heart)

Kneel to Mother Earth, and honor her with the word *Aho* and this prayer: "Please give me the strength, perseverance, and courage to follow you and my path." Ask "How can I be of best service to Spirit today?"

For more information about **Sierra Bender**, visit bootcampforgoddesses.com. Her new book, *Boot Camp for Goddesses: Redefining Fitness, Beauty, and Power for the 21st-Century Woman*, is due out November 2009 (Llewellyn Publishers).



Bow Pose



Camel Pose



Lying Down Twist