„The prerequisite for all spritual practice is kindness. Without such approach your practice is not real, then you have to practice more kryas”

TARTALOM

COURSE DECSRIPTION

The course is designed to address all aspects of yoga, particularly emphasizing the classical yoga described in the Bhagavad Gita and the systematic eight principles of Ashtanga yoga addressed in the Yoga Sutra channeled by Patanjali 2000 years ago. With the primary emphasis on classical yoga, the course content includes study of Ayurveda, Philosophy, Pranayam, Asanas, Bandhas and also modern approaches as Women yoga, Spine yoga, Flow basics, Yoga therapy, Yin yoga basics, Fascia and more.

Yoga is a great form of healing from India at the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. We are moving towards the direction of not only preparing qualified and certified yoga teachers but also preparing healing practitioners beyond yoga.

Our program is an integrated system of self-transformation that empowers you to realize your full potential. The journey begins as you revitalize the body through postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques. It deepens as you learn to focus awareness, enabling you to enter meditative states that awaken compassion and clears the mind. Through the practice you discover how to nurture the roots of health, catalyze personal growth, live with greater skillfulness and joy, and transform your sense of what it means to be alive.

Yoga lives both on and off the yoga mat. As we practice and teach yoga, our lives inevitably begin to change. As we practice, we begin to notice obvious changes in our physical body, a growing tolerance for the sensations that are created in each asana, and an increase in flexibility, strength, and health. In addition, noticeable shifts occur emotionally and spiritually. The practice of being present begins to suffuse each moment as we explore asana, pranayama, and meditation. Samskaras, or energy blocks, are activated and opened, literally loosened, by on-the-mat practice. Prana, the life force, opens resistance in our body and mind as we become ready. Consequently, we are supplied just the right situations to draw these resistances to the surface for greater inquiry. Whether we like the feelings and sensations that arise in yoga or not, we are encouraged to examine, feel, and integrate them over time. As we continue to practice, we can become more skillful in listening to the inner wisdom that guides us in the flow of our lives.

This is a theoretical and experiential course. Theories give understanding conceptually, and experience provides us the meaning to the theories. Swami Sivananda once said, “An ounce of practice is equal to a ton of theory.” Both, however, are necessary for us to have a thorough understanding of yoga tradition.

As Yoga deals with universal truth, its teachings are as valid today as they were thousands of years ago. The practice of Patanjali’s eight principles would lead to deeper self knowledge, love and respect towards other people and creatures, a cleaner environment, healthy diet and union with the Divine.

Tradition keeps teachings alive. You become a part of tradition when you become a teacher and practitioner. You will teach based on your direct experience and direct knowing (wisdom), and the most importantly you directly connect to your teachers, the teachers before your teachers and beyond. It traces all the way back to the ancient yoga masters, the rishes, and the lineage of Pattabhi Jois, BNS Iyenger, BKS Iyenger, Desikachar, Krishnamacharya, Vishnu Devananda, Sivananda, Shankaracharya, and Patanjali. You will serve as a conduit to pass down the teaching and knowledge to others. This is the true teaching, teaching without ego. We no longer are the doers but conscious indwellers.

The service of teaching yoga

Teaching yoga is one of the highest forms of service there is. Yoga can heal the body, bring equanimity to the mind, and re-connect people with their true nature and with each other. Blending compassion with non-attachment and self-honoring, a teacher’s abilities will grow and refine over the years. However, teaching too many classes, neglecting personal practice, or allowing the ego to become overly attached to praise or criticism can lead to a decreased connection with the Self and, in the end, pose great difficulty for a teacher. Teaching yoga can be one of the best ways to remain a dedicated student.

Teaching yoga is challenging. Creating a sacred space, inspiring students to give their best, and balancing determination with playfulness all require practice. Noticing the initial mood of the class and meeting the students where they are takes a high degree of observation. As a teacher, you must create a lifestyle that supports your yoga practice, and your teaching practice.

Our approach:

1 Awakes nonjudgmental self-awareness.

2 Offers yoga as a safe and disciplined practice for integration.

3 Combines Western science with Eastern philosophy to promote vitality.

INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a complete lifestyle.

Yoga is the science of living and, as such, is intended to be incorporated in daily life. Yoga works on all aspects of the person; the physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. The science of yoga begins to work on the outermost aspect of the personality, the physical body, which for most people is a practical and familiar starting point. When imbalance is experienced at this level, the organs, muscles and nerves no longer function in harmony; rather they act in opposition to each other. For instance, the endocrine system might become irregular and the efficiency of the nervous system decrease to such an extent that a disease will manifest. Yoga aims to bring the different bodily functions into perfect coordination so that they work for the good of the whole body.

From the physical body, yoga moves onto the mental and emotional levels. Many people suffer from phobias and neuroses as a result of the stresses and interactions of everyday living. Yoga cannot provide a cure for everyday life, but it does present a proven method for coping with it.

The practice of Yoga covers all aspects of a person's life - the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual as well as his environment and relationship with other creatures. In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, he described the eight aspects of a Yogic lifestyle and called it the Eight-Limbs of Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga. These eight limbs are a practical guide for personal development to achieve harmony of the mind, body and spirit, which ultimately leads to Samadhi or Enlightenment.

Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh explained yoga as an ". . . integration and harmony between thought, feeling and deed, or integration between head, heart and hand". Through the practices of yoga, awareness develops of the interconnectedness between the emotional, mental and physical levels, and how a disturbance in any one of these affects the others. Gradually this awareness leads to an understanding of the more subtle areas of existence.

The five points of yoga

Yoga is a life of self discipline based on the tenets of "simple living and high thinking." The body is a temple or vehicle for the soul, and has specific requirements which must be fulfilled for it to function smoothly. These requirements may be seen metaphorically in relationship to an automobile. A car requires five major elements: a lubricating system, a battery, a cooling system, fuel, and a responsible driver behind the wheel.

1. Proper exercise—Asana practice acts as the lubricating routine to the joints, muscles, ligaments, tendons, and other parts of the body by increasing circulation and flexibility. Yoga regards the body as a vehicle for the soul on its journey towards perfection; Asanas are designed to develop not only the body, but they also broaden the mental faculties and the spiritual capacities. Your body is as young as your flexibility. Asanas also work on the internal machinery of the body: the glands, organs, and muscular system. By practicing yoga asanas, not merely as physical exercise, but as an exercise of awareness of the

muscles being used, awareness of breathing, and awareness of relaxation, then the mind is detached from the senses little by little.

2. Proper breathing (pranayama)—aids the body in connecting to its battery: the solar plexus, where tremendous potential energy is stored. When tapped through specific yoga breathing techniques, the energy is released for physical and mental rejuvenation. Control of the prana, or subtle energy, leads to control of the mind. The grossest manifestation of prana in the human body is the motion of the lungs. All diseases of the body can be destroyed at the root by controlling and regulating the prana. This is the secret knowledge of healing. The person who has abundant pranic energy radiates vitality and strength.

3. Proper relaxation (savasana)—cools down the system, as does the radiator of a car. When the body and mind are continually overworked, their efficiency diminishes. Relaxation is nature's way of recharging the body. Relaxation includes three parts: physical, mental, and spiritual. Physical relaxation refers to relaxing the bodily system by using autosuggestion. One mental relaxation technique is breathing slowly and rhythmically for a few minutes when experiencing mental tension. One may experience a kind of floating sensation when mentally relaxed. The spiritual relaxation is not to identify the Self with mind and body because there will be worries, sorrows, anxieties, fear and anger; a yogi identifies him/herself with the all pervading, all-powerful, all-peaceful, and joyful Self, or pure consciousness within.

4. Proper diet (vegetarian)—provides the correct fuel for the body. Optimum utilization of food, air, water, and sunlight is essential. There is a cycle in nature known as the "food cycle" or "food chain". The sun is the source of energy for all life on our planet; it is the top of the food chain. The food at the top of food chain has the greatest life-promoting properties. All natural food has different properties of essential nutrients. Animal flesh is considered a secondary source of nutrition. A health motto is "eat to live, not live to eat."

5. Positive thinking and meditation (Vedanta and dhyāna)—they put you in control. With positive thinking and meditation the intellect is purified. The lower nature, the desires of the mind, is brought under conscious control through steadiness and concentration of the mind. When the surface of a lake is still, one can see the bottom very clearly. In the same way, when the mind is still, with no thoughts and desires, you can see "Self". This is called yoga. We can control our mind either internally or externally by focusing on the Self or other points of focus. When the mind is focused there is no time. Time is nothing but modification of the mind. Time, space, and causation and all external experiences are mental creation. All happiness achieved through the mind is temporary and fleeting, limited by nature. To achieve the state of lasting happiness and absolute peace, we must first know how to claim the mind, to concentrate and go beyond the mind. By turning the mind's concentration inward, upon the Self, we can deepen that experience of perfect concentration. This is the state of meditation.

Why Yoga?

Practicing the postures, breathing exercises and meditation makes you healthier in body, mind and spirit. Yoga lets you tune in, chill out, and shape up - all at the same time.

For starters, yoga is good for what ails you. Specifically, research shows that yoga helps to manage or control anxiety, arthritis, asthma, back pain, blood pressure, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic fatigue, depression, diabetes, epilepsy, headaches, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, stress and other conditions and diseases. What's more, yoga:

1 Improves muscle tone, flexibility, strength and stamina

2 Reduces stress and tension
3 Boosts self-esteem
4 Improves concentration and creativity
5 Lowers body fat
6 Improves circulation
7 Stimulates the immune system
8 Creates sense of well-being and calmness

And that's just the surface stuff. In fact, most of the benefits mentioned above are secondary to yoga's original purpose. The main purpose of yoga is to achieve that higher consciousness where there is no worry, no conflict – a state of total thoughtlessness, so that a person can enjoy his/her life.

The result of practice

As the practitioner continues to move deeper into practice, self knowledge arises. This self knowledge leads to a natural release of the desire for sensory pleasures because inner joy fills its place. While the senses may still create enjoyment, life becomes directed more from inner wisdom and intuition for improving practice. In those sensory pleasures that the practitioner still pursues, increased intellect from practice is used to work out his karmic relationships with those forms. The two aspects, positive, disciplined focus, and negative, renunciation of desires, balance each other. First the practitioner decides to give up some 'pleasure' or maybe just to find time to try a yoga class. After feeling the results from practice, the curiosity rises, and then follows the decision to dedicate themselves to the practice. Practice deepens and freedom from desires ensues, replaced by innate and profound contentment. The ultimate freedom and ultimate bliss come when the qualities of nature are renounced for the splendour of the soul.

Balancing Yoga and life – Dharma Yoga

There is another way of practicing Yoga which is summed up by the popular phrase 'take your yoga off the mat'. This idea, which is explained provocatively in the *Bhagavad Gita* and expounded by many of the famous saints of India in recent times, directs one to live a dutiful life of fulfilling one's unique purpose in the world. For this to be a spiritual practice it must embody the ideals of service that uplifts fellow mankind, and be done without attachment to the results. This means to follow your intuition and do what you feel is right, and to focus on the doing, not claiming or deserving of any outcome. This phenomenon can be most easily observed in those experiences when people are compelled to help others in need or when artists and performers channel a creative flow which feels to come from a higher intelligence, or experience enthusiasm beyond their normal ability.

What does yoga mean?

- We practice to be able to stay calm and steady in all circumstances, in any position. Consciousness can only raise when you can accept with grace and serenity whatever you experience in the outside world or in your mind. It is all product of the maya or illusion. We practice to be able to discriminate between soul and illusion.

- The ultimate purpose is cleanness (sauca). Santosha (contentment) and divine creativity and talent all comes from purity. We clean our body, mind, emotions, so we become like an empty clay vessel. Higher conciousness only can enter when your are pure.
- Yoga is the restraint of thoughts in the mind: cessation of thoughts in the mind (Second sutra from Patanjili's Yoga Sutras).
- Yoga is the union between mind, body and spirit.
- Yoga is the development of physical ability including flexibility, strength, and endurance.
- Yoga is to unite the individual with the universe.
- Yoga is the unification of soul and matter
- Yoga is the salvation to /communion with a Higher Being

The word yoga can mean "union," or an application of means; in this case, it signifies the means to reconnect something. Let's remember that something is already here. There is no separation of spirit from nature except in our mind. Any dedicated outward searching will ultimately lead us back to a remembrance of this ground of being. The ideas of the mind drop into the heart and body, and like any thing rooted to the earth, the flowering of our awareness is related to how much nectar is drawn up from our connection to the primal elements from which we grew.

Yoga practise is a journey of evolution

<u>Yoga practices can be used:</u>

- To correct the disorders in the body
- To purify the mind
- To train the intellect

<u>Yoga is a science of Personality development:</u>

- Physical condition
- Mental control
- Emotional balance
- Intellectual development

Classic Definitions of Yoga
PATANJALI, YOGA SUTRAS I.2:
"Yoga Citta Vritti Nirodaha" - "Yoga is to still the movements of the mind"
YOGA AND BUDDHISM:
"Yoga is the end of suffering"
SWAMI SIVANANDA SARASWATI OF RISHIKESH EXPLAINED YOGA AS...
"...an integration and harmony between thought, feeling and deed, or integration between head, heart and hand".

REVIEWING THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS

There are many types, branches or paths of yoga. Each path utilizes a different emphasis to help perfect a different aspect of human personality, in different stages of an aspirant's development.

Hatha yoga (Yoga of Body and Mind Purification)

Hatha yoga is also known as the science of purification. When you clear the body of impurities, the nadis function correctly and energy blocks are released. When the rishis discovered the science of hatha yoga, they did not have yoga therapy in mind. Although yoga has proved to be very effective in the treatment of many impossible and incurable diseases, the therapeutic effect of yoga is only a byproduct and incidental.
The main objective of hatha yoga is to create an absolute balance of the interacting activities and processes of the physical body, mind and energy.
When this balance is created, the impulses generated give a call of awakening to the central force, sushumna nadi, which is responsible for the evolution of human consciousness. If hatha yoga is not used for this purpose, its true objective is lost.
The syllable 'ha' denotes the sun or the pranic (vital) force governing the physical body and 'tha' denotes the moon or Chitta (mental) force thus making Hatha Yoga a catalyst to an awakening of the two energies that govern our lives. More accurately, the techniques described in Hatha Yoga harmonize and purify the body systems and focus the mind in preparation for more advanced Chakra and Kundalini practices.
In yoga, life and consciousness are known as prakriti and purusha; in tantra they are known as Shakti and Shiva. In hatha yoga, they are called ida and pingala; in taoism, yin and yang, and in physics, matter and energy.

The term Hatha Yoga has been commonly used to describe the practice of Asana (postures). However, the Hatha Yoga system includes not only Asanas but also the six Shatkarmas (physical and mental purification techniques), Mudras and Bandhas (psycho-physiological energy releasing techniques) and Pranayamas (pranic awakening practices).

Jnana yoga (Yoga of Enquiry)

Jnana Yoga is the process of converting intellectual knowledge into practical wisdom. It is a discovery of human Dharma in relation to nature and the universe. Jnana Yoga is described by tradition as a means to obtain the highest meditative state and inner knowledge. Jnana literally means 'knowledge', but in the context of yoga it means the process of meditative awareness, which leads to illuminative wisdom. It is not a method by which we try to find rational answers to eternal questions; but rather a part of meditation leading to self-enquiry and self-realization.
Some of the components of Jnana Yoga are:

1. Not believing but realizing
2. Self-awareness leading to self-analysis
3. Experiencing knowledge
4. Realizing one's personal nature
5. Developing intuitive wisdom
6. Experiencing inner unity

Karma yoga (Yoga of Action)

Karma Yoga is a path of devotion through work, or rather, service. One loses his identity while working, only selfless work remains. This state is very difficult to achieve. Generally some reward, incentive or outcome follows after work and one is attached to these rewards or incentives. This is not Karma Yoga. Non-attachment towards work and becoming the perfect instrument of the super consciousness in this manifested universe is the ultimate aim of Karma Yoga.

In the initial stages of Karma Yoga, an individual possesses a strong sense of ego and consciously or unconsciously he is attached to the fruits of his efforts – he expects at least praise or recognition. However, being continually involved in work and developing a change in mental attitude, the individual can surely disassociate himself from the ego and his own personality. In this state the work becomes worship to God, it becomes spiritual. The individual also becomes an expert, a Yogi. He achieves stability of mind in all conditions, he is not disturbed, excited or happy in any situation. He becomes divine & his actions represent God's will.

The essence of Karma Yoga, as extracted from the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 6, Sloke No.1- 3), is that the world is confined in its own activity except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore one must perform every action sacramentally and be free of attachments to the results.

Bhakti yoga (Yoga of Devotion)

Bhakti means Yoga of devotion or complete faith. This faith is generally in God or supreme consciousness in any form. It may be Lord Rama, Krishna, Christ, Mohammed, Buddha etc. It may be a Guru for his disciples or love towards existence.

The important thing is that a person interested in following this path must have a very strong emotional bond with the object of faith. The flow of emotional energy is directed to this object. Most people suppress their emotions, and that often manifests in the form of physical and mental disorders. Bhakti Yoga releases these suppressed emotions and brings about the purification of the inner self.

Continuous meditation on God or an object of faith will gradually decrease the ego of the practitioner. This in turn prevents new distractions, fickleness or even pain and induces strong bonds of love. Gradually, the practitioner loses self-identity and becomes one with the object of faith, this is a state of self-realization.

Kundalini yoga (Yoga of Energy)

Kundalini Yoga is concerned with awakening the psychic centers or chakras, which exists in every individual. There are seven main chakras in the human body. The lowest level chakra connects us to the animal instinct level, while the highest level connects us to the instinctive realms of being or the sublime heights of consciousness.

In Kundalini Yoga, higher-level chakras are awakened and in turn the activities associated with these higher psychic centers are awakened as well. The basic method of awakening involves deep concentration on these chakras and forcing their arousal. Asanas, Pranayama, Mudra and Bandha and other forms of Yoga such as Mantra Yoga are also used to stimulate this awakening.

Mantra yoga (Yoga of Recitation)

Mantras are Sanskrit syllables, words or phrases, which when repeated in meditation, will bring an individual to a higher state of consciousness. Mantra Yoga has its origins in Vedic Sciences and also in the Tantras. In fact, all the verses in Vedas are called mantras, it is said that any person who can chant or sing Vedas can achieve ultimate salvation or union with supreme consciousness only by chanting the mantras, which is the aim of Mantra Yoga.

Raja yoga

(Yoga of Meditation - the yoga of the systematic approach to control the thoughts in the mind)

Raja Yoga usually refers to the system of yoga as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. In this ancient text, Patanjali describes eight stages of yoga, which are known collectively as Raja Yoga or Ashtanga Yoga. Raja Yoga is a comprehensive yoga system which deals with the refinement of human behavior and personality through the practice of the Yamas (restraint) and Niyamas (disciplines); attainment of physical health and vitality through Asanas (postures) and Pranayamas (pranic breathing techniques); management of mental and emotional conflicts and development of awareness and concentration through Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses) and Dharana (concentration); and developing the creative aspect of consciousness for transcendental awareness through Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (absorption in the universal identity).

Iyengar yoga

Iyengar's method, a form of Hatha Yoga, is based on placing emphasis on the physical alignment of the body in the poses. In the Iyengar school, it is taught that there is a correct way to do each pose, and that every student will one day be able to attain perfect poses through consistent practice. Once this balance is created in the body, it will be reflected in the mind. One of Iyengar's major innovations is in the use of props. Today it is quite common to see blankets, blocks, straps, pillows, chairs, and bolsters being used in yoga studios. The use of these props is relatively new in the history of yoga and comes directly from Iyengar. The purpose of the usage of props is to assist the student in attaining ideal alignment, even if the body is not yet open enough.

Ashtanga vinyasa yoga

Ashtanga Yoga is an ancient system of Hatha Yoga, first recorded in the manuscript 'Yoga Korunta'. For generations, Ashtanga Yoga has been passed down from one teacher to the next, and since 1948 was being taught by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois at his school in Mysore, India.

In Ashtanga Yoga, there is one breath for each movement. The movements are meant to flow together so as to heat the body and produce a detoxifying sweat. This inner heat is also intended to burn away the six poisons (desire, anger, delusion, greed, envy, sloth) that surround the spiritual heart.

To avoid confusion with Ashta-anga (the Eight-Fold Path), the preferred names for the yoga of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois are 'Ashtanga Vinyasa' or 'Ashtanga Vinyasa Flow'. Another commonly used name is 'Mysore Ashtanga`.

HISTORY OF YOGA

Exact dates are extremely difficult to pinpoint when looking at yoga's ancient history as many teachings were orally transmitted. The dates below form a rough guide:

• 2,500 – 1,500 BCE – Indus Valley civilization, where carved figures depicted in what may be seated meditation postures were found. Untranslatable text accompanies the figures.

• 1,000 BCE – The Vedas are composed. "Veda" means knowledge. These teachings describe rituals, hymns, practices, and spells.

• 700 BCE – The oldest Upanishads are written. A collection of orally transmitted teachings.

• 500 BCE – The Bhagavad Gita is written. Concepts of rebirth and a broadening of the practice of yoga are clearly explained.

• 200 CE – The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are composed. Short, well-organized verses explaining the nature of the Self and an approach to self-realization.

• 600 CE – The beginnings of Tantra Yoga.

• 800 CE – Sankara's "Advaita Vedanta" school of non-dual philosophy is formulated.

• 900 CE – Kashmir Saivism. One of the more clearly articulated non-dual yoga philosophies, reliant on the transmission of grace from guru to student, called "Shaktipat."

• 900 C.E (?) –Rajanaka Tantra. Horizontal model of yoga without the concept of a singular, fixed attainment or enlightenment.

Contemporary Yoga

• 1900s – Hatha Yoga. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was responsible for preserving, evolving and popularizing Hatha Yoga. Teacher of B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi and his son Desikachar, among many others.

• 1950s – B.K.S. Iyengar develops his system of yoga based on physical alignment and therapeutic benefits, using props to make postures more accessible.

• 1960s – Hatha Yoga begins to take root in the West.

• 1970s – present – Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois gains popularity.

• 1980s – present – Flowing styles of yoga based on the physically demanding form of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga become widely popular.

• 1997 – present – John Friends' interpretation of Tantric philosophy joined with modern bio-mechanical alignment principles into a school of yoga called "Anusara" – a Sanskrit word meaning "to be in the flow of grace."

ASANA PRACTICE

'Sthira sukham asanam' (- `Asana should be stable and comfortable`)
-Patanjali Yoga Sutra.

Asana is a position which is supremely steady and comfortable. Traditionally, asana was the meditative seated postures of yoga. Asana can be defined as a physical yoga posture or position that is designed to help master the body and enhance the body's functions.

Yoga poses are, in essence, 'yoga exercises', creating strength and endurance, improving circulation and

energy flow, cleansing organs and other systems, and expanding muscles and joints. Most of them work on more than one aspect of the body at the same time. For example, a twisting Asana benefits the spine, adrenal glands, liver, pancreas and kidneys.

With all these benefits of the yoga poses, we should not lose attention to the original purpose of the yoga pose or yoga exercise. Yoga exercises evolved thousands of years ago from the need to create a healthy body in order to move more readily to the state of oneness and realization.

When a body is cluttered with stress, tension, and disease, the mind becomes cloudy and the ability to connect with the inner self is inhibited. The physical freedom attained from the yoga exercises increases one's ability to sit with silence with enhanced perception and awareness. Asana can stimulate the physical and mental body which can contribute to healing many postural and mental imbalances.

Yoga Asanas produce their beneficial effect on the organs and glands in three ways:

- The position of the Asana causes an increase in blood circulation to the specific target organ or gland.
- The position of the Asana often produces a slight squeezing of the organ or gland. This has the effect of massaging the organ or gland and stimulating it.
- Deep breathing and visualization of the target area sends an extra supply of prana to the area.

Beginning asana practice

Before beginning your asana practice, ask yourself why you are doing yoga today. The reasons may be physical discomfort or lethargy in the body. The reasons may be emotional in nature: to calm the energy in the body, for example. Your intention for practice may be a blend of the physical, emotional, and spiritual. The highest purpose for engaging in yoga practice is to reconnect with our essential divinity. The peace, clarity, and contentment we often feel after Savasana is our true nature unveiled. Take a seat and create a meaningful intention for practice. After practice, a helpful tool is to journal your practice, taking notes on your experience that day.

Drishti in asana

Drishti is the direction of your gaze, or focus. Drishti refers to a way of anchoring into the asana by the gaze of the eyes. Drishti can increase endurance and help glean more intelligence from the asana. As the alignment settles into place, the eyes rest calmly onto a single point. There is also awareness to the corners of the eyes, the peripheral vision, and the whole space of your vision while a stream of concentration flows to the point. This is a means of sense withdrawal and strengthening concentration. It also increases kinesthetic and spatial awareness of your body.

Alignment

This refers to the basic structural alignment of the body in a given posture. The major joints of the body (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and neck) are the places of greatest range of motion, and therefore most tending toward misalignment. In asana practice, the body takes various forms. Physically, the tissues of the body must strengthen and lengthen to adapt to these forms.

The alignment of one part of the body (knees, for example) affects the alignment of every other part, just as an uneven foundation in a house will create an uneven first floor, second floor, and so on. Adjustments to the outer form of the posture naturally begin at the foundation and move sequentially upward.

The human body has an optimal alignment. When the body is moving closely towards or in optimal alignment there is increased freedom of movement in the joints and more available energy in the body, since the body is not fighting itself and can thus move freely.
Pain is also greatly reduced or eliminated when the bones and tissues of the body are in a cooperative relationship.
The ability to perform asana may vary greatly, depending on factors such as bone structure, previous injuries, age, energy level, and ardency of the student. Approaching asana practice as a discipline of mindfulness and non-violence (especially to the practitioner) is a fundamental starting point to a pain-free practice.

The key to steadiness in asana is to know and perform correct alignment which allows for a release of inappropriate effort and a feeling of lightness. A key principal of correct alignment is balance. Balance in a pose initially might be thought of as whether you can stay in it or not. Is there more weight on this side, or that? Is there more pressure in this hand or that hand? Inevitably, matters of alignment are discovered through inquiries about balance.

Every one's bones are different in length, orientation, shape, and thickness. Within any class, no two student's postures will look the same, or feel the same. Students will have varying degrees of tension in muscle groups, particularly the hamstrings, shoulders, and the muscles of the back. Yoga practice is very effective in the long term in releasing and lengthening these muscles, and allowing entry into the full range of motion. On that day when a student has released the limiting tension and hits the point where the tissues or bones are compressing, and that compression is stopping further range of motion, they must understand that as far as stretching goes, it has done its work. More stretching, or working with tension, will not increase range of motion or add more depth to the posture. The orientation of the bones within a particular student may limit their range of motion. For example, some students are at their full range of motion before their arms become vertical when asked to reach up. Other students are able to raise their arms fully over their heads and take them back behind their ears as much as six inches. Bone structure can account for this critical difference, nor will or muscular flexibility. Watch for these differences in structure and remember not every posture is possible or appropriate for every student.

Mis-alignment generally occurs where bones meet – in the joints. You'll probably never meet anyone who points to the middle of their thigh-bone and states "it's been hurting here."

Setting the foundation
In any posture, there is a foundation, or that part of the body that connects to the earth. We exist within a field of gravity, a constant force that exerts a downward force on the body and provides the stability from which to rise up, physically and energetically. Asana practice would not really be possible or beneficial

without gravity. Gravity roots the body, providing the resistance that creates strength in muscle tissue. It is this compressive, condensing force from which we expand.

Feet

The bone structure and musculature of the feet create a dome structure, or arch, on the sole of the foot to support and transfer the weight of the body in space. Without arches in our feet, there would be no springy structure to provide a light step and to strengthen and align the ankles, knees, and femur/ hip joint.

Common misalignments in the feet:

• lack of, or weakness in, the inner and transverse arch
• feet habitually turned outward or inward, creating a mis-alignment of the knee and hip when walking
• habitual weight-bearing on one foot while standing

Aligning the feet

There are four corners to each foot:

1) the mound of the big toe
2) the back of the inner heel;
3) the mound of the little toe; and
4) the back of the outer heel.

Creating connection to the earth through the feet should follow this sequence. In Tadasana (mountain posture), draw an imaginary line from the center of the ankle to the middle of the second toe. Make this line on each foot parallel with the other. The feet are outer hipbone's distance apart.

Knees

The knee is a hinge joint that works well in moving forward and back. It has very little ability to twist safely while weight-bearing.

Common misalignments of the knee:

• not tracking straight due to weakness in the feet
• not tracking straight due to tightness in the hips
• hyper-extension of the knee (moving backwards beyond 180 degrees)

In Samasthiti (Tadasana), the upper leg bones (femurs) and lower leg bones are vertical and in line with each other. The knees are not bent or hyper-extended (bent back beyond a straight line). The four corners of each kneecap are square. The sides of the kneecaps are vertical. In standing postures, the knee (if bent as in a posture such as Parsvakonasana and Virabhadrasana 1 and 2) tracks directly over the ankle, and not beyond. Root the heel well, to take pressure off the kneecap. Activate the back side of the knee.

Hips

The hip includes the upper leg bone – in particular the joint where the femur connects to the pelvis – the hip socket, and the surrounding musculature and ligaments.

Common misalignments of the hips:
• external rotation of the head of the femur (thigh bone) in the hip socket
• tightness on the outer leg, restricting internal rotation
• weakness in the adductor muscles (inner thigh muscles)

Spine

The spine is the vertebral column that surrounds the spinal cord. This column of vertebrae allows us to bend forward, backward, side to side, and twist. The spine includes articulating vertebrae – cervical (neck), thoracic (upper back), lumbar (lower back) – and fused vertebrae (sacrum), and coccyx (tailbone).
Common misalignments of the spine:
• loss of natural inward curvature in the lumbar spine (low back)
• vertebral compression due to tight musculature
• head – forward carriage, resulting in tightness in the upper neck
• scoliosis – abnormal lateral curvature

Shoulder girdle

The shoulder girdle includes the shoulder blades, collarbone, upper arm bone, and supporting musculature. The shoulder girdle has great range of motion, allowing our arms to move in every direction, but at the expense of some stability. This area is perhaps the most commonly misaligned region of the body, requiring more specific therapeutic work to bring it back into balance.
Common misalignments of the shoulder girdle:
• shoulders "off the back" – habitually riding away from the body's mid-line, shortening the pectorals (chest muscles) and moving the shoulder joint forward, rounding the upper back (hunched position)
• imbalance of musculature side to side because of dominant handedness
• head-forward carriage, tightening the posterior muscles of the upper back and weakening/ shortening the muscles at the front of the neck
The shoulder girdle (collar bones, upper arm bones, shoulder blades) should be placed so that the shoulder blades set into the back of the body. To achieve this, standing in Tadasana, elongate the sides of the torso upwards, lift and roll back the shoulders, relaxing the arms to the sides of the body. Feel as you pull back the upper arm bone inside the socket while activateing the armpits.

Neck/Head

The cervical spine (neck) has great range of motion, enabling us to direct our gaze in a wide range. The weight of the head is balanced on the top of the spine. Good spacial alignment allows the muscles of the upper back and neck to be responsive and not habitually held too tightly.
Common misalignments of the neck/head:
• head-forward carriage, tightening the posterior muscles of the upper back and weakening/shortening the muscles at the front of the neck
• chronic tension of the upper back/neck musculature caused by whiplash from an automobile accident
• jaw tension due to stress

Wrists/Hands

The radius and ulna (bones of the forearm) articulate with the many small bones of the wrist and hand, giving the hand great dexterity and sensitivity. In yoga practice, weight-bearing on the hands is common, and misalignments of the wrists show up in these weight-bearing postures.

Common misalignments of the wrist and hand in weight-bearing postures:

• uneven weight-bearing of the upper body via the two bones of the forearm to the hand

• hands placed to wide to provide stability, or to narrow for comfortable upper body movement up and down

• fingers contracted (bent) rather than extended with fingertips actively supporting weigh

When the hands are part of the foundation, as in down dog or Chaturanga Dandasana, and most arm balances, they too must be aligned and connected.

The four corners of the hands are:

1) index finger mound;

2) inner heel of the hand;

3) pinky finger mound; and

4) outer heel of the hand.

Spread and root the fingers and keep the weight ont he ball of the fingers instead the root of the palm. When the hands are part of the foundation, the creases of the wrists align with each other and the front plane. If you are facing forward on the mat (as in down dog) the creases of the wrists should be parallel to the front edge of your mat. The hands are placed shoulder distance apart.

Posture categories

- Standing postures
- Balancing asanas
- Backbends
- Forward bends
- Twists
- Inversions
- Hip-openers
- Restoratives
- Arm balances

Standing postures

The practice of standing postures strengthens the leg and hip joints, tones the leg muscles, and increases one's sense of balance. These postures also help remove stiffness in the legs, correct the hips due to minor deformity in the legs, relieve cramps in and increase elasticity of the calf and thigh muscles. They also tone abdominal muscles and organs. Circulation is encouraged as well as a balanced flow of prana. Those who

suffer from sciatica or slipped disc should practice standing postures with care, especially postures which involve forward bending action.

Backbends

Backbends open the front of the body. Gravity and habitual closure of the front body due to posture can round the back and close off the front body, both physically, emotionally, and causally (the realm of thought). It also provides a good stretch to the spine and the abdominal area, thereby increasing spinal flexibility, toning the spinal nerves and strengthening the abdominal organs as more blood and oxygen gets directed to the spinal and abdominal regions. These postures also help to maintain proper function of the kidneys. Depending on the application, backward bending postures are generally very effective in removing back pain and correcting spinal defects. Backbending invigorates the nervous system and can help to release held emotions. As these postures enliven the nervous system, time of day should be considered for intense backbend practice as they can create insomnia if practiced too late in the evening.

Forward bends

The practice of forward-bending postures induces relaxation as it is done with chest compression and exhalation. The effects are generally more introverted, soothing, and calming to the nervous system. It also increases flexibility of the leg muscles and tones abdominal muscles and organs, keeping them free from sluggishness. When the organs inside the abdominal cavity are kept healthy, proper digestion and bowel movement will take place, thereby preventing/curing constipation. These postures also give a good stretch to the pelvic region, bringing more oxygenated blood and nourishment to the gonad or reproductive glands, thereby helping to cure impotency and promote Brahmacharya. It may be necessary to have students sit on a block or blanket to achieve this. If standing, keep legs firm and simply fold partway, with hands supported on legs. Those suffering from lower back pain or any back condition should avoid these postures.

Twists

The practice of twisting postures increases spinal flexibility and stimulates spinal nerves. Lateral twisting of the spine can help remove backache and pain in the hips as well as stiffness and pain in the shoulder joints. Twisting also works strongly on the abdominal region, massaging, detoxyfing and nourishing the abdominal muscles and organs, keeping the liver, spleen, pancreas well toned and in good function. Daily practice of twists also helps prevent enlargement of the prostate and bladder. Those with a stiff back must practice with care and not twist more than their current flexibility allows.

Many of our activities involve asymmetrical usage of the muscles. While watching television we often turn the body to one side. Most of us turn the spine to the same side to reverse a car. In this manner many activities can be shown to be one-sided in execution - some unconsciously and others consciously. Yoga teaches us to be more aware of our body position and movements.

Inversions

The practice of inverted postures reverses the effects of gravity on the body and encourages a rich supply of blood to the brain, nourishing the pituitary gland and enhancing the working of the entire endocrine

system. These postures are also effective in improving mental power and concentration. There is generally some fear connected to being upside down since it is disorienting initially. Encourage students to move slowly into postures such as headstand and avoid kicking up or throwing their legs against the wall. Those with high blood pressure, heart or back conditions or illness causing blood to be impure should avoid these postures.

Hip openers

Hip openers encourage root chakra function and can release lower back pain and misalignment in the legs. Because of our preference for sitting in chairs, the muscles and connective tissue of the hips tighten over time and limit range of motion. This coupled with weak abdominal muscles (again, the back support of the chair does not encourage engagement of the abdominal area) creates a situation where it becomes difficult for many adults even to sit comfortably on the ground. In order for the front and back of the hips to open, a balance of strengthening and flexibility is key. Standing postures such as Virabhadrasana 1 and 2 as well as Parsvakonasana provide an accessible way to begin to open the hips. New or very tight students may find traditional seated hip openers such as Rajakapotasana extremely challenging and difficult to approximate. Bone structure in the pelvic area (femur heads, length of greater trochanter and shape of the acetabulum) can vary greatly from student to student also, allowing some great freedom of movement and others restriction.

Restoratives

These postures are by nature designed to relax and restore energy. Savasana is the ultimate restorative posture, in which the challenge is allowing true relaxation—a release of muscular tension and of controlled breath while remaining conscious. The body has an innate ability to heal itself. Restorative postures allow a greater flow of prana in the areas targeted. Because of the total relaxation needed, restorative postures should be primarily supine (on the back) and possibly supported by props.

Arm balances

The practice of arm-balancing postures should be done in the intermediate or advanced stages of asana practice and is generally not suitable for beginners. Requiring courage, strength, and stamina, arm balances are perhaps the most exhilarating class of postures. Because of their intensity, they can often be attempted by “muscling” into them. A key point to remember is that the entire body is active in an arm balance, providing stability and distributing the work throughout the body, not just the arms. These postures strengthen the wrist and shoulder joints, chest and arm muscles as well as the abdominal muscles and organs. Those with high blood pressure, heart problem, back or knee pain should avoid these postures.

Warm up exercises

Surya Namaskar

‘Surya’ means `sun` and ‘namaskar’ means `salutation`. The sun salutation is a dynamic practice made up of a smooth, flowing sequence of yoga postures. It originated as a series of prostrations carried out to the rising sun in gratitude for its lighting, warming and energizing effect on our lives. It is an effective way to loosen up, stretch, tone and strengthen the entire body. Each posture is sequenced in such a way that

postures opening the chest are followed by those which contract the chest. This frees the respiratory system and encourages deeper breathing. This practice also increases blood circulation and focuses the mind. As such, it is an excellent warm up and can also be included at any part of a yoga session or practiced on its own. Benefits are not only gained from the postures themselves but also from flowing from one posture to another with breath-movement coordination.

Standing asanas

Tadasana (Mountain pose)

Mountain pose is the summit for all-other standing and inverted Yoga Asanas. The principles of Mountain pose lay the foundation for developing yoga skills of alignment, focus and balance. Mountain pose may look simple as if you are just standing there, but this is an active pose which strengthens the legs, back and core, improving posture and mental clarity. Mountain pose is typically positioned at the beginning of the practice or sequence to bring calm to the mind and awareness to the whole body.

To start, stand with the feet hip-width apart, the arms by the sides. Fix the eyes at a point on the wall slightly above the head. Distribute the weight evenly between the feet. Draw down into the heels and lift up through the arches of the feet to straighten the legs. Press the outer edges of the shins towards each other, while rotating the inner thighs towards each other. Tuck the tailbone down and lift up through the core. Draw the shoulders blades down towards the back waist, but lengthen the spine and torso. Broaden the collar bone, lengthen the neck. In the final position the ears, shoulders, hips and ankles should be aligned. To exit the pose, transition into the next posture.

Benefits

- Develops physical &mental balance
- Strengthens and tones legs and abdominals
- Strengthens ankle joints
- Improves posture

Variations

- Place hands in Namaste for standing Prayer pose
- Interlock fingers, and turn the palms upward, stretch arms over head and lift onto toes for palm tree
- Interlock fingers, and turn the palms upward, stretch arms over head and bend side to side for swaying palm tree pose
- Practice with eyes closed
- Lift one leg and extend it front and then back

Uttanasana (Standing forward bend)

This simple standing forward bend is a powerful pose as it a mild inversion where the head is below the heart, which allows for good blood circulation throughout the body. Although the pose looks easy with the torso folded over the pelvis, this pose is one of the best ‘work in progress’ poses for any practitioner. This

means, that as we further into our Yoga practice we go deeper into the forward fold. Most importantly, this pose allows is for you to explore your breath more deeply and connect with the expanding of your lungs during inhalation with the contraction of the exhalation.

To practice the standing forward bend pose stand with both feet hip-width apart. It is important here to ensure that the feet are firmly grounded into the mat. Bring your awareness to the toes and feel them anchoring into the ground. Place your hands on your waist and take a deep inhale as you elongate your torso, extend forward and fold from the hip over your pelvis. Allow your spine to naturally curve as and release your hands from the waist to hold your ankle or calf muscle. Exhale as you further extend forward to bring your head closer to your legs while stretching the back and hamstrings.

Hold this posture for a few deep long breaths. To release this pose, unlock your hands from your ankle or calves. Bring your hands back to your waist, inhale to press into your feet and lengthen the torso to come out of the forward bend. Exhale as you stand up.

Benefits

- Stimulates internal organs such as kidney, liver and intestine
- Massages the internal organs
- Relives mild depression
- Calms the nervous system
- Reduces stress
- Improves blood circulation throughout the body

Contraindications

- Back injury
- Slip disc
- Spinal cord injury or surgery
- Knee injury
- Sciatica

Modifications

- Bend knees to fold a little deeper into the forward bend
- Use the wall as support for balance
- Use yoga blocks as support for the hands instead of holding ankles or calves.

Variations

- Half standing forward bend
- Grip the between the big toes to fold forward
- Clasp both elbows behind the calves as a lock
- Place your feet on your palms facing up

Vrksasana (Tree pose)

Start by standing in Mountain Pose. Then, shift all of the body-weight onto the left foot and bend the right knee. With a bent knee begin to open the right hip to the right side of the body.

Keeping the knee bent and hip open to the right, reach down with the right hand and clasp the right ankle. Bring the right foot up with the right hand and, if possible, place the right foot along the left inner thigh. Toes are pointing down toward the floor. Firmly press the sole of the right foot against the left inner thigh and, at the same time, press the left inner thigh into the sole of the right foot.

While you are in Tree Pose, your tailbone drops toward the floor and your pubic bone lifts. Remember to keep your ears, shoulders, hips, left knee and ankle aligned. In order to maintain balance in tree, remember to breathe steadily and try gazing softly forward.

Arms can be inhaled straight up, placing the biceps next to your ears, hands can be on the hips, or hands can press together for Prayer Pose in front of the chest.

Try staying in Tree Pose for five complete breath cycles or for as long as your wish. To come out of Tree Pose, remove the foot from the thigh and slowly exhale the leg down until you are back in Mountain Pose.

Perform steps one through four on the opposite side.

If you are shaky in this pose, scan your body to see where the shakiness is originating. Is the whole body wobbly or is it just in the ankles? Sometimes weak ankles make balance poses a little tricky. A great way to strengthen weak ankles is to keep practicing Tree Pose and other balance poses.

Benefits

- Improves concentration.
- Improves balance.
- Strengthens thighs, calves, ankles, and spine

Contraindications

- If you have high blood pressure, keep the hands in Prayer Pose in front of the chest. Refrain from lifting them overhead.

Modifications

- If you are not comfortable balancing on your own, try this pose up against a wall for extra support or hold on to the back of a folding chair. If bringing the foot all the way to the upper thigh is not possible, try these modifications:
- Rest the foot of the bent leg next to the foot or ankle of the standing leg.
- Place the foot right next to the calf. In this modification, you do not apply pressure from the foot to the calf. You are simply “holding” the foot next to the calf.

Variations

- Tree in wind
- Closed eyes

Utkatasana (Chair pose)

In Tadasana, firmly root into the ground, finding equal weight on all corners of the feet. Inhale to bring the arms up overhead, moving the upper arm-bones up and back. Turn the palms to face each other, or place the palms in prayer. Exhale to bend the knees as though sitting in a chair. Track the knees over the toes and in line with the hips. Maintain a neutral spine by dropping the tailbone down and drawing the pubic bone towards the navel. Avoid both over arching or tucking the lumbar spine. The torso will be perpendicular to the thighs. In order to activate the deeper stabilizer muscles, maintain a neutral spine, pressing the heels firmly into the ground, gently begin to squeeze between the calves, drawing energy into the inner thighs and up to the pelvic floor muscles at the base of the spine, lifting the hammock of pelvic muscles up into the body and engaging the abdominals. Stay for 5 deep breaths. To come back to standing, inhale to straighten the legs and exhale to release the arms to the side of the body.

Utkatasana or Fierce pose is designed to stoke the agni fire in the belly, burning through both physical and energetic blockages.

Benefits

- Strengthens gluteal, thigh, abdominal and back muscles.
- Strengthens the ankles and feet, while stretching the calve muscles.
- Warms the body, stimulates the heart.

Watch out for:

- Knee tracking, either knees knocking together or bowing out.
- Shoulders in the ears.
- Shortening the neck extensors by lifting the chin too high.
- Over arching the lower back.

Contraindications

- Knee or ankle problems.
- Migraines or HBP (keep the arms lower)

Modifications

- Don’t bend the knees as deeply... keep the arms in front of the chest... perform at the wall, so the tail is just touching and is gently supported.

Variations

- Bring the thigh-bones parallel to the floor.
- Tip toe
- Dynamic
- Parsva (revolved) utkatasana
- 1 leg version

Parsvottanasana (Intense side strech pose or Pyramid pose)

Stand in Tadasana. Step your right foot back, roughly between 3 and 4 feet (one meter or more). Place your right foot flat on the ground and line up your left heel and right heel. Turn your right foot so that it points toward the front right corner of your mat, and have your left foot facing forward. Reach your arms behind your back and bring your hands together, palms together, with your fingers pointed towards the ground. Bring your hands close to your back so that your thumbs touch your back. Move your wrists away from your back and turn your hands so your fingers point forward and touch your spine. Move your shoulders back and expand your chest. Turn your hands up so that your fingers point up and slide your hands up your spine. Maybe you can even slide them up between your shoulder blades. If you can't do Reverse Prayer, see the Modifications section below for some suggestions. Pull back through your left hip and draw your right hip forward as your turn your right leg in. Squeeze your thighs towards each other. These actions will help make your hips square to the front of your mat and more stable. Lift through your chest, flex at your front hip and fold your torso over your front leg. Lengthen through your spine. Instead of giving into the rounding in your back that the shape of this pose encourages, work to find more of the natural curves of your spine. Work to slightly arch your lower back and your upper back as you lengthen your torso down your leg. Straighten your knees, engage your quadriceps to keep your legs strong and straight and stretch your spine long. Be careful to not hyperextend your knees. Pull up from your heels slightly to help create support for your knees from your hamstrings..

To come out, keep your legs straight and strong — OR bend your front knee slightly — and lift your torso. Bring your hands out of Reverse Prayer and into Anjali Mudra (Prayer Position) and step forward, back into Tadasana.

Pyramid Pose is a two-sided pose so be sure to practice the second side.

Benefits:

- Stretches your hamstrings.
- Strengthens your quads.
- Strengthens your calf muscles in your front leg and stretches them on your back leg.
- Builds strength in your hip stabilizers including your gluteus medius and minimus.
- Strengthens your spine.
- Strengthens your ankles and feet, as they are key to finding your balance in the pose.
- Helps to build support for your lower back.
- Builds strength in your upper back.
- Tones and strengthens your core.
- If you're doing the full pose, with Reverse Prayer, it stretches your wrists.
- If you're doing the full pose, with Reverse Prayer, Parsvottanasana helps to open your chest and strengthen your shoulders, which helps improve your posture.

Contraindications

- hamstring tear
- high blood pressure or a back injury
- hip injury

Modifications

- Placing blocks on the floor close to your foot will also help in maintaining the balance of the body and for someone who finds it difficult to go down fully.
- One could adjust the distance of the feet to first gain confidence in the pose and gradually move on to deeper expansion of the feet.
- It is not necessary to clasp the palms in Namaste, if one tends to lose balance. One could place the palms on the floor in front or hold the ankles of the forward foot while going down in forward fold.
- One could first start with half pose while coming parallel to the floor with the torso, and looking up and straight to gain confidence with the pose and then gradually go into the final posture.

Uttita Trikonasana (Triangle pose)

From Tadasana pose step the left back into a wide stance. Turn the toes out to a 45 degree angle. Open the arms out to a T shape. Inhale and extend the right arm, reaching out through the finger tips. On the exhalation, bring the right hand to shin or to the outside of the foot. Inhale and roll the left shoulder back slightly as you extend the left hand upwards, palm facing away from you. Turn the head and gaze towards the out stretched fingers. To come out of the pose, inhale and lift back to a wide stance. Turn the torso and toes to centre. Then bring the right foot in to 45 degrees and rotate the torso towards the left leg. Bring the left foot to a 90 degree angle. Repeat on other side.

Picture yourself pressed between two sheets of glass to gain the correct alignment. Now imagine squeezing the thighs together like a scissors as you draw the femurs (thigh bones) into the hip. Grow roots from the soles of the feet to maintain your balance and keep the legs strong the tree trunks in this pose.

Check the feet are aligned heel to heel to arch. Those with more flexible hips should use a heel to heel alignment. Root the feet into the mat, keeping the legs strong and pelvis stable. Stack the shoulders on top of each and keep the arms active to create space between the shoulder blades.

Benefits

- Aids the digestion, massages the intestines
- Opens the chest, lungs and heart to improve breathing
- Gently stretches sciatic nerve and inner thighs and groins
- Strengthens legs
- Improves flexibility of hips, stretches abductors
- Stretches side waist and core

Contraindications

- Injuries to knee, back, hips and neck

Modifications

- To avoid putting pressure on injured knees, use bent knee triangle. Insure the front leg is bent to a 90 degree angle and the thigh is parallel to the floor.

- In the case where the hips are very tight or painful, bring the hand to the shin, block or chair.
- If shoulders are tight bring the top hand down to the hip.
- In case of neck pain, Do not turn head, keep eye gaze to floor or straight ahead.

Variations

- To deepen the pose bring the extended arm back to open the chest and heart
- To strengthen the legs and feet, hold the big toe with the two fore fingers. Press the toe into the ground while pulling upwards with the fingers for a toe to hip stretch.
- Revolving triangle. Bring the left hand to the outside of the right foot and then repeat the other side.

Parivritta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle pose)

From Tadasana, step the left foot back about 2 or 3 foot distances (shorter than trikonasana), with the toes turned out abut 45 degrees. Place both hands on the hips and rotate the left hip forward to square the hips. Press down on the ball of the big toe on each foot to soften the knees. Inhale, raising the left arm, while keeping the right on the right hip. Exhale, hinge forward at the hips, while engaging the core, keeping the left arm extended next to the ear. Bring the left fingertips to the floor inside the right foot. Inhale deeply, and then exhale to twist the torso to the right, keeping the right hand on the hip. Once the stance is steady and the twist is full, roll the right shoulder back and reach up with the right arm, then take the gaze up towards the hand. To exit the pose, bring both hands to the floor, framing the right foot. Bring your hands to your hips and slowly hinge up with a straight back. Repeat on the other side.

Benefit comments

- Improves balance.
- Builds focus.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Improves digestion and circulation.
- Tones and stretches leg muscles.
- Strengthens and stretches abdominal muscles.
- Strengthens hip muscles.
- Opens chest and shoulders.

Watch out for:

- Curved chest and arm arching towards the floor.
- Hyperextended legs.
- Lifted back foot.

Contraindications

- Back injuries.
- Neck injuries.

Modifications

- Use a block under the bottom arm to give support to reaching the floor and to maintain a straight spine.
- Bend the front knee if there are balance difficulties, or tight muscles.
- Shorten the stance if the back foot lifts from the floor.
- Place the back heel against a wall for support and balance.
- Feet can be little wide apart

Variations

- For a deeper stretch, take the bottom hand to the outside of the forward foot, pressing the pinky of the hand against the pinky side of the foot to stabilize the pose.
- Press against the ankle with your wrist and do not place the hands on the floor

Uttita Parsvakonasana (Extended side angle pose)

From Tadasana take the feet wide and parallel. Turn the right foot 90 degrees, so the toes face the top of the mat. Turn the left toes in slightly, to about 45 degrees, towards the front of the mat. Inhale, lift the arms parallel to the floor, palms facing down. Exhale, release the right knee over the ankle to a 90 degree angle, keeping the back straight and arms extended. Anchor in the left foot, keeping the leg straight and strong. Weight distributed equally between the two legs during the asana. Reaching forward, bring the right hand to the floor on the outside of your knee; take your left hand to your hip. Roll your left shoulder back to open the torso towards the sky. Keeping the torso open, extend the left arm over the left ear, palm down. To exit the pose, press down through both feet; straighten the front leg while reaching back with the left hand to bring the torso vertical. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the legs: ankles, knees, thighs.
- Opens the hips.
- Opens the chest and shoulders.
- Improves digestion.
- Stretches the side body.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles.

Watch out for:

- Front knee forward of the ankle.
- Front knee collapsing inwards.
- Top shoulder arching towards the floor.
- Lifted back foot.

Contraindications

- Knee injury.

Modifications

- Use a block, or a chair, under the bottom hand to give support to reaching the floor.
- For balance assistance, press the outside of the back foot against a wall, or align the entire back against a wall for support.
- Place the lower hand to the thights

Variations

- For a greater hip opening, take the bottom arm to the floor inside of the inner thigh and press against the leg.

Parivritta Parsvakonasana (Revolved side angle pose)

To begin, stand in the Mountain Pose keeping your feet four to five feet apart. Raise your arms keeping them parallel to the floor. Your palms must be facing downwards. Exhale deeply and turn your right foot outwards keeping it at an angle of 90-degrees to the right. Turn the left foot inward 60-degrees to the right. Make sure that your right heel is in line with the left line. Slowly bend your right knee till your thigh is parallel to the floor. Your right knee should be aligned over the heel and your calf must be perpendicular to the floor. Keep your left leg stretched out. Exhale deeply and turn your torso towards your right thigh. Bring your left arm to the outside of your right knee. Place your left palm on the floor. Your left armpit must cover the outer side of the right knee. Stretch your right arm over your right ear with your palm facing down. Turn your head upwards and look straight. Hold this pose for 20-30 seconds while breathing deeply. To release the pose, lift your palm, straighten your torso and the leg, and return to the starting position of Parivrtta Parsvakonasana.

Benefits

- It Prevents Osteoporosis
- Strengthens Muscles
- Aids Digestion
- Relieves Lower Back Pain
- Good for Sciatica Pain
- It Rejuvenates the Entire Spine
- Tones Thighs, Calves and Ankles
- This pose tones the thighs, calves, and ankles due to the balancing and stretching actions involved in the pose.
- Helps to Get Rid of Excessive Body Fat
- It Improves Posture
- Beneficial for People with Bloating, Flatulence, Constipation and Indigestion

Contraindications

- Those with high blood pressure should not lift their arms up and should keep their palms on their hips. Those suffering from any disc-related conditions should keep the front body open and extended and keep the back leg slightly bent or on the floor to reduce the depth of the twist. Ladies who are menstruating or pregnant should refrain from this pose.

Modifications

- Parsvakonasana (Side Angle Pose)
- Revolved High Lunge Pose
- Hands on thigh
- Hands on blocks

Variations

- Find a full bind from your half bind by wrapping your bottom arm under your front thigh to bring your hands to meet and interlace behind you

Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-legged forward bend)

Begin from Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Take a big step back, approximately 3 1/2 -4 feet, with the right foot. Pivot on the mat so that both feet are facing the long edge of the mat, in a parallel position. The outside edges of the feet are parallel with the short edge of the mat. Firm the legs muscles and lift through the arches of the feet. Place the hands on the hips. Inhale to lengthen the spine towards the ceiling and exhale to hinge from the hips, folding forward towards the thighs. Reach the hands to the floor and inhale to lengthen the spine again, finding a long neutral back, not rounding the spine (see modifications), exhale, to hinge deeper into the posture. Keep the legs engaged as the upper body releases forward. Keep the palms pressing into the floor and bring the crown of the head towards the ground. Hold the posture for 5 to 10 breaths. to come up, place the hands onto the hips again, engage the inner thighs and inhale to lengthen the spine back up to standing.

Benefit comments

- stretches and strengthens inner thighs and back of legs
- stretches the back
- energizing
- releases neck tension
- stimulates digestive organs

Watch out for:

- ankles rolling in or out
- knees locking
- sitting back in the hips and heels
- rounding the lumbar spine

- tension in the neck

Contraindications

- Use caution with lower back problems (see modifications)
- High blood pressure (half way only)
- Low blood pressure, come out slowly

Modifications

- Use a block to place the palms on
- place the palms on a wall
- Bend the knees

Variations

- At the bottom of the posture hook the index and middle finer around the big toe in a yogi grip. Bend the elbows and gently draw the body further forward.
- In standing, interlace the fingers behind the back, draw the shoulder blades together. Hinge forward and extend the arms over the head towards the floor.
- Place one palm on the floor (or on a block) beneath the torso in the fold. Lengthen the spine from the tail and head and gently twist the upper body towards the ceiling. Keep the hips square. Extend the top arm towards the ceiling. Gently release and repeat on the opposite side.
- Keep the hands on the hips through out the posture.

Virabhadrasana I. (Warior I.)

From Mountain Pose, step the left foot back any amount and rotate the foot to a 50 to 70 degree angle. The toes of the right foot point to the front of the room. Align the heel of the right foot and the arch of the back foot. Bend the front knee to a 90 degree angle directly over the front ankle. Imagine the legs pressing out in opposite directions as the feet remain grounded. Internally rotate the back thigh so the hips remain squared to the front of the mat. Extend the torso up and out of the waist feeling a sense of steadiness and bravery. From here, inhale the arms up, placing the biceps next to the ears, palms facing one another (Palms can touch at the top, if desired). Shoulders stay down and away from the ears as the fingers extend up to the sky. Stay here for several breaths and then repeat these steps on the other side.

Benefits

- Improves posture, alignment, and balance.
- Strengthens legs, ankles, and groin area.
- Boosts confidence.
- Improves joint health.
- Promotes flexibility of hips.

Contraindications

- Use modified versions of Warrior I if you have:

- Knee injuries.
- Low back pain.
- High blood pressure (Do not extend arms up next to the ears.)

Modifications

- If aligning the front heel to the back arch is hard on the knees, align the heels instead.
- If knee injuries, low back pain, or balance issues are present, widen and/or shorten the distance between the feet until the pose is more comfortable. Use the back of a folding chair or a wall for extra support.
- Bring the hands into Namaskar
- High lunge

Variations

- Add a backbend.
- "Active" Warrior: Add movement to the pose by bending and straightening the front leg and/or extending and lowering the arms slowly.
- Clasp the fingers together behind you. Then, hinging at the hips, lower the torso to the thigh of the front leg or, bypass the thigh, and lower the torso to the inside of the front thigh.

Watch out for

- Do not let the shoulders crowd the ears.
- Make sure the front knee does not go too far forward of the front ankle.
- Keep both hips squared to the front of the mat

Virabhadrasana II. (Warrior II.)

From Mountain Pose, step the left foot back about a meter. (Note: The length you step back depends on your height.) Turn the left foot to a 30 to 50 degree angle. Align the heel of the front foot with the arch of the back foot. Bend the front knee to a 90 degree angle so that the front thigh is parallel to the ground. Planting the feet firmly in the ground, begin to open the torso, shoulders, and both hip bones toward the left side . Next, with palms facing down, lift the arms to shoulder height. Arms should be parallel to the front leg. Always keep the arms strong, active, and in a straight line with the shoulders. Keep the shoulders back and down so they do not crowd the ears. Hip bones stay squared to the side. Let the coccyx travel down as the pubic bone lifts. Lift up through the rib cage. Softly and slowly, take your gaze to the middle finger of the right hand. To come out of Warrior II, exhale the arms down, turn the hip bones back to the front of the mat and step the back leg up to meet the front leg. End in Mountain Pose. Repeat these steps on the other leg.

Benefits

- Promotes calmness of spirit.
- Improves alignment of the legs, hips, and shoulders.

- Strengthens legs, ankles, and groin area.

Contraindications

- Use modified versions of Warrior II if you have:
- Knee injuries.
- Pain in the hips.

Variations

- "Active" Warrior II: Straighten the front knee as you inhale the arms up next to the ears. (Palms face each other). Exhale as you move the arms and knee back to the original Warrior II position. (Palms face the floor.) Repeat 5 times on each side..
- Add a chest opener by clasping the hands together near the lumbar spine. Roll the shoulders back.
- Place hands in Prayer Position or use Eagle Pose arms.
- Humble warrior

Watch out for

- Keep the front knee bent at a 90 degree angle over the front foot at all times.
- Do not let the arches of the feet collapse. Pay special attention to the arch of the back foot.
- No "lazy" arms, please.

Virabhadrasana III. (Warrior III.)

Begin in Warrior I Pose, placing the hands on the hips. Shift all of the weight to the front foot and, hinging at the front hip, begin to drop the torso forward. Simultaneously, lift the back leg up. Continue hinging at the front hip, lowering the torso and raising the back leg until both the torso and the back leg are parallel to the floor. The back foot can be pointed or flexed. While you're balancing, keep both hips bones squared to the floor. Picture an internal rotation of both legs. Pull the shoulder blades back and down the spine so the shoulders do not crowd the ears. Do not bend either knee, but do keep them "soft." Extend the arms straight ahead, placing the biceps next to the ears. Stay in this pose for three or more breath cycles and then switch legs.

Imagine someone pulling the fingers forward in order to elongate the spine. Feel the head and neck naturally extending from the spine. Keep the neck neutral. As your fingers are being "pulled" forward, imagine that the back foot is being pulled back. Continue to lengthen the body from fingertips to toes.

Benefits

- Elongates and strengthens the spine.
- Improves balance and concentration.
- Stretches and strengthens the legs.
- Strengthens the abdomen.

Watch out for

Make sure you do not “lock” and/or hyper-extend the knee of the standing leg.

Contraindications

- Not recommended for students with high blood pressure.
- Chronic pain or recent injuries to the ankle, knee, or back

Modifications

- Use the back of a chair, the edge of a counter, or wall for support.
- Place the back foot on the wall as both hands extend forward.
- Place the arms along the sides of the body, place the hands on the hips, or bring the hands to Prayer Position.
- Sunbird pose

Uttita Hasta Padangusthasana (Extended hand to big toe pose)

Begin in mountain pose. Shift weight into left leg and foot. Bend right knee to chest, bring right hand to inside of knee and clasp right two fingers around right toe. Extend the leg straight, horizontal to ground. Stretch left arm horizontal. Turn gaze towards right toe. Pull shoulder blades down the back, chin parallel to the floor. Raise left arm out to the side for counter balance. Keep pelvis and torso facing to front, do not twist or tilt body. To exit the pose, bring gaze to front, and return leg to centre. Bend the knee into the chest and step the foot down. Repeat other side.

This pose requires physical awareness of grounding, spinal alignment and focus to stabilise the body for balancing and extending.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens legs and ankles
- Improves focus, concentration and balance
- Increases hip flexibility
- Tones hips and thighs
- Improves posture and strengthens back and spine

Contraindications

- Sciatica
- Hip injuries

Modifications

- Place a strap around sole of foot (when arms do not reach)
- Keep uper knee bended
- Practice with feet on the wall
- Practice standing next to a wall, hand holding for support

- Practice with chair in front, lift leg onto chair with strap

Variations

- Bend knee, clasp hands under foot sole, extend leg and touch knee to nose
- Raise the legs and extend while keeping both hands on the hip
- Bend knee, cross hands and clasp fingers underneath feet, then extend
- Bend knee into chest, open hip out to side, clasp toe and extend to side
- Bend knee into chest, cross hands and clasp fingers underneath feet, release left hand, revolve torso to left, repeat other side

Ardha Chandrasana (Half moon pose)

Begin in Mountain Pose (Tadasana). From Tadasana pose step the left back into a wide stance. Inhale as you bend to your right side, bring your right hand 15 – 20 cm behind the little toe (in tepee fingers). Take the left hand to the left hip. Exhale and press the fingertips into the floor. Extend the crown of the head pointing away from you. Inhale and lift the back leg parallel or a little above to the floor. Roll the left shoulder back and press the heel of the standing foot into the floor. Gently straighten the standing leg and flex the foot (with toes pointing away from you). When you have balance, extend the left hand upwards with the palm facing away from you. Now turn the head and eye gaze towards the extended fingers. To come out of the pose, exhale and lower the raised leg to the mat. Return to the Mountain and repeat on the other side.

The supporting hand should be positioned under the shoulder. When extending the top hand stack the shoulders on top of each other. The hips should also be aligned in similar way – with the top hip moving up and back, the lower hip bone push forward. Flexing the raised foot and extend out through the heel keeps the leg strong and active in the pose. Bringing the left hand to tepee fingers (finger tips pressed into the floor and palm lifted) to provide addition lift and support in the pose. The standing leg is holding all of the body weight in this pose. To avoid hyper-extending the knee, micro bend the standing leg. Lift upwards from the inner foot and ankle as you press the big toe, little toe and heel into the floor. Draw the navel to the spine and lift the core muscles in and upwards. Extend the tailbone out towards the raised foot.

Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen, ankles, thighs, buttocks, & spine
- Stretches the groins, hamstrings & calves, shoulders, chest, & spine
- Improves coordination & sense of balance
- Helps relieve stress
- Improves digestion

Contraindications

- Neck problems (don't look upward)
- Headache or migraine; Low blood pressure

Modifications

- Rather than extending the hand, most beginners should keep the hand and the head in a neutral position, eye gaze on the ground.
- Place the hands on bricks or use tepee fingers (tops of the fingers pressing into the floor and palms lifted) to create space in the side chest and hips.
- Modification using the wall: Stand with your back to the wall, one leg's length away from the wall. Exhale & bend forward into a standing forward bend. Bring both hands underneath the shoulders to the floor or bricks. Inhale & raise your left leg parallel to the floor & press the left sole against the wall. Then complete the pose as above.
- Come into a wide stance with your back to the wall. Place a brick about 6-10 inches in front of the right little toe. Bring your right foot to a 12 o'clock position and the left foot to 10 o'clock with the heel pressed against the wall. Bend your right leg and bring your right hand onto the brick. Inhale and lift the left leg parallel to the floor. Extend the left arm and back of the hand long the wall. Gently press left hip, heel, shoulder and back of the hand towards or against the wall to gain correct alignment and balance in this challenging pose.

Variations

- Modified Half-Moon Arch – Bend the raised leg a lower the extend arm. Bring the hips back slightly to catch the foot
- Revolved half moon

Garudasana (Eagle pose)

In Tadasana or Mountain pose, spread the toes and heels, rooting the feet into the ground. The knees should be soft. Bend both knees. Shift your weight and grounding into the left leg making the right leg light. Inhale as you lift the right knee and wrap it around the standing leg. Exhale and bend the knees. The right thigh should be in front of the left and the top of the right foot should rest on the left calf. Inhale and extend the arms straight in front of you and parallel to the ground. Bring the left arm over the right and bend the elbows. Wrap the left forearm around the right and bring the palms together in front of the nose. Balance in this position for five flowing breaths. To come back to Tadasana, bend the left knee and bring the right toe down to the floor. Inhale and straighten the legs, exhale and release the arms down. Repeat the other side.

To support steadiness, alignment and balance of the pose, encourage students to keep the eye gaze steady, focusing on a fixed spot at eye level. To maintain the pose and support the back extension, ask students to lift up from the pelvic floor on the inhale and drawing the tail bone down on the exhale. Push the elbows away from the chest to open the shoulders and lift the chest. Pull the lower belly in to make space for the top leg to lift and wrap over the standing leg. The shoulders will round slightly so encourage the students to relax the shoulders blades drawing them down into the back to prevent rounding of the back or hunching of the neck.

Benefits

- Improves concentration
- Strengthens ankle and leg muscles
- Increases flexibility of shoulders, arms, legs and hips
- Improves strength and flexibility of upper back

Contraindications

- Ankle and Knee injuries (arms only)
- Wrist and hand injuries (legs only- arms in prayer)

Modifications

- Use a wall to support back or bring the toe of the wrapped leg to the floor to support the ankles and knees. If the shoulders are tight – fold the arms bring palms together in prayer – anjali mudra.
- 1 leg Utkatasana

Variations

- Dynamically
- Hands in back Namaskar

Natarajasana (Dancing Shiva, Lord of dance)

This posture not only requires balance, concentration, flexibility and strength, but most importantly its execution requires grace and elegance.

Starting in Tadasana (Mountain pose) ground down into your left leg as you lift the right heel towards your buttocks, swiftly taking hold of the inside of your right foot with your right hand. Inhale and lift your left arm towards the sky along with lengthening the upper back and chest. Exhale and extend your right leg back gently pressing your right foot into your right hand, simultaneously bending back and down. Now draw your attention to the grounding of your supporting foot, imagine that your grounding foot is growing roots like a tree keeping you fixed to that one spot. Reach your left hand out in front of you keeping your gaze forward (Drishti point) with chin parallel to the floor. Hold for 20 seconds to 1min release and repeat on the other side.

Once in position keep your supporting leg strong and stable by contracting your quadricep muscles, at the same time encouraging a micro bend in the knee to prevent over extension. Once deep into the pose the back raised legs thigh remains parallel to the floor. Check that both hips are open and you are creating space in your lower back by pressing your tail bone down towards the floor. Your torso should remain aligned as far forward as possible. The arm reaching upwards/forwards should remain relaxed and shoulders away from the ears. keeping your gaze forward and chin parallel to the floor ensures a natural curve in the upper spine. Crown of the head reaching towards the sky.

Benefits

- Develops balance
- Opens the shoulders and chest
- Increases lung capacity
- Strengthens the leg muscles and arches of the feet
- Strengthens the spine
- Stretches the abdominal muscles
- Stimulates and energies the mind
- Relieves mild depression
- Reduces stress
- Develops mental concentration

Contraindications

- Vertigo
- Back injury
- Knee injury
- High / Low blood pressure

Modifications

- Beginners may find it easier to lift the heel towards their buttock and hold in that position increasing the strength in their supporting leg. It is also a good idea to hold onto a chair or wall for balance. Advanced students may work towards lifting the back leg enough to be able to hold onto the back foot with both hands. Your elbows should point forward keeping the elbows close as possible to the side of your head. If holding onto the foot is a strain then use a strap to hold your foot.
- Rope

Variations

- tip toe
- rope while raising elbow to the sky
- grabbing the tow while raising elbow up to the sky

Utkata Konasana (Goddess pose)

Goddess pose is a wide standing squat that opens the hips and chest while toning the entire body. This pose is a favourite of pregnancy yoga teachers, as this pose stretches the inner thighs, groins and hips. It is also known as fiery angle pose for it powerful energising benefits.

Begin from Mountain pose. Step the feet apart to twice the width of the hips pointing the toes out 45°. Bend deeply at the hips bringing the knees out over the toes. Rotate the hips, and inner thighs outward, sinking deeper into the squat. Place the hands on the knees and lift the waist out of the hips, lengthening the spine. Press the hands wide on the knee and draw the tailbone down. Pull the glutes towards each

other and exhale to squat deeper. To finish the pose, bring hands into prayer. To exit the pose, release the hands, straighten the legs and step or jump feet together, returning to Mountain pose.

Benefits

- Stretches hips, groin and chest
- Tones and strengthens core muscles
- Strengthens quads and inner thighs
- Tones upper back
- Creates more room in the pelvis are in preparation for childbirth
- Improves digestion, elimination and circulation

Contraindications

- Hips, knee and shoulder injuries

Modifications

- Use cactus arms
- Practice sitting astride a chair
- Practice leaning against a wall

Variations

- Practice on tiptoes
- Place palms on thighs
- Bring hands to hips

Urdva Prasarita Ekapadasana (Standing splits)

Begin in mountain pose with feet together. Raise arms over head, fold forward from hips, placing fingertips in front of feet. Shift weight onto right foot, raise left leg behind into a split, toe pointing up. To exit the pose, lower the leg to ground. Look up halfway. Bring the hands to hips and hinge upwards to start position. Repeat other side.

Benefits:

- strengthens back, hip and leg muscles
- Improves blood circulation
- Massages internal organs
- Improves concentration and focus
- Improves balance and coordination

Contraindications

- Heart conditions
- High blood pressure
- Vertigo

Modifications

- Place hands on blocks or chair
- Practice with back to wall, slide or rest foot on wall

Variations

- Bring hands to touch toes of standing leg
- Bring nose to touch knee of standing leg
- Hold hands around ankle
- No hands

Ardha baddha Padmottanasana (half bound lotus standing forward fold)

Begin in mountain pose with feet touching and parallel. Hands on hips. Shift the weight onto the left leg. Bend the right knee and bring the foot onto left thigh in half lotus. Raise the arms over the head and fold forward at the hips, placing hands to sides of feet. To exit the pose, press fingertips into ground and lift up to standing position, release leg down. Repeat other side.

Benefits

- Stimulates digestion and relieves constipation
- Improves circulation and blood flow in the legs
- Improves balance and mental focus

Contraindications

- Sciatica
- Slipped disc
- Hernia
- Weak legs

Modifications

- Place blocks by the sides of the feet
- Practice against a wall
- Place strap around waist and foot (to hold in place)

Variations

- In standing lotus, bind right arm behind and hold left toe before folding forward. (Repeat other side)

Brahmacharya asana (Half bound lotus tiptoe pose)

Half Bound Lotus Tiptoe pose is an advanced standing balance. What is essential for this pose is that one requires strength in the toes and ankles as well as flexibility in the hips and knees.

To practice the Half Bound Lotus Tiptoe pose, begin in Mountain pose with the feet parallel and hip-width apart. Shift the weight to the right foot. Bend the left knee and lift the foot up onto the right hip crease to half lotus tree pose (or above the knee). Soften the right knee and fold forward from the hips, bring all ten fingertips to the ground. Bend the right standing leg and come onto the ball of the right foot. Lower the hips down into a deep squat balancing the base of the tailbone onto the right heel. You're your balancing point. Take one hand at a time into prayer. Take 6-9 yoga breaths. To exit the pose, bring the fingertips back to the ground. Lift the hips and straighten the right leg returning to half lotus standing forward bend. Rise up to Mountain pose and release the bound leg. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Strengthens core muscles
- Develops stronger joints – hips, knees, ankles
- Improves balance and focus
- Opens hips
- Increases focus, concentration and balance

Contraindications

- Hip, Knee and ankle injuries
- Sciatica
- Achilles heel injury
- Slip disc

Modifications

- Begin in chair pose, cross one leg ankle to knee, lower to squat, then bring hands into prayer
- Practice tiptoe or chair with half lotus pose against the wall for support or holding onto blocks or chair

Variations

- Reach one hand around back waist and hold lotus leg toe
- Place both toes on floor with soles of feet touching and knees pointing outward
- Bring the hands to the side in chn mudra

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward facing dog)

Start on hands and knees, lining the knees up underneath the hips and the hands just slightly forward from the shoulders. The index fingers should face towards the front of the mat.

Tuck the toes under and lift the pelvis up and back to make an upside down V with the body. The heels may or may not touch the floor. Turn the pelvis s the sitz bones lift up towards the ceiling and the lower

spine becomes neutral. Draw the shoulders away from the ears and keep the head in alignment with the spine. Spiral the arms onto the body by turning the eye of the elbow or inner part of the elbow forward. (See the Technical comments for more details into the pose)

This posture can be held for a minute or two and is used throughout Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar).

For many students Downward facing dog is a challenging pose to find good alignment. Tightness in the back and hamstrings threatens to pull the pelvis into a posterior pelvic tilt, while muscle imbalances in the shoulders can make it tricky to get the shoulders into place. The best place to start is as soon as the knees come off the floor. While the hips lift up and back, keep the knees bent deeply enough to find a gentle arc in the lower back. This arc should mimic the natural curve of the spine without exaggerating it. Keep the knees bent as you bring awareness to the hands. The fingers are spread out wide, with the index finger pointing forward to bring a gentle 'turnout' to the hand. Maintain contact on the floor with the tips of the fingers and the knuckles at the base of the fingers. Continue the turnout up the forearms to the elbows, spiralling the inner part of the elbow towards the front of the room while maintaining a soft, open joint- not locked. The upper arms will continue to spiral towards the shoulder blades. Lift the upper most part of the arm bone up and back and widen the shoulder blades while gently sliding them down the back. This allows the front of the chest to open. Now bring awareness to the front of the body. Gently draw the ribcage in so that the bottom of the ribs is in line with the top of the hips. From this very stable body begin to straighten the legs while maintaining the posture. The legs may or may not fully extend depending on tightness. Firm the thighs by lifting the kneecaps. Delicious- breathe and enjoy!

Benefit comments

- Stretches hamstrings, calves, shoulders, and chest.
- Strengthens upper back, core, arms, legs, hands and feet.
- Stimulates the body and helps calm the mind.
- Good for digestion
- Strengthens bones

Watch out for

- Weight in the wrists- index fingers lifting off the mat
- Elbows locked
- Shoulders lifted towards the ears
- Head dropping
- Ribs popping
- Lack of abdominal connection
- Pelvis tucked under
- Knees locked- muscles of the legs not engaged
- Feet out of alignment

Contraindications

- Use caution with wrist issues- i.e., carpal tunnel syndrome, repetitive strain injury (see modifications)

- High blood pressure- though this posture can be helpful for students with high blood pressure, proceed with caution. Watch for blood rushing to the face and shortness of breath.

Modifications

- For wrist problems and tightness in the shoulders try rolling the front edge of the mat or use a blanket to elevate the wrists and decrease the angle into the hands.
- Perform Dolphin Pose, coming onto forearms

Variations

- Lift one leg in parallel holding the leg in line with the torso. Hold for a few breaths then release and repeat on the other side.
- Lift one leg up, as above, then bend the knee and arc the leg back allowing the pelvis to rotate to the side and stacking the hips. Try to keep the upper back and shoulders square to the floor. Release and repeat on the other side.

Urdva Mukha Svanasana (Upward facing dog pose)

Begin from plank pose. Line up the palms just slightly wider than shoulder distance apart, fingers spread wide on the mat, with the index finger facing forward. The heels line up over the toes and the body is in a strong long line. Inhale to simultaneously roll over the toes to press the tops of the feet into the ground and press the sternum forward to extend the upper spine. In this posture it's important to maintain energy in the lower half of the body to avoid sagging in the pelvis and collapsing in the wrists. Then firm the legs, pressing the hamstrings towards the ceiling. Finally, bring energy to the lower belly by drawing the tail under slightly and lifting the pubic bone towards the belly button. Create continuity through the torso by keeping a connection between the top of the hipbones and the bottom of the ribcage. Lift the eyes and chest up. Press the shoulders back, lift the chest and energize up from the palms of the hands. This posture can be used as part of a flow through sun salutations or held on its own for several breaths. To come out, shift the weight back to plank, tucking the toes under again. Press back to Down Dog or lower through Chaturanga Dandasana to release to the floor.

*This posture can also be started from the floor, with the hands lined up at the chest, pressing the chest up and out and lifting the pelvis and legs away from the floor.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens the back, legs, shoulders, arms and abdominals
- Opens the whole front of the body, including chest and shoulders
- Energizing and heart opening

Watch out for

- Sagging in the pelvis and an anterior pelvic tilt (pelvis tipping forward)
- Ankles collapsing

- De-energized legs- this makes the pelvis sag
- Extension in lumbar spine only with ribs popping
- Elbows locked and weight in wrists
- Head out of alignment- lifting the chin up and pressing the head forward

Contraindications

- Be careful with students with lower- back issues, and shoulder problems.
- Avoid if experiencing carpel tunnel syndrome and use caution with wrist and elbow problems
- Avoid if pregnant

Modifications

- Perform with the knees on the ground for more support for abdominals and upper body
- Keep the toes tucked under to help the legs to energize more and create more stability
- Perform mini cobra from the floor, leaving the legs on the ground instead and lifting the upper chest only (this is especially helpful while flowing quickly)
- Place blocks under the wrists to find more extension in a tight thoracic spine
- Roll the edge of the mat or use a wedge under the palms to decrease the angle of the wrist extension.

Variations

- Raise one leg up

Parighasana (Gate pose)

Begin in a kneeling pose with the feet touching and front of the foot flat on the ground. Stretch the right leg to the side and extend the right arm along the leg. Raise the left arm over the head and side bend the torso to the right. Place the left palm over the right and spiral the chest upward, eye gaze under the arm pit. To exit the pose, lower the left arm, bring torso upright and return right knee to ground. Repeat the other side.

Benefits

- Lateral stretch to pelvic region and torso
- Massages abdominal muscles and internal organs
- Stimulates digestion
- Tones abdominals and strengthens legs
- Stretches side ling and improves respiratory lung function
- Relieves symptoms of asthma, allergies, colds,
- Improves spinal flexibility

Watch out for

- Knee pain (place blanket under knees)

Contraindications

- Knee injuries
- Back injuries

Modifications

- Left (or right) hand stretches overhead, but is not placed on top of right(or left)
- Blanket is placed under knees
- Practice by a wall, overhead hand can be pressed against a wall

Variations

- Stretch to right (or left side) place hand flat on ground, raise extended leg
- Dynamic gate; stretch sideways, float upright, bend the other way to place hand on ground and raise leg

Malasana (Garland pose)

Beginning in Tall Mountain pose (Tadasana) The Pose – Step the feet out to shoulder width with the feet at a 45° angle (toes pointing out towards the edges of the mat). Slowly bend the knees coming down to a low squat with the knees wide. Bring the palms together in prayer pose (Anjali mudra). Inhale and press the elbows against the inside of the knees. On the inhale return the arms to prayer and repeat 3-5 times. To exit the pose, bring the hands in front of the feet. On the inhale bring your weight into the hands and arms. On the exhale slowly extend the legs to a forward bend. On the inhale roll all the way up – one vertebra at a time back to Tall Mountain.

The feet should be flat and well-grounded. Elbows need to be on the inside of knee (pressing into the soft crease – not the knee itself). The bottom should be low but not touching the heels or ground. Breathing is an important part of this pose - Inhale when pressing the palms together and exhale when extending them forward. The palms in prayer should be at heart level with wrists, lower arms and elbows in alignment to encourage opening in the shoulders and neck.

Benefits

- Strengthens and tones thighs and hamstrings
- Improves strength and flexibility of shoulders, arms and knees
- Increases flexibility of hips
- Improves digestive complaints such as constipation and wind (gas)

Watch out for

- Heels off the ground (open legs wider or place blocks or folded mat under heels)
- Bottom in the air (bring weight into heels and draw tailbone down)

- Bottom touching heels (bring weight into toes and lift up from lower belly)
- Elbows on or in front of knees)widen the feet slightly)

Contraindications

- Knee injuries
- Sciatica
- Slip disc

Modifications

- Students with tight hips or Achilles tendons may find their heel come off the ground in a squat. Placing blocks or a folded mat under heels helps to support this part of the foot and encouraging the tendons to release without strain.
- Opening the feet wider than hip width will also help to release tight hips and/or heels.
- Placement of blocks under the bottom as well as the feet can provide extra support to those new to this pose or in later stages of pregnancy.
- Prasarita Padottanasana

Variations

- Raise hands above the head
- Fold forward
- Twist and loop
- Closed inner thights

Backbends

Bhujangasana (Cobra pose)

Begin lying face-down with the legs extended hip-distance apart and the hands spread wide underneath the shoulders. Draw the elbows in close to the ribcage. On an inhalation, firmly press the pubic bone, tops of the feet, and thighs into the floor, lift the shoulders up and back as you press into the palms to lift the chest off of the floor. Maintain a connection in the front of the body between the lower ribcage and the top of the hips, engaging from the pubic bone to the belly button. Allow the tailbone to slightly drop down, as you try not to over engage the buttocks muscles. Lift from the sternum to the top of the head, maintaining an equal openness through out the spine. Stay for a few breaths. On an exhalation, reach through the crown as you lower the chest back to the floor. Keep the elbows hugging close to the body to engage the tricep muscles and avoid the shoulders rounding forward.

Benefit comments

- Stretches the ankles, thighs, hips, psoas and back
- Energizes the body
- Massages the organs
- Improves digestion

Watch out for:

- Popping ribcage
- Shoulders in the ears
- Lifting too high and losing congruety of the spine- too much lower back
- Legs popping off
- Lifting the head too high
- Shoulders in the ears

Contraindications

- Back Injuries
- Pregnancy

Modifications

- Lift the hands, only come up to a place where you can support your spine without pushing. Cobra Push Up: Extend the arms in front of the body, slightly wider than the shoulders. As you inhale, slide the palms along the floor to lift the chest. On the exhalation, allow the palms to slide forward releasing back onto the chest
- Sfinx

Variations

- To deepen the pose, with the chest lifted, step the palms slightly wider then the shoulders and walk the hands closer to the body.
- To increase the stretch in the thighs, bend both knees bringing the feet towards the head. Make sure to maintain connection to the pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles.
- Dynamic version
- Twisting Cobra

Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

Start by lying face down with your lower body relaxed and your feet together and facing down. Hands flat on the floor beneath your shoulders. Without putting weight into the hands, lift the chest and upper body as high as you can and raise the right leg a couple of cm off the ground. It is more important to maintain the hips being level than to raise the foot further off the floor. If this is uncomfortable then folded blankets under the hip area may help. Keep the lower spine neutral and the buttocks active to protect the lumbo-sacral region. Hold for 6 breaths. Lower on the exhale. Repeat on the left leg. The half locust is a preparatory exercise for the full locust, strengthening and helping to warm up the muscles of the back. To enter the full posture ensure the body is relaxed with the legs extended and together and the feet relaxed. The arms are palm down by the side of the body. Using the muscles of the back, raise the chest and the legs simaltaneously on the inhale. Stay for a few breath and after release the position on an exchalation.

Benefit comments

- Builds strength in the muscles of the lower back
- Strengthens the neck, arms and shoulders
- Increases flexibility and strength in the back
- Helpful and offers relief in cases of sciatica, slipped disc, varicose veins, hemorrhoids and lower back pain
- Excess fat is reduced especially from the hips, waist, posterior, thighs, and the abdomen
- Improves stomach and digestive disorders. Stretching and improving circulation throughout the small and large intestine. Alleviates disorders of the stomach and bowels and flatulence, improves digestion, promotes peristaltic action and helps with constipation
- Improves circulation and blood flow throughout the lower body
- Energetic (Pranic)
- Stimulates swadhisthana chakra
- Increases agni (the digestive fire)

Watch out for

- Ribcage extending too far forward
- Shoulders crowding the ears
- Compression of the bones in the neck

Contraindications

- Throughout the practice it is important to maintain awareness on the breath. Keeping the breath smooth and regular, avoiding jerks or strains and using this as a means of awareness of the suitability of the practice at that time. Awareness of the spine and correct posture should also reduce risk of injury and strain. If at any time you feel discomfort in the spine, or any other part of the body, you should back off and come out of the pose. Students with a weak spine should avoid the full Locust Pose and practice only a gentle version of the Half Locust Pose. Students with a neck injury may keep their head in a neutral position by looking at the floor or supporting the forehead on a folded blanket. Shalabhasana, requires a certain amount of physical strength and effort and hence is not suitable for the less physically able student. It should not be practised by students with peptic ulcers, hernia, intestinal problems, recent or chronic back injury, slipped disc, coronary problems, high blood pressure or headache. It is not advisable for pregnant women. Students with back problems such as slipped disc or sciatica should be treated on an individual basis as this posture may strengthen and provide relief- however it should be practised with awareness and care.

Modifications

- Modifications are available for some students, ie back problems/sciatica may widen legs, pad under pelvis to reduce compression of the lower back and soften the final position

Variations

- The classic form of the posture-with both arms and legs raised- may be too demanding to be useful to many students.
- having the hands by the side facing down. Again different traditions may have the hands in a fist and/or under the stomach rather than by the side- this increases the work in the abdomen and lower back whilst still allowing the upper back to arch.
- arms lifted out to the side at shoulder height- strengthens the neck and shoulder muscles- suitable when the upper back arch is strong and stable.

Ustrasana (Camel pose)

With the toes tucked under, in a high kneeling position, place the hands on the lower back. Lift the chest up and draw the tips of the shoulder blades down towards each other. To ensure that the abdominals are engaged, the upper thighbones move back and the tailbone pulls slightly down. Lift the lower belly. To deepen into the posture, keep the thighs perpendicular to the floor, as you reach back to place the hands on the heels. Feet are hip distance apart and the shins are parallel. With the toes tucked under, encourage even the baby toe to wrap under. Press into the big toe mound and across the ball of the foot to avoid rolling the ankle joint. Rotate the inner elbows forward to open the chest. The head can be kept neutral, or if the neck is strong, release the head back. Hold the pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. To come out of the posture place the hands into the lower back, lengthening the tailbone down again. Inhale to lift the chest up; the head comes up last. Untuck the toes and fold over the knees into Balasana- Child's pose.

Benefit comments

- Opens the front of the thighs, chest, shoulders and throat.
- Strengthens the back muscles.
- Invigorates the nervous system.
- Stretches the abdominals and deep hip flexors.

Watch out for

- Straining the throat or neck
- Compressing the Lumbar spine
- Protruding ribcage
- Overly tight buttocks muscles
- Shoulders rolling forward
- Overstreched elbow joints

Contraindications

- High or low blood pressure
- Lower back or neck injury

Modifications

- For some students it may be difficult to release the hands to the feet. One option is to stay with the hands in the lower back and work on lifting through the upper chest. Conversely, place a block lengthwise on either side of each heel and rest the hands onto the blocks.

Variations

- Flatten the tops of the feet on to the floor, increasing the arch in the spine.
- Bring the legs closer together. (Brick between the legs)
- 1 arm version.
- Hands on the wall

Dhanurasana (Bow pose)

Begin lying prone with the arms extended to the sides of the body, the legs hip distance apart, and the forehead on the ground. Bend the knees towards the buttocks and place the hands around the outside of the ankles. Inhale to begin pressing the feet into the palms until both sides of the chest draw up off the floor. Reach through the top of the head. The body should look like an archers bow. To release from this pose, lower the chest and quietly return the legs to the floor.

Benefit comments

- Tones the muscles of the back and maintains flexibility of the spine
- Excellent strech for the joints
- Opens the entire front side of the body- ankles, thighs, hip flexors- psoas, abdomen, chest, and throat
- Increases vitality and counteracts fatigue
- Stimulates the digestive tract and reproductive organs
- Aids in Constipation

Watch out for

- Jamming the neck by lifting the head too high
- Straining the lower back by bending mostly in the lumbar spine. Examine the body from the side view and look for a continuous curve from the lower back to the top of the head. Notice the curvature in the thoracic region. Look for a widening across the collarbones.
- Knees pulling apart, abducting the legs and taking the body out of alignment while torquing the knee.
- Shoulders rolling forward.

Contraindications

- Lower back or neck injury
- Serious knee injury
- Pregnancy

Modifications

- Use a yoga strap around the ankles if students can't reach with their hands. Bend one knee at a time, leaving one side of the body on the floor while the other side lifts. Alternate sides.

Variations

- Place the hands on the inside of the ankle for a greater expansion across the chest.
- Rocking Bow: In Bow pose, begin to use the breath to rock the body backwards and forwards. This is a great massage for the internal organs, while challenging the back muscles.
- Parsva Dhanurasana – Side Bow: From Bow pose, bring the right shoulder towards the floor, pulling the legs with the arms to roll over the hipbones and onto the right side of the body. Stay on the right side for a few breaths, then with an exhalation, roll onto the tummy again and through to the left side. Stay to breath. Finally, roll back to center to release the posture.
- Execute the position with elbows up to the sky.

Chakrasana (Wheel pose)

Lying prone, step the feet in towards the buttocks, hip distance apart. Place the arms by the sides of the body with the blade edge or pinky-finger side down. Roll the shoulders back to open the front of the body. The chest should lift off the floor here, as though there was a fist placed behind the heart. On the exhalation, actively press into the edge of the arms and into the feet to begin lifting the hips up off of the floor. Firm the lower belly by lengthening the back and allowing the tailbone to draw under, lift the pubic bone towards the navel, to engage the lower belly, rather than lifting it towards the sky. Pushing the pubic bone up to the sky will cause the lumbar spine to tighten and, if performed repeatedly, may cause lower back pain. Feel a strong connection into the feet. They are the foundation of this posture. Press firmly into the big toe mounds to keep the inner thigh muscles engaged. Make sure the femur bones are parallel to each other. Use the strength of the hamstrings to lift the thighs parallel to the floor. Make sure the knees are directly above the ankles. To encourage more opening in the front of the chest, clasp the hands behind the back and reach through the arms. To release from Bridge, unclasp the hands and lower the buttocks to the floor, with the exhale, unwind the spine down to the ground.

Benefit comments

- Opens the chest and throat, stimulating the thyroid.
- Strengthens abdominals and hamstrings; stretches the spine and joints.
- Aids digestion, headaches, backaches, insomnia, menstrual cramps (see modifications), and high blood pressure.
- Calming effect on the nervous system, helpful for anxiety, fear, depression, and stress.

Watch out for

- Compression in the lower back.
- Disconnection from the feet- rolling to the outside edges of the feet.
- Knees dropping out to the sides.
- Feet too far away from the body

Contraindications

- Persons with severe neck injuries should avoid this posture.
- Use caution with high blood pressure

Modifications

- For difficulty keeping the hips lifted, slide a bolster underneath the pelvis. Restorative Spinal Lift: Begin coming into the posture as above, lifting the hips off of the floor. Place a bolster underneath the pelvis and allow the pelvis to relax down. The arms can be soft by the sides, or, to open the chest, relax the arms overhead. Allow the body to be fully supported. This restorative modification can be held for 5 to 15 minutes.

Variations

- Eka Pada Chakrasana - One Foot Wheel: Keep the left foot firmly pressing into the floor and draw the right knee in towards the chest. Extend the right heel up towards the sky, straightening the leg. Hold for a few breaths; return the foot to the floor and change legs.
- Use brick under the palms or feet.

Arm balances and strengtening asanas

Plank pose

Begin from hands and knees. Line up the palms just slightly wider than shoulder distance apart and spread the fingers wide on the mat, the index finger turns to face forward. Press down into the hands and step the legs back to straight. Firm the body from the legs all the way up the torso, keeping energy right out to the top of the head.

This posture can be used as part of a flow through sun salutations or held on its own for several breaths. To come out, lower the knees down to the floor again or press back to Down Dog or lower through Chaturanga Dandasana to release to the floor.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens throughout the body: legs, core, back, shoulders, arms, hands and neck.
- Powerful and invigorating
- Lengthens the spine
- Builds endurance

Watch out for

- Sagging in the pelvis and lower back- an anterior pelvic tilt (pelvis tipping forward) or pelvis lifted too high and tucking under into a posterior pelvic tilt.
- Ribs popping
- Rounded thoracic- overusing pectorals
- Elbows overstreched and weight in wrists
- Head out of alignment- lifting the chin up or dropping the head down

Contraindications

- Avoid if experiencing carpel tunnel syndrome and use caution with wrist and shoulder problems
- Use caution with lower back injuries- make sure they can keep their pelvis neutral

Modifications

- Perform with the knees on the ground for more support for abdominals and upper body
- Perform on elbows or fingertips
- Roll the edge of the mat or use a wedge under the palms to decrease the angle of the wrist extension.

Variations

- Eka Pada Kumbhakasana – One legged Plank Pose- Lift one leg off and keep it elevated as you breath and hold the pose. Repeat on the other side
- Waves, Circles with hip
- Jumping
- Mountain climbing

Charuranga (Four limbed staff pose)

From plank position, ensure that the hands are lined up with the shoulders and just slightly wider than the chest. The heels and toes will line up with each other. Rock forward on the toes and begin to been the elbows. The elbows and wrists will stack and the upper arm bone becomes parallel with the ground, the elbows tucked in towards the body. Keep the whole body firm.

This posture can held on its own or used flowing through sun salutations. To come out, slowly lower to the ground, or press up strongly back to plank pose, or slide the chest forward to press into Upward Facing Dog.

This poster is very challenging and for most students a modification will be required.

Benefit comments

- strengthens core
- develops upper body strength, including triceps, upper back, chest, wrist and hands
- generates heat in the body
- powerful and invigorating

Watch out for:

- pelvis sagging (see modifications)
- elbows behind wrists
- shoulders rounding in

- head dropping
- de-energized legs

Contraindications

- avoid if experiencing carpal tunnel syndrome
- use caution with repetitive strain injuries in the wrist
- use caution with elbow and shoulder problems

Modifications

- perform with knees on the floor
- don't go down as far
- use straps on uper arm or brick under shoulders or tighs

Variations

- This posture is very challenging in and of itself, however in time one can develop strength to move down through Chaturanga and flow over the tops of the feet. This movement can eventually blend to Upward Facing Dog.

Vasisthasana (Side plank)

Begin in plank pose. Grasp the ground with the toes and stretch back into the heels. Move the shoulders forward over the hands. Root the right hand, pressing the finger tips into the ground. Shift the weight into the right hand and arm. Roll onto the outer edge of the right foot. Lift the left arm, extending it upwards, turning the body and head to face out. Bring left foot and leg on top of the right. To come out of the pose lower the left arm and leg. Return to plank pose. Repeat on the other side.

Breathe normally through the practice of this asana, holding for a short duration. To achieve the shape of a plank, the shoulders need to be brought over the hands in the start position. Extend the spine by lengthening the neck, pointing the crown of the head forward and stretching the heels of the feet back. The body and spine in this pose are held in one straight line from crown of the head to the ankles. Begin making the left hand light and the right hand strong. Keep the eye gaze forward. Repeat ont he other side.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens and tone leg muscles, feet and ankles
- Strengths hands, wrists and arms
- Strengths shoulders, upper back and spine
- Improves balance
- Energizes the whole body

Watch out for

- Sagging hips (bring one knee to the floor)

- Curling forward (roll top shoulder back and/or wrap upper arm around the back)
- Bending arms (come down the forearm)

Contraindications

- Hernia
- High blood pressure
- Heart conditions
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Back injury

Modifications

- For wrists weakened or sore from carpal tunnel syndrome come down to the forearms (Dolphin side plank)
- For weakened shoulders, bring lower leg knee down and top foot to ground behind (place a folded mat or blanket under the knees)

Variations

- To complete the full pose, bend the top leg and take hold of the toe. Straighten the knee and left the leg. Turn the head and eye gaze towards the big toe
- Side plank twist (fallen triangle pose) From plank, bend the right leg and curl forward bring the leg underneath the body and extend the leg away from the body- resting on the outer edge of the foot. Lift the left arm and extend it upwards
- For a dynamic version of the pose, extend the top arm, then thread it under the body on the exhale, inhale and lift it up again.
- Visvamitra

Bhakasana (Crow pose)

Begin in a low squat – namaskarasana with feet shoulder width apart and toes pointed out at a 45° angle. Place the hands flat on the floor in front of the feet. Bend the elbows and slowly shift your weight forward onto the hands. The heels will begin to come off the floor. Engage the lower abdominal muscles to lift one knee and then the other onto the upper arms. Now bring the weight fully into the arms and hands. Squeeze the insides of the knees to the upper arms lifting one foot and then the other off the ground. To exit the pose lower the feet back to a low squat bring the hands into prayer to namaskarasana.

Paripurna Navasana (Boat pose)

Sit with the knees bent, feet flat on the floor and legs together. Allow the upper body to straighten, engaging the muscles of the upper back and abdominals. Gently hinge the upper body back to balance on the back edge of the sitz bones. Use the abdominals to lift the feet up off the floor. Lift the shinbones until they are level with the floor and then extend the legs out to a 45-degree angle from the ground. Hold the position for a few breaths, up to a minute then gently bend the knees to return the feet to the floor.

Benefits

- Deep strengthening of hip flexors
- Strengthens abdominals, back and legs
- Good for digestion as it stimulates the intestines

Watch out for:

- Chin lifting
- Collapsing in the lower back
- Lack of core strength- rectus abdominus popping out
- De-energized legs and arms

Contraindications

- Use caution with lower back injury- see modifications
- Use caution with high blood pressure, heart problems- see modifications to keep knees bent

Modifications

- Keep the knees bent
- Touch toes lightly to the floor
- Use the palms on the ground in a low V behind the body to gently support the pose
- Strap loop

Variations

- Half Boat Pose (Ardha Navasana)- From Full Boat Pose interlace the fingers behind the back of the head, gently curl the tail under and roll part way down. Lower the legs to eye level. Take a few breaths then carefully bend the knees to bring the feet to the floor and release.
- Hands above the head

Purvottanasana (Upward facing plank pose)

Begin in staff pose (Dandasana) with legs together and in front of the body. Bring the hands in back of the hips, fingertips pointing towards the body. Press the feet towards the ground and lift the hips upward. To exit the pose, lower the hips to the ground.

Benefits

- Strengthens shoulders, arms, chest and legs
- Stretches spine, back, chest and legs
- Benefits nervous system, alleviating symptoms of mild depression and fatigue
- Improves respiratory system, relaxing throat and opening chest

Watch out for:

- Collapsing arms (bend knees and bring feet flat on ground)
- Sagging hips (place block under feet and press feet down)

Contraindications

- Wrist injuries
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Back injuries

Modifications

- Reverse table top (Ardha Purvottanasana) with bent knees and bring feet flat on ground
- From staff pose (hands on blocks or blanket behind hips)

Variations

- From upward facing plank, raise legs vertical (one at a time)

Bhujapidasana (Shoulder-pressing pose)

To enter the pose, begin in a squat with feet shoulders-width apart. Bring the arms underneath the knees. Place the palms flat on the mat to the outside of each foot. Begin shifting the weight forward onto the hands. When the upper arms are under the thighs, squeeze them together. Now, rock the hips gently rock back to lift the feet off the ground. To anchor the pose, cross the ankles and lift the sternum. Hold for 5-10 breaths. To exit the pose, uncross the feet and lower them to the mat. Release the arms and return to the start position.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens arm muscles
- Increases flexibility in shoulder joints and lower back
- Massages abdomen and internal organs, especially the pancreas
- Improves balance and concentration

Watch out for

- Collapsing arms
- Legs sliding off arms
- Shoulders up by ears

Contraindications

- Sciatica
- Slipped disc
- Weak back
- Hernia

- Heart problems
- High blood pressure

Modifications

- Place blocks under hands, hips or both
- Practice facing a wall, walk feet up the wall and press feet flat against the wall
- Keep feet on ground

Variations

- Extend one leg in front, the other hooked over the arms
- Transition from shoulder press to plank or crow

Titbassana (Firefly pose)

Begin in a low squat (namaskarasana). Bring the torso forward. Slide the shoulders and upper arms underneath the thighs. Bring hands around the back of the legs and place them behind the feet. Rest the thighs on the upper arms. Transfer the weight of the body from the feet to the hands and arms. Now lift the feet off the ground and extend the legs. To come out of the pose, lower the feet lightly to the ground and come back to start position –squat.

The chest needs to slide forward, so the upper arms can reach underneath the thighs. Keep moving the chest forward and the seat back without letting the posterior touch the ground. Keep the chin level with the floor and lengthen the neck, pointing the crown of the head away from the body. Spread the fingers and press the finger tips into the floor. Round the shoulders and draw the navel in and up to lift. Now bring the pelvis forward, counterbalancing this movement by extending the legs and pointing the toes at the same time as pushing the seat back (without letting it drop to the ground)

Benefit comments

- Develops arm muscles
- Increases flexibility of shoulder joints and lower back
- Massages and tones abdomen and intestines
- Stimulates pancreas

Watch out for

- Twisting or collapsing wrists and elbows (keep fingers pointed straight and elbows bent back towards the body)
- Seat on the floor (bring the chest forward and extend back, neck and head)
- Shoulders and upper arms do not reach under thighs (keep feet on ground, gently working shoulders under)

Contraindications

- Sciatica
- Slipped discs and back injuries
- Hernia
- Heart problems and high blood pressure

Modifications

- Beginners may find placing bricks under the hands and/or feet will provide the extra boost needed to lift out and up in this pose
- Students with tight hamstrings and/or weak knees may keep knees soft or bent in this pose (see variations)

Variations

- Full pose, from firefly, straighten the arms pressing the inner thigh against the upper arms

Sitting, hip openers, forward bends

Dandasana (Staff pose)

Start from a seated position with the legs extended out from the body. Flex the feet and energize the legs drawing up the quadriceps muscles and lifting the knee caps. The feet and knees should point up to the ceiling. Lengthen the spine by lifting up from the sitz bones and creating a neutral pelvis. Draw the entire spine into alignment, paying special attention to keeping the back of the neck lengthened and gently engaging the throat. The arms reach down beside the body and the palms press down into the ground to create more lift through the spine.

Benefits

- Lengthens the spine, and hamstrings
- Strengthens the back muscles, abdominals and quadriceps
- Very grounding and meditative pose
- A great place to practice engaging through the bandhas
- Safe for most students to practice

Watch out for:

- Posterior pelvic tilt (tucking the tail under) If this is the case have the student sit on a block or bolster or try bending the knees
- Head out of alignment- either lifting the chin up and pressing the head forward, or dropping the chin directly to the chest
- Lack of inner thigh engagement- usually this means the kneecaps are facing outward and the legs can’t stay together
- Rounding in the upper back

Contraindications

- Be careful with students with bulging or herniated vertebral discs. Ensure that they are in a completely neutral position and not rounding in the lower back.

Modifications

- Sit on a block, cushion or bolster
- Roll a small blanket behind the back of the knees
- Perform with the back up against the wall or with a partner
- Place blocks underneath the hands if the palms do not reach the ground

Sukhasana (Easy seating)

Start with a folded blanket or foam block to sit on. Sit at the front edge of the block and fold the legs into a comfortable cross-legged position. Allow the knees to open wide and let one foot rest in front of the other. Allow the upper legs and shins to form a small triangle of space in front of the body. Allow the weight to rest evenly in the sitz bones keeping the pelvis in a neutral position. Lengthen the spine up from the pelvis. Allow the ribcage to float on top of the pelvis and the head to align over the torso.

There are several different options for the hands. The palms can be placed in the lap with one hand resting in the other- a mudra can be created by bringing the thumbs together to touch. Alternatively the hands can be placed on top of the knees wither with the palms down (a more grounding approach) or with the palms up- perhaps taking one of several mudras.

This posture can be held for any length of time and is a comfortable position to work on meditation.

Benefits

- Strengthens the back
- Opens the hips and ankles
- A calming position to energetically centre

Watch out for:

- Posterior pelvic tilt (rounding in the lower back). (Usually a higher block can correct this).
- Shoulders lifted
- Strain in the face
- Slumping

Contraindications

- Be careful with students experiencing knee injuries. Sometimes propping under the knees with folded blankets can alleviate discomfort. Also extending one leg to straight can ease pain and make it easier to sit for longer periods of time.

Modifications

- Sit on a block, cushion or bolster
- Extend one leg (as mentioned in Contraindications)

Padmasana (Lotus pose)

Sit with the legs outstretched straight in front, feet together without touching each other. Back, neck and head straight and comfortable. Hands on the side, palms faced down resting on the floor behind the buttocks. Relax the body. Bend the right leg slowly and carefully place the right foot on the thigh of the left leg. Try to keep the heel of the right leg close to the pelvic region as much you possibly can comfortably. Sole of the right leg must face the upward direction. Remain in this position for a few seconds. Bend the left leg slowly and repeat the same procedure mentioned abov. Place the hands on the knees with palms facing in the upward direction. Touch the outer edge of your thumb and index finger (or middle finger) to each other. The spine and head must be erect, shoulders relaxed and elbows slightly bent. Relax the whole body, close the eyes and take long, deep and slow breaths. In the final position, the knees touch the ground which might take time and practice.

Benefits

- Increases the energy level of the body
- Improves posture and function as a hip opener
- Useful in getting rid of the menstrual discomfort
- Stimulates abdomen, bladder, spine and pelvis
- Prevents the disorders of the female reproductive system
- Stretches the knees and ankles increasing their flexibility
- Enhances digestion and increase the blood flow in the abdominal region
- Improves concentration and keeps the mind calm and peaceful for meditative practices

Contraindications

- People who are affected by sacral infections, sciatica and weak or injured knees should doing avoid this pose.
- If you are a beginner or have an ankle or knee injury, perform this pose only under the supervision of a yoga instructor.

Modifications

- Half lotus
- Brick support

Variations

- Scale pose
- Twist
- Lotus peacock pose
- Lion

Virasana (Hero pose)

Begin in a kneeling pose. Sit back, lowering the buttocks to the ground and between the legs. Place the hands on the knees, palms down. Bring the spine and back upright, chin level with the floor. Close the eyes and relax the arms. Breathe normally using the nose, focusing attention of the inhale and exhale of air for 5minutes or longer. To exit the pose, open the eyes and bring the hands to the floor. Push up into a hands and knees pose. Stretch the legs back one at a time before returning to the start position.

In the start kneel position, the knees are together, with toes touching and heels apart. The front of the feet will be flat on the ground. When lowering the buttocks down to the ground, place hands on the calves, rolling the flesh away from the knee crease. When buttocks are touching the ground, tilt forward and move flesh to sides, so that seat is balanced evenly on both sit bones. The heels of the feet should be next to the hips.

Benefit comments

- Improves digestion (relieves symptoms for ailments such as peptic ulcers, hyperacidity, hemorrhoids)
- Strengthens pelvic muscles
- Prevents hernia and sciatica
- Improves circulation and flow of blood to genitals, improving reproductive and sexual functions
- Relieves menstrual disorders
- Stretches and strengthens muscles and tendons around ankles and knees

Watch out for

- Knee pain (exit the pose and/or use modifications below)
- Foot cramps or ankle pain (return to kneel position, stretch leg and foot back before returning to pose)
- Hips in the air or slumped to side (Use blocks to support pose)

Contraindications

- Knee injuries
- Osteoarthritis

Modifications

- For stiff knees, tight hips and pregnancy, place blocks under buttocks
- For knee injury and pregnancy practice meditation in seated crossed legs

Variations

- Reclining heroes pose (Supta Virasana). Place hands beside hips, lower spine to ground or bolster
- Paryankasana

Baddha Konasana (Cobbler or Butterfly pose)

Seated, with the knees bent and the feet flat on the floor, slide the heels towards the pelvis. Bring the soles of the feet together allowing the knees to relax towards the ground. Hold the big toes with the middle and index finger, or conversely, place the palms on the ankles or shins. Keep the outside edge of the feet on the floor. Lengthen the spine by drawing the hips, ribcage and shoulders into alignment. To deepen the posture, inhale to reach taller, and then exhale to fold forward from the hips.

Imagine the head of the femur (the upper thigh bone) relaxing down towards the floor, creating space between the hips and pelvis from which the spine can elongate. While folding forward, soften the breastbone and relax the head and neck. Use the breath to access the backspace of the body. Breathe into the lateral edge of the hips and up the spine. Use the exhale to release deeper.

Benefits

- Targets the hips and adductors. While folding forward, targets the spine.
- Helpful for menstrual cramps, infertility, urinary issues, anxiety and stress, menopause, heart disease.
- Stimulates the internal organs, including: spleen, liver, kidneys and gall bladder.
- Prepares the body for seated meditation

Watch out for:

- Students trying to force the knees down to the floor with their elbows or palms.
- Forcing the head towards the feet.
- Shoulders in the ears.
- Rolling the ankle joint (in some variations this posture is taught with the soles of the feet opening up to the ceiling like a book. This is not wrong, but may cause problems in the knee joint)

Contraindications

- Lower back or neck injury

Modifications

- For stiff bodies, prop the hips with a cushion or block, allowing the pelvis to be neutral rather than in a posterior tilt.
- For pain in the knees, place a bolster underneath the knees or support each leg with cushions.
- Place the feet a bit further away from the groin

Variations

- Flatten the tops of the feet on to the floor, increasing the arch in the spine.
- Bring the legs closer together.
- Bend forward towards the knees
- Raise the feet to the forehead

- Side bend
- Supine baddha konasana
- Rope version

Upavista Konasana (Straight angle pose)

Straight angle pose is a wide legged seated straddle, sometimes practiced as double splits. This pose requires time and patience, but its rewards are many. Straight angle Pose is the ultimate hip opener, improving flexibility of hip rotators and stretching the entire leg from hip to toe.

Begin in a seated position with your legs extended along the floor (staff pose). Spread the legs as wide as is comfortable. Flex the feet with toes pointing upward. Lift the torso up and out of the hips. Relax the shoulders and straighten back and spine. Bring hands to prayer and gaze to fingertips. To exit the pose, release the hands to the ground and draw legs together, returning to staff pose. Repeat daily to improve flexibility.

Yoga theory says that many emotions are stored in the hips. Straight angle pose seeks to release those emotions. On the inhale, breathe into the stretch; on the exhale release all tension. Relax and enjoy the space created by the absence of emotion.

Benefits

- Stretches and strengthens hips, groin, inner thighs, hamstrings and calves
- Improves flexibility of abductors and lateral hip muscles
- Stimulates spinal nerves and relieves lower back pain
- Reduces hip pain
- Improves circulation and blood flow to abdominal area
- Tones abdominals, hips and glutes

Watch out for:

- Tight or painful groins, hamstrings, hips (move to a more comfortable straddle)
- Slouching back (sit upright against a wall or bolster)

Contraindications

- Some hip injuries
- Some lower back and sciatica issues

Modifications

- Open the legs only as far as is comfortable
- Sit on a blanket or block to lift pelvis
- Sit against a wall for back support
- Sit facing a wall, sliding feet along for an extra stretch

Variations

- Fold forward
- Side bend
- Fold forwards towards the knee
- Kurmasana

Paschimottanasana (Seated forward bend)

Begin Seated with both legs extended out in front of the body. Adjust the pelvis to bring equal weight into both sitting bones. Engage the muscles of the legs, actively pressing the back of the legs into the floor and pressing out through the heels. Inhale to sit up tall through the spine and lift the chest (it may be necessary to sit up on a folded blanket or block). Press the hands down into the ground on either side of the legs to find more length in the spine. Exhale and fold forward from the hips to stretch over the tops of the legs. Press the sitting bones and the top of the leg bones back. The arms can reach forward to hold the outside edges of the feet (or ankles, or shins, if the feet are not possible). To keep the shoulders down and the neck lengthened, root the upper arm bones back in the same way the upper leg bones move back. The arms can then reach forward form this stable place. If the hands are wrapping the outside edge of the feet, soften the elbow joints and lift the arms away from the floor, the points of the elbows facing out to the sides.

This posture is best approached with patience and compassion as stubborn hamstrings and a tight lower back can leave students feeling frustrated. The goal of this posture is not to bring the head to the shins (though that may happen over time); rather the goal is to create length through the entire back of the body and to breathe deeply into the thoracic area. Envision a loop of energy starting from the toes all the way up the back of the legs, up the back of the pelvis, over the spine and back of the head, looping back to the toes. Keep the breath flowing deeply and the energy circling around the body like a cocoon.

Benefit comments

- Stretches the entire back of the body- calves, hamstrings, back, neck
- Calms the nervous system
- Aids in Menstrual discomfort
- Beneficial for digestive organs
- Stimulates the kidneys

Watch out for

- Pulling forward with the arms
- Shoulders lifted
- Pelvis tipping posteriorly and lower back hunching (sit on a block, blanket or bolster to help)
- Bending at the waist instead of the hips
- Feet and knees falling out of alignment
- Contraindications

- Use caution with students experiencing a back injury such as a bulging disc as deep flexion can increase symptoms

Modifications

- Sit on a block, cushion, bolster or folded blanket
- Roll a small blanket behind the back of the knees
- Perform with the back up against the wall
- Use a strap around the feet

Janu Sirsasana (Head to knee forward bend pose)

Begin in a seated pose with the legs extended. Bend the left leg, drawing the sole of the foot to the upper inside of the right thigh. The left knee should rest comfortably on the floor. Bring both hands to either side of the right leg. Inhale and turn towards the extended leg. Exhale and fold forward. Breathe slowly and deeply for five breaths. To come out of the pose, inhale back to the start position. Repeat the other side.

Benefit comments

- Stretches back and hamstrings
- Increases flexibility of hips
- Tones abdomen
- Massages internal organs of liver, pancreas, spleen, uro-genital system, kidneys
- Improves circulation to nerves and muscles of spine, back and pelvis

Watch out for

- Clutching foot, tugging on strap and straining the back to extend forward – advise students to lift the torso out of the hips and walk hands along the floor, leg or strap.
- Bent knee off the floor – place blanket, folded mat or block under leg or knee
- Rounding shoulders and flexion of back – place bolster on lap

Contraindication:

- Slip disc
- Sciatica

Modifications

- Place blanket or folded mat under the seat to support lower back and even out the hips
- Place blanket or folded mat under the bent leg to support hips and knees which are off the ground or uncomfortable in this position
- Bring a strap around the foot of the extended leg to support forward fold and back extension

Parivritta Janu Sirsasana (Revolved head to knee pose)

Begin in a seated position with the legs extended to the sides. Bring the sole of your right foot to the left inner thigh, pressing the right heel into the groin. With an exhale, slowly lean to the left, letting your left shoulder rest at the inside edge of the left knee. Extend your left arm forward grabbing the inside edge of the left foot. Inhale as you raise your right arm towards the ceiling. With an exhale extend the right arm overhead reaching for the outside edge of the left foot. If you cannot grasp the foot simply reach forward as you elongate the right side body. Keeping both hips anchored to the ground, hold as you breathe for 5 breaths. Gently release by first folding forward over the extended leg and then return to seated position. Switch sides when you are ready.

Benefits

- Stretches the spine, shoulders and side body muscles.
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Aides back pain
- Alleviates headaches

Watch out for

- Rounding the spine which can create strain in the back
- Straining the neck

Contraindications

- Avoid if respiratory illness occurs.
- Avoid if gastrointestinal discomfort exists.
- Do not practice if back or neck issues exist in the body.

Modifications

- To lessen hamstring tightness in the extended leg, place a blanket or towel under the knee to add support
- Place a block or towel beneath the bent knee to add support
- If you cannot grasp the foot with the hands use a strap around the foot

Variations

- Wide Angle Seated Forward Bend - Upavistha konasana
- Extended Side Angle Pose - Utthita Parsvakonasana

Marichyasana A (Pose dedicated to the sage Marichi I)

Begin from staff pose with the legs extended (dandasana). To prepare for the pose, stabilise the hips by sitting evenly on the sit bones, drawing the flesh out to the sides. Bend the left leg and place the foot sole flat on the ground. Place the right hand, palm down next to the right hip. Raise the left arm, fingers to sky.

Stretch the crown and sternum forward as you fold down, bringing the left arm to the inside of the knee. Keep stretching the left arm forward, until the arm pit makes contact with the shin. Wrap the arm back around the leg. Bring the right arm around the back waist and clasp hand to wrist. Extend the head crown and sternum forward, and then fold over the right leg, nose to knee. At the same time, relax the shoulders away from ears. Avoid rounding the back or compressing neck by keeping eye gaze towards the toes of extended leg. Flex the foot of the extend leg; press the heel of bent leg into the floor. Breathe normally. To exit the pose, release the arm bind. Place both palms on either side of the hips. Unfold and return to staff pose. Repeat other side.

Benefits

- Stretches and strengthens spine
- Stimulates spinal nerves and improves circulation to back muscles
- Tones and massages internal organs, stimulates liver and kidney function
- Stretches hamstrings
- Improves flexibility of shoulders, hips and wrists
- Calms the mind

Watch out for

- Rounding back
- Uneven or rolling hips
- Straining neck or shoulder in bind

Contraindications

- Asthma
- Digestive problems

Modifications

- Sit on block
- Place blanket or wedge under rolling hip
- Use strap to bind arms

Variations

- Twisted Marichi - Seated with left leg bent, bring left arm (elbow bent) to inside of left knee, right hand to back of right hip, twist torso and turn head to right. Repeat other side
- Standing Marichi –From Mountain pose, bend the left knee, wrap left arm around knee and bind with right. Repeat other side.

Ardha Baddha padma paschimottanasana (Half bound lotus seated forward extension)

From staff pose, bend the right leg. Hold knee with right hand and cradle foot with left hand. Lay the right foot onto the upper left thigh, drawing the heel near to the hip crease. Extend and stretch the right arm towards the toes, then wrap it back around the waist. Clasp two fingers around the big toe. To fold forward, maintain a straight spine, stretching head crown and sternum towards left foot. Extend the left arm, to hold left foot with two fingers. Hinge at the hips and fold over the left leg. Relax the entire body. Gently release nose to knee. To exit the pose, release hand hold and bind. Place the hands, palms down by sides. Gently hinge upwards to staff pose. Repeat other side.

Benefit comments

- Improves flexibility and reduces stiffness in knees
- Improves flexibility in shoulders, hips and ankles
- Stretches and strengthens back and spine
- Strengthens quadriceps
- Stretches hamstrings
- Massages internal organs
- Relaxes the nervous system
- Prepares the body for meditation

Watch out for

- Unsupported knees
- Rolling hips
- Twisting ankles
- Rounding backs

Contraindications

- Sciatica
- Knee and ankle injuries

Modifications

- Cross leg over thigh (just above knee)
- Place blanket under hips and/or block under bent leg knee
- Use strap to hold foot and bind
- Use strap to hold extended foot
- Remain in seated half lotus

Variations

- Bend extended leg back into virasana
- Standing – bend right leg into ½ lotus, wrap right arm around to bind. Fold forward. Repeat other side
- Reclining – bend right leg into lotus, hold with left two fingers. Repeat other side

- Headstand – in final position, fold right leg to ½ lotus, lower to ½ head stand
- Shoulder stand - in final position, fold right leg to ½ lotus, lower to plow

Trianga Mukhaekapada paschimottanasana (Three Limbs Face to One Leg Intense Stretch)

Begin with dandasana. Fold your right leg at the knee placing the foot beside the right hip joint. Slide your right calves muscles outwards with the hands. This makes a contact between the inner right calf muscles with the outer right thigh. Find your balance keeping the knees together and relaxing the shoulders. Inhale raise your arms above your head. Exhale bend forward on your left knee and embrace the left foot holding your left wrist. Place your head, then nose to the knee. Inhale with a half lift and rest your chin on the left shin. Gazing the toes hold this position for 30 -60 seconds and keep breathing, Inhale lift the trunk release the arms and come up. Exhale bring the palms to the floor on your sides. Repeat the same by folding the left foot. Once the round on the left foot completes, relax in dandasana.

Benefits

- Builds flexibility
- Rejuvenates abdominal organs
- Cures flat feet
- Stimulates the reproductive system
- Leaves calming effects
- Pain reliever
- Activates the Manipura chakra

Contraindicatons

- Pregnant women should avoid this asana without the help of any props and instructor.
- Do not practice it while recovering from any recent surgery.
- Avoid it if there is an injury in the back, hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, neck, and arms.

Modifications

- Yoga Block or Blanket
- Yoga strap

Krounchasana (Heron pose)

From Dandasana (staff pose), begin by drawing your left leg into Ardha Virasana (half hero's pose). Bending the right knee, allow your foot to rest on the ground. Exhale as you reach down with both hands to grasp the right foot. Inhale, lean back slightly into the seat keeping the torso long and avoid rounding the shoulders forward. With your next inhale, gently raise the right leg to at least a 45-degree angle from the floor. The leg can be lifted higher depending on hamstring flexibility. Hold Heron pose for 30 seconds to a full minute while breathing slowly. Gently release the right foot down to the ground. Allow the left leg to release back to Dandasana. Switch sides when ready.

When raising the leg think of seeking length throughout the body. Expanding with the extension from the top of the foot and the top of the head. Keep the seat firmly and evenly pressed into the ground. Before lifting the leg, draw the shoulder blades closer together to maintain the lift of the chest. Keep the gaze looking forward to avoiding strain on the neck.

Benefits

- Stimulates the abdominal organs and heart
- Stretches the feet
- Stretches the hamstrings
- Stretches the knees
- Strengthens the arches of the feet

Watch out for

- Knee pain in Ardha Virasana
- Lifting the gaze and straining the neck

Contraindications

- Knee issues
- Ankle issues

Modifications

- If knee issues arise in the Ardha Virasana posture, sit instead in Janu Srisasana
- A strap can be used around the foot if reaching for the foot is unavailable
- The extended leg can be bent slightly if hamstring flexibility is poor

Variations

- Add a Twist by placing the same side hand on the ground slightly behind the back and spinning the torso towards the extended leg

Gomukhasana (Cow face)

Begin in all fours. Bring the right leg in front of the left and draw two thighs together. Separate the heels and sit back, ensure that both sitting bones are touching the ground. (use a prop is necessary). The feet should be approximately the same distance from the hips on either side of the body. If the right knee is on top, stretch the left arm straight up toward the ceiling with the palm facing back, bend at the elbow to reach down between the shoulder blades. Reach the right arm out to the side of the body and again turn the palm to the back with the thumb facing down. Bend at the elbow and rotate from the shoulder to reach up between the shoulder blades. Clasp the fingers together if it's available. Reach the top elbow towards the ceiling and then bottom elbow towards the floor to deepen the stretch. Lengthen up through the spine. Stay in the pose for 1-2 minutes and then repeat with the other leg on top and the opposite arm position.

Benefit comments

- Opens the hips- especially beneficial for tight and gluteals.
- Opens the shoulders- especially targeting tight rotator cuff muscles.
- Opens chest and thighs
- Stretches the triceps

Watch out for:

- Sitz bones lifted
- Ribcage popping forward
- Head pushing forward
- Straining in the shoulders and neck

Contraindications

- Proceed cautiously with students experiencing shoulder injuries or neck problems

Modifications

- Sit on a block, cushion or bolster if the sitting bones don't make it to the floor
- Prop under the ankles or knees to decrease any discomfort at these joints
- Half Gomukhasana
- Hands in namaskar

Variations

- To increase the stretch into the hips and back, hinge forward at the hips to lay the torso over the top of the thigh
- Perform a simple twist with the upper body only.

Eka Rajakapottanasana (1 leg pigeon pose)

Pigeon pose is a great hip opener posture which also strengthens the legs. This intense hip opener is a good pose for beginners and has plenty of benefits.

Begin in Downward facing dog and fold the bended right leg forward between the palms. Scoop under the sacram and try to keep the spine in vertical position. You can swing to the left and right smoothly a few times. Sqaure the hips to the top of the mat. Try the position with back feet flexed and pointed as well.

Benefits

- Improves flexibility of hips and pelvis
- Stretches groin and inner thighs
- Strengthens back
- Massages and stimulates internal organs

Watch out for

- One or both hips off the floor (Use blankets, bolsters and blocks to even out the hips)
- Back leg angled out to side (bring knee and foot in line with hip)
- Upper chest rolling to side (fold forward onto forearms or remain in upright position, hands on blocks)
- Rounding upper back (fold forward onto forearms or remain in upright position, hands on blocks)

Contraindications

- Ankle and knee pain or injuries
- Lower back pain or injuries
- Painfully tight hips and pelvis

Modifications

- Folded blanket under the buttock of the bended leg
- Bricks under the hand
- Fold forward bringing the forehead towards the ground

Variations

- Pigeon pose extended (Curl toes of front foot to knee)
- Pigeon Pose with hands in prayer
- Strap
- Sole towards the sky and grab ankle with both arm

Hanumanasana (Monkey God pose)

Monkey pose, also known as the "splits" is an advanced leg stretch and hip opener. Monkey pose simultaneously stretches the front and backs of the legs. These are the muscles that get the most use in walking, running and cycling. Therefore the many benefits of Monkey pose, include prevention of injury from these sports. However, this also means that extra care should be taken when entering the full posture.

To start, begin in a hands and knees position. Place the right foot forward, foot sole flat on the ground. Place the hands on the right thigh, and draw the belly in to straighten the spine. Place the hands on the ground or blocks next to the hips. Slide the left knee back an inch of two. Gently extend the right leg straight, heel on the floor, toes pointing up. This is the modified half-splits version. To continue into the full Monkey Pose, keep sliding the right heel forward, simultaneously sliding left knee back, lowering the pelvis and both legs to the floor in one straight line. Close the eyes and bring the hands into prayer at heart centre. Hold for as long as is comfortable. To exit the pose, bring hands to the floor, draw the right foot back towards the body. Return the start position. Repeat other side.

Benefits

- Improves flexibility in legs, groin and hips
- Strengthens, tones and stretches hip flexors and quads
- Tones the pelvic area

Watch out for

- Groin strain (use bolster and/or blocks)
- Hamstring pain (modify to half-split)
- Back leg alignment (both legs should be in one line)
- Rolling to side (place bolster under pelvis, hands on blocks)

Contraindications

- Hamstring or groin injury
- Slipped disc
- Hernia
- Sciatica
- Hip injuries

Modifications

- Tuck back toe under for stability
- Place bolster or blanket under pelvis to avoid groin strain
- Practice half-split
- Place hands on blocks and pelvis on bolster, waiting for muscles to relax, rather than sliding into pose

Variations

- Extend arms upward
- Fold forward over front leg
- Bend back leg up and catch foot

Bhekasana (Frog pose)

Begin on the belly, with the legs stretched out behind. Bring the forearms onto the mat as in sphinx pose. Bend the legs back, heels reaching towards the buttocks. Turn and look over your right shoulder and reach back with the right hand. Press the palm of the hand on the top of the right foot and cup your fingers around the toe. Once you have a good grab on the foot, turn head and gaze back to centre. Balance on your hips bones, the turn over the left shoulder, reach back and place the left palm on the front of the left foot. Bring the gaze back to centre and hold for 5-10 breaths. To exit the pose, release the feet one at a time, bringing arms back to sphinx pose.

Benefit comments

- Opens hips and shoulders
- Strengthens inner thighs (adductors)
- Stretches quadriceps, tibialis anterior (front shin muscles), keens, ankles and Achilles tendon
- Massages inner organs and improves digestion
- Strengthens back muscles

Watch out for

- Twisting the back; keep hips square
- Straining to cup feet: use straps around ankles
- Discomfort from resting on hip/pelvis; place blanket under pelvis

Contraindications

- Knee, shoulder, ankle, back, hip injuries
- Pregnancy

Modifications

- Half frog: Complete one leg at a time
- Place bolster under ribcage
- Grab feet with strap

Parivrtta surya yantrasana (Compass)

The compass Pose is also known as Revolved Sundial Pose, which is the literal Sanskrit translation of the name of the pose. This is a deep pose which opens the hamstrings, hips, shoulders and chest. Because of the level of flexibility required for this pose, it falls into the intermediate category of yoga poses. The Compass Pose is one that can be performed gracefully to open up the sides while elongating the spine. Most Yoga teachers add this pose as a peak pose in their class plans. The Compass Pose requires equal parts strength and equal parts flexibility to master the pose.

Begin seated in Staff pose with legs stretched out and back long and shoulders open. Bring the left leg closer to the chest by hugging the left knee with both hands. Stay here for a few breaths and rotate the leg to open the hips as a preparation for the pose. Next step is to cradle the left leg, by bringing the left knee into the left elbow and holding the left ankle with the right hand. Breathe here for a few seconds and while cradling the leg and rocking to and fro. Next bring the left leg back to hook over the left shoulder. Fold the right leg in half seated cross-legged pose. Holding the left foot with the right hand, extend the left hand sideward by slightly bending your back. The final step is to hold firm the left foot with right hand and extend to straighten the left leg. Press into the left fingers as you add length to the extended right side of the body. Further straighten the left leg, while gazing upwards towards the right side. To come out of the pose, release the straightened leg back over the knee. Bring the left hand to hug the left leg. Release the left leg back to Staff Pose.

Benefits

- Opens the hips, obliques, hamstrings and chest.
- Allows the spine to become more flexible.
- Stimulates the internal organs, especially the digestive system.
- Allows the practitioner to become more patient with more patience.
- Relieves stress and constipation
- Strengthens lower back and hips.

Watch out for

- Stiff and tight hamstrings
- Tight Hips
- A pressure in the knee joints.
- Bent back
- Stiff obliques

Contraindications

- Hamstring injury
- Back or spinal cord injuries
- Hip replacements or injuries.

Modifications

- Use a strap to hook the ankle to stretch hamstring before opening into the pose.
- A blanket if the seated knee is lifting off the ground.

Variations

- Archer Pose
- Standing compass pose

Twisting asanas

Marichyasana B

Start by sitting in the Dandasana or Staff Pose. Your upper torso and lower body should be at right angles to each other with your spine at right angles to the floor. The shoulders should be relaxed and the rib cage should be lifted up. Bend your right leg at the knee. Place your right foot flat on the floor with the heel as close to the right buttock as possible. Your left leg should remain extended and rotated slightly inwards with the thigh pressed downwards on the floor. You right arm should be behind you with the palm on the floor to help maintain your balance. Make sure your spine is stretched to its maximum and begin your twist. Take a deep breath and as you exhale, twist your torso towards the right. Your left arm should be bent with the hand pointing upwards. If possible, place the bent left elbow in the outer crook of the bent right knee. If you cannot accomplish this without losing your balance, then hold on to your outer right knee

with your left hand. Your twist should be accomplished by revolving your spine and turning your stomach towards the bent right knee. Maintain your weight equally on both the inner and outer part of your right foot. Do not allow the right leg to be pushed either outwards or inwards from its original position. Maintain your weight equally on both of your sitting bones. Hold the pose for at least 30 seconds, twisting and lengthening with each breath. Return to the Dandasana position and repeat the pose in the opposite direction to complete a set.

Benefits

- Stretches the spine and the back muscles.
- Increases the flexibility and strength of the spine.
- Stretches and loosens the shoulder muscles.
- Massages the internal organs and glands make them function effectively.
- Improves digestion.
- Helps to relieve fatigue and rejuvenates the body.
- May help ease menstrual pain.

Ardha Matsyandrasana (Lord of the fishes)

Begin in a seated position with the legs stretched out in front. Bend the right leg and bring the foot across and to the outside of the left knee. Now bend the left leg, drawing that foot towards the outside of the right hip. Inhale to lift and turn the torso, bringing the left elbow to the outside of the knee and the right hand behind the back. At the same time turn head and eye gaze to look over the right shoulder. On the exhale press the left elbow against the right knee. To complete the pose, bend the left arm and open the palm. Breathe deeply and slowly for the duration of the pose. To come out the pose, release the left arm, inhale back to centre and on the exhale stretch the legs back to the start position. Repeat the other side.

Benefits

- Stretches and tones back and shoulder muscles
- Lengthens and energises spine
- Massages and tones abdominals
- Relieves digestive problems
- Aids function of liver, kidney and adrenal glands

Watch out for

- Back and/or shoulders curling forward – sit on block or folded blanket to help make space for twist
- Knee or foot off the floor – place blanket or folded mat underneath
- Slumped posture – place a block or folded mat under hand near base of spine

Contraindications

- Pregnancy
- Ulcer, hernia, hyperthyroidism
- Slipped disc

- Spine and back injuries

Modifications

- Place blanket, folded mat or block under seat to help lift torso for twist
- In case of neck issues, keep head and neck in line with torso – look to side

Variations

- Ardha Matsyendra ll- Move into the pose as described above – Instead of bending the arm, extend it along outside of top leg – holding the ankle.. To take this further externally rotate shoulder bringing hands to bind behind the back.

Supine positions

Pavana Muktasana (Knee to chest pose)

Begin from corpse pose (savasana). On the inhale, bend the right knee and interlock the fingers below the knee. The left leg remains extended and on the mat/ground. On the exhale, roll the head and shoulders off the ground, bringing the nose towards the right knee. Hold for 1-3 breaths. On the inhale, roll the head and shoulders back to the start position and release the right leg. Repeat 3 times with the right leg and then three times with the left leg.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens lower back muscles
- Improves flexibility of upper back and spine
- Massages abdomen and pelvic muscles
- Improves function of colon
- Remedy for painful wind and constipation
- Massages reproductive organs

Variations

- Dead bug – with both knees bent, bring hands underneath and press thighs to side of chest
- Dead bug rock - add knee circles or rocking
- Thread-the-needle-asana – crossing one leg over the other

Supta Virasana (see Virasana)

Supta Padanghustanasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Lie on your back stretching the legs on the floor and hands by your sides. Inhale, raise the left leg to bring it perpendicular to the floor. Raise the left arm and grab the left big toe between the thumb, index, and middle fingers. Keep the right leg stretched on the floor with right hand resting on the right thigh. Take 3-4 deep breaths. Exhale lifting the head and trunk off the floor. Bend the left elbow to pull the leg towards

the head keeping the knee straight. Simultaneously, bring the head and trunk towards the leg so that the chin rests on the left knee. Hold the pose for about 20 seconds breathing normally. Inhale, drop the head and trunk to the floor and bring the left leg back to perpendicular position. Bring the left leg down to the floor and repeat the above mentioned steps switching the leg and arm position.

Benefits:

- It stretches thighs, hips, hamstrings, calves and groin
- Makes your knees stronger
- Stimulates the prostate gland
- Vitalize your digestive organs along with improves digestion
- Gives relief in backache, sciatica and menstrual related discomfort
- Cures infertility, flat feet

Jathara Parivartasana (Reclining spinal twist)

To enter Reclining Spinal Twist pose, lie on the floor in Corpse pose. Raise your knees so the soles of the feet are on the mat. Bring the knees into the chest and hold them with the hands. Inhale and extend the left leg so it is lying on the mat. Exhaling and guiding the right knee with the left hand, slowly bring the right knee toward the mat on the left side of the body. Extend the right arm out to the right side of the body and gently turn the head to gaze over the right fingertips. Strive to rest the right shoulder on the mat. Both shoulders should be down and away from the ears. After holding for the desired length of time, bring the right knee into the chest while centering on the spine. Raise the left knee so both knees are held by the hands. Extend the right leg and repeat the pose with the left knee. To exit the pose, center on the spine, bring both knees to the chest and then lower the feet to the mat.

Benefits

- Relaxes and lengthens the spine.
- Stimulates and massages internal organs to stimulate proper functioning.
- Stretches the gluteal muscles.

Contraindications

- Recent back or knee injury/surgery.
- Hip pain.
- Back pain or disc disorders.

Variations

- Twist with both legs bent at the same time.
- Twist the legs as in Eagle pose before bringing over to one side.
- Practice with a straight leg crossing the body.

Inversions

Setu Bandhasana

To begin, lie on your back. Fold your knees and keep your feet hip distance apart on the floor, 10-12 inches from your pelvis, with knees and ankles in a straight line. Keep your arms beside your body, palms facing down. Inhaling, slowly lift your lower back, middle back and upper back off the floor; gently roll in the shoulders; touch the chest to the chin without bringing the chin down, supporting your weight with your shoulders, arms and feet. Feel your bottom firm up in this pose. Both the thighs are parallel to each other and to the floor. If you wish, you could interlace the fingers and push the hands on the floor to lift the torso a little more up, or you could support your back with your palms. Keep breathing easily. Hold the posture for a minute or two and exhale as you gently release this yoga pose.

Benefits

- Strengthens the back muscles
- Relieves the tired back instantaneously
- Gives a good stretch to the chest, neck and spine
- Calms the brain, reducing anxiety, stress and depression
- Opens up the lungs and reduces thyroid problems
- Helps improve digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause and menstrual pain
- Helpful in asthma, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Contraindication

- Avoid doing this pose if you are suffering from neck and back injuries

Variation

- 1 leg version
- brick under sacram
- straight leg

Sirsasana (Headstand)

Begin in vajrasana (seat to heels). Bring the fore arms down to the ground. Interlock the fingers and cup the hands together in a V shape to support the head. Place the crown of the head between the thumb mounds. Straighten the legs and walk the feet towards the head until the hips are over the shoulders. Now extend one leg straight up and then the other. Lift up through the torso and legs. To come down, lower one leg and then the other to the ground. Bend the knees and sit back into child pose.

Benefits

- Strengthens arms , shoulders and neck
- Improves breathing
- Relieves leg and back pain
- Strengthens core muscles
- Relieves fatigue, insomnia, stress and mild depression

- Improves nervous system
- Improves balance

Watch out for

- Collapsing wrists (Bring the hands and thumbs closer together)
- Collapsing shoulders (place a strap around the forearms)
- Neck pain (come out of the pose!)
- Hips in front or in back of shoulders (practice against a wall)
- Fly away legs (keep one leg straight and one to spring up and/or practice against the wall)

Contraindications

- Neck injuries
- Headache or migraine
- High blood pressure
- Heart ailments
- Pregnancy
- Menstruation
- Glaucoma or eye problems
- Ear infections

Modifications

- Dolphin or Puppy are both beginner poses which provide entry into head stand once the shoulders and core are strong enough to support the weight of the body. Students might begin in down dog or on all fours and then proceed as above but keeping the feet on the ground. This is a good alternative for pregnancy yoga.
- wall support
- Head stand with knees bent

Variations

- Headstand lotus pose (padmasana sirasana). Begin in sirasana. Slowly fold legs into ½ lotus of lotus (padmasana)
- Tripod headstand

Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand)

Begin in savasana, reclining on the back. Engage the abdominal muscles and raise the legs vertical, peeling the back away from the floor to bring the hips over the shoulders. Place the hands on either side of the waist below the rib cage and lift up through the torso, pointing the toes. The elbows should be shoulder-width apart, the chest pressing toward the chin. The legs should be straight with feet together and touching. To exit the pose, bring the toes to the ground behind the head (plough pose) and roll slowly down to start pose.

Benefits

- Stimulates the thyroid gland
- Improves circulatory, respiratory, reproductive, nervous and endocrine systems
- Calms the nervous system
- Boosts the immune system
- Stimulates parathyroid, stimulating bone growth
- Strengthens and tones abdominals, legs and back muscles
- Relieves pressure from hemorrhoids
- Improves flexibility of neck and upper spine

Watch out for

- Shoulder or neck pain (come out of the pose)

Contraindications

- Enlarged thyroid, liver or spleen
- High blood pressure
- Back injuries
- Menstruation and pregnancy
- Slip disc

Modifications

- Prep pose (back flat on ground, legs raised vertical)
- ½ Shoulder stand (Legs raised 45°)
- Legs up the wall
- Chair style (lay with lower legs across chair, hand holding chair legs. Hold there or lift hips up to seat and lean legs on chair back)

Variations

- From shoulder stand final pose, lower one leg horizontal (over body). Raise and repeat other side
- From shoulder stand final pose, lower both leg horizontal (over body). Bend one knee to nose. Straighten and repeat other side
- From shoulder stand final pose, fold one leg into ½ lotus. Hold or fold the other, performing full lotus in shoulder stand.

Halasana (Plough pose)

Begin in Savasana with legs together and arms beside the body. The hands will lay flat with the palms pressing down. Raise the legs vertical and peel the back away from the ground, bringing the hips over the shoulders and the toes behind the head. The shoulders, hips and ankles should be aligned in the start position to avoid tilting or toppling over. Exhale to lower the toes onto the floor behind the head. Using the

hands to support the back, walk the toes away from the head and lift the thighs parallel to the floor. To exit the pose, bring the hands flat to the ground and slowly lower the back vertebrae by vertebrae back to start pose – Savasana.

Benefits

- Strong stretch to the back
- Massages abdominal muscles and internal organs
- Stimulates digestion, spleen, suprarenal glands
- Improves function of pancreas, liver and kidney
- Tones abdominals, legs and spinal nerves
- Relieves back tension and/or spasms
- Improves spinal flexibility
- Stimulate metabolism
- Regulates thyroid

Watch out for:

- Rolling over sideways (place bolsters or blocks by sides)
- Neck or back pain (come out of the pose)
- Contraindications
- Slipped disc
- Hernia
- Sciatica
- High blood pressure
- Arthritis of the neck

Modifications

- For tight back or shoulders bring the toes onto wall, blocks or chair
- For weak backs place blanket, bolster or block under hips
- For tight hamstrings bend knees and place near to ears

Variations

- Practice in a sequence, beginning with shoulder stand (Sarvangasana) and lowering legs into plough (intermediate/advanced)
- Shoulder stretch – Walk feet in towards head and hold toes
- Dynamic plough- Practice in a flowing movement, beginning from savasana, raising legs and hips, bringing toes over-head, then rolling back lifting to a sit-up position and finally into a forward bend.

Karnapidasana (Knee ear pose)

From savasana with the hands, palms down by the sides. Press the palms into the floor and using the abdominal muscles raise the legs slowly over the head. Bring the toes to the floor behind the head. Turn the palms upward and place the hands behind the ribcage to support the back. Bend the knees and hold for as long as comfortable. Return to the start position by straightening one leg, then the other. Bring the palms back to sides, palms pressing down. Using the abdominals, slowly roll down one vertebra at a time, buttocks, then legs, returning to savasana.

Benefits

- Full extension and stretch of spine
- Improves flexibility of shoulders and neck
- Strengthens back and abdominal muscles
- Massages internal organs, improving circulatory, liver and kidney function

Watch out for

- Forcing of toes to floor or knees to ears to reach final position (let gravity do the work and/or place chair, bolsters, blocks under knees and feet.
- Straining of abdominals or back (raise one leg at a time)
- Compression of neck (lie with back nd neck stretched out on floor, place blanket under shoulders and neck if needed)

Contraindications

- Hernia
- Slipped disc
- Sciatica
- High blood pressure

Modifications

- Place feet on chair or wall
- Place blocks or blankets under thighs, knees, upper body and neck

Variations

- Hold ankles
- Fold arms around backs of knees
- Raise sole towards the sky

Matsyasana (Fish pose)

To begin lay flat on the floor with the knees bent and feet firmly rooted to the floor. Slide the hands (palm-side down) underneath the buttocks. Tuck the forearms and elbows close to the torso and press down. Lift

the upper chest and arch the back. Let the head tilt back. If possible rest the head crown on the floor. Next stretch the legs out one at a time. Press the backs of the legs into the floor and stretch out through the heels. Take five full breaths. To exit the pose, gently lower the head and back to the floor. Bend the knees and hug them to the chest.

Benefit comments

- Opens chest
- Stretches and stimulates muscles and organs for belly and throat
- Stretches hip flexors (psoas) and intercostals (muscles between ribs)
- Strengthens upper back and neck
- Improves posture

Watch out for

- Neck strain – avoid placing weight on head in final pose

Contraindications

- High or low blood pressure
- Back or neck injury

Variations

- From final position, lift legs off floor
- From final position, slide hands out from beneath body and extend upwards, fingers to sky
- Place legs into lotus position

Hand stand

Begin in downward facing dog. Spread the fingers and press the fingertips into the ground rooting the hands and activating both arms and shoulders. Walk the feet towards the hands until the shoulders come over the wrists. Bend one leg and hop off the foot, bringing the hips over the shoulders and swinging the straight leg upwards. Practice the bent leg hop 3 times on each side. Straighten the bent leg and stretch both legs along the wall. Keep the shoulders blades broad and lifted, externally rotating the upper arms to open up the thoracic spine area. Eye gaze is on the ground (between the hands). Remain in the pose for 10 breaths, lifting up from the finger tips, through the arms, shoulders, torso, legs and arches of the feet. The wrists, shoulders, hips, legs and feet need to be in one straight line to hold the balance.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens wrists, arms, shoulders
- Stretches the belly
- Improves balance
- Balances the nervous system
- Relieves mild depression and anxiety

Watch out for

- Collapsing arms (use strap around upper arms).
- Fingers pointing out (fingers should be pointing straight).
- Running starts (Begin with hands rooted).
- Flaying legs (one leg is bent for spring, the other is straight for swing).

Contraindications

- Back, wrist or shoulder injury.
- Neck injury.
- Pregnancy and Menstruation.
- Headache.
- Heart condition or high blood pressure

Modifications

- For beginners it is advisable to practice against a wall.
- For intermediates, students might practice with a partner to stand behind and hold (but never hauls up) the swing leg and then the other.

Variations

- Bunny hop – Both legs are bent and used to spring or hop up, lifting hips over shoulders and then straightening legs up into handstand.
- Begin in Prasarita Padottanasana (wide straddle forward bend) straighten the arms and press up into handstand

Vrshikasana (Scorpion pose)

Scorpion pose combines a challenging inversion with a deep backbend. Scorpion pose is an advanced yoga posture that requires a strong forearm balance. Scorpion pose in its full extension resembles the shape of a striking scorpion that arches its tail above its back and then strikes beyond its head.

To start, begin on hands and knees. Lower the forearms to the floor, elbows aligned with shoulders (hands turned slightly in) Straighten one leg at a time and lift into forearm stand. Bend the knees and lift the head. Arch the back and bend deeply, slowly lowering the feet onto the head crown. To exit the pose, lower one leg at a time to the floor, returning to start pose.

Benefit comments

- Strengthens arms and back
- Open chest
- Strengthens shoulders and shoulder flexibility
- Strengthens hips and hip flexibility

- Improves spinal flexibility and tones spinal nerves
- Improves circulation in the lower limbs and abdomen
- Improves balance

Watch out for

- Loss of balance (practice against wall)
- Back strain (lower legs in stages or rest against wall)
- Collapsing arms (place bolster under chest)

Contraindications

- Back and hip injuries
- Vertigo
- High blood pressure
- pregnancy

Modifications

- Practice with hands two feet from the wall. Bend the knees and place feet against the wall. Walk the feet down the wall, deepening the backbend. Go as far as is comfortable
- Place bolster under chest and feet against wall

Variations

- Begin from head stand (lower forearms to floor)
- Begin from locust (with chin on floor)

Relaxaton poses

Savasana (Corpse pose)

Come to lie on the back with the legs open and the arms releasing at the sides. Carefully lift the pelvis slightly to tuck the tailbone down. For those with tight hip flexors or hyper-lordosis, placing a bolster under the knees will help to make this adjustment. Next, rock the upper body slightly to allow the shoulders blades to tuck in and down, releasing the front of the chest. In doing this the arms should relax to the appropriate distance at the sides of the body. Turn the palms up. Lengthen through the back of the neck, relaxing the back of the head into the ground beneath you. Some students may need a pillow behind the head to allow the neck to release.

Begin to scan the body for gripping and tension. Allow tension to melt from the body, releasing the jaw, the inner ears, the nose. Relax the eyes and forehead, allowing the eyes to sink to the back of the head. Release control of the breath. Allow the breath to breathe you.

It is recommended that for every half hour of Asana practice, 5 minutes of Savasana is allotted. This may also vary depending on the intensity of the class and the attention span of the students. It is very important not to skip this posture.

The most important thing to remember as a teacher is that you are holding the energy for your students to feel safe and to completely let go. Keep an eye on your students and look for signs that they have released before guiding them back into the room.

To come out, first, softly waken up the body. Deepen the breath and begin to bring life to the limbs. Roll over to the right side of the body (to avoid putting pressure on the heart). Take a few breaths here. When you are ready, use the top arm to press yourself up.

Benefits

- Stress release and deep relaxation.
- Calms the nervous system.
- Beneficial for insomnia, headaches, pain relief.
- Helps to lower high blood pressure.
- Gives rest to Respiratory & Circulatory system.
- As the activities of the muscles are reduced, the supply of blood and oxygen to them eventually reduces.
- In short, because of the less fresh blood requirement, the participation of respiration system also reduces comparatively.
- Naturally the activities of the respiratory system and blood circulation system are very slow and thus they get rest.
- Which gives rest to Heart: Pumping of the heart also reduces and heart gets rest. In general the activities of body are reduced.
- Which gives rest to nervous system & Brain: The activities of nervous system are also reduced. Hence the brain gets rest when the body relaxes and the breathing is slower.
- Which makes mind Stable: In turn the mind becomes stable and steady with slow breathing. So this Asana gives rest to the body as well as the mind.

Restorative postures

Restorative yoga uses long-held, supported resting poses to create the conditions for us to cultivate the skill of conscious relaxation and most importantly to release unnecessary habitual tension in the body and mind. It's a little bit closer to a meditation practice than a movement practice—it's a way of practicing "meditation". For many of us, hatha yoga practices can easily become another opportunity to over-effort or get caught up in accomplishing or striving to get better at a pose. Restorative yoga is about, "How can I let my body and mind unwind? How can I let go? How can I do less?"

Benefits of Restorative yoga

- Enhances flexibility
- Deeply relaxes the body
- Stills the mind
- Improves capacity for healing and balancing

- Balances the nervous system
- Boosts the immune system
- Develops qualities of compassion and understanding toward others and self. Acceptance, accept all how is it, but work to improve
- Enhances mood states

Restorative yoga helps us discover where we are holding tension.

The actual effort involved in restorative yoga is the willingness to look at how and where we are holding tension, and to relax our body on the ground, allowing the breath to come in more, so the tension that we find can be softened or less gripping. Discovering where and how we hold tension helps us find room for change, so that tension won't limit our physical, emotional, and mental wellness and our comfort in our body.

The grounding; complete, full breathing; and quietness of restorative yoga help us elicit the relaxation response, a neurological response that tells us we are safe, pulls us out of "flight or fight" mode, and initiates the body's self-healing process. We switch over from worrying about staying "safe" to fostering the longevity systems of longterm health, including digestion, elimination, reproduction, growth and repair, and immunity.

Restorative yoga helps us face what we are avoiding about ourselves.

Most of us are programmed to "do" a lot—it keeps us engaged and makes us feel productive and in control. But our habit of running around, conquering our to-do lists, and fueling ourselves with coffee and ambition can often be a way we avoid deep discomforts and unwelcome feelings in the body and mind. Restorative yoga asks us to stop engaging in all the doing and face what we really need to look at about ourselves. To learn about, befriend, and care for the whole of ourselves in a way we are not used to. This is an essential step for health and healing, for true renewal. A lot of people think relaxing is about letting go, but rather than throwing out, we are trying to make space for what's uncomfortable and to allow more space for the full experience of who we are.

1. Benefit from Full and Deep Stretches

Think you have to "work" to give your body benefit? Active practice is fabulous, but there's only so long that you can stay in an intense backbend without feeling the burn. Long, supported poses help your body to fully engage, soften, and allow the precise positioning to work its magic.

2. Enhance Flexibility

All forms of yoga help make you bendier, but regular use of restorative poses leads you more quickly to this nirvana. However, Restorative yoga is not a stretching class and there is no end goal involved, like being able to touch your toes after 10 sessions. You are exploring what happens when you release the tension your body habitually holds.

3. Find out Where You Hold Your Stress

Restorative poses give you the opportunity to notice where you hold this tension—kind of like a dye that sticks to the parts of you that are bound-up and dense. Once you come to this realization, you can make small changes in your everyday life to reduce the stress and tension you allow to build up in your body.

4. Trim Fat and Lose Weight

A 2013 study from the University of California, San Diego showed that restorative yoga helps overweight women trim fat. The study compared restorative yoga with a more active stretching regime over 48 weeks, and found that women practicing yoga lost more subcutaneous fat. The yogis also lost more weight than the stretchers. One explanation may be that restorative yoga reduces cortisol levels—of which high levels are linked to increased abdominal fat.

5. Boost Your Immune System

A regular restorative yoga practice helps to improve your immune system and makes you less of a victim in the face of all those cold and flu viruses flying around.

6. Balance Your Nervous System

Use a restorative practice to engage your nervous system and take your body into a state that allows for renewal and rejuvenation. Benefits include optimizing energy flow to the organs, tissue renewal, and reduced “fight or flight” response.

7. Quiet Your Mind

Restorative yoga can be a calming hug for your overstimulated mind. Beware, though—it may look like the yogi is taking a nap, but once you get into them, you realize how challenging they can be. Be patient; just because your body is resting doesn’t mean your mind will automatically grow silent. Over time, you will learn how to drop into a place of stillness and be content peacefully basking in the present moment.

8. Recover from Illness

We all need rest, whether or not you’re recovering from muscle strain, a broken bone, a bad bout of flu, or a chronic illness. Just because you’re not practicing more “active” asanas doesn’t mean you can’t benefit from yoga’s healing powers.

Restorative yoga allows you to practice when your energy is low and your body is building strength.

9. Heal Emotional Pain

Just as you need to build physical strength after illness, you need to heal emotional injuries. Restorative poses offer soothing care for when you are processing the loss of a loved one or a relationship, coming to terms with a change in your life, or dealing with depression or anxiety.

10. Segue to a Meditation Practice

If you want to benefit from meditation and you're not sure how to start or how to continue, Restorative yoga provides a bridge between familiar poses and, to many, the unfamiliar and often intimidating practice of meditation. You may feel vulnerable, emotional or anxious when practicing Restorative yoga—this is all part of the powerful process where you create space and let go. Wearing an eye mask, wrapping yourself in a blanket, or keeping your feet up on the wall can help ground and calm you. Some poses help your heart, some assist your lungs. Others benefit the entire body. All are nourishing and life-enhancing when practiced regularly.

Vinyasa

Vinyasa means "a series of movements linked together by breath." Vinyasa also implies a fluidity of concentration through change. Yoga methods such as Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga incorporate this transition between postures. Sun Salutations are a form of Vinyasa, as they link together by movement and breath the postures contained within them. The benefits of Vinyasa are increased cardiovascular levels which produce heat and sweat. Heat allows the muscles to stretch more easily. Sweating, when coupled with the wringing out of the body's tissues and organs that the postures encourage, can be detoxifying. Incorporating Vinyasa into your practice or teaching will increase the level of difficulty as far as endurance and strength are concerned. Vinyasa–style yoga also can be an accessible way for newer students to engage in practice. A faster paced class is fun and engaging. At the end of a Vinyasa practice, often no encouragement is needed for students to sink into a deep Savasana.

The drawback of Vinyasa is simply that it is not effective if you can not do it. The jumpthrough transition from a seated posture through Vinyasa requires a certain ratio of arm to torso length to move back smoothly without one's feet getting stuck on the way. For older students, the fast-paced movement may be too demanding and sometimes dangerous. Students with injuries or misalignments may not be able to pay attention to optimal alignment when in a posture for only one breath. When planning a class, you could choose to incorporate Vinyasa, you could choose to give it as an advanced modification, or choose to leave it out entirely. Refer to your intention for practice and see if Vinyasa is a fit for that intention.

Effect of vinyasas

Vinyasa has a wide range of beneficial effects for the body and the practice. Sequences of vinyasa movements will help you understand your range of motion, structural tensions, and overall body awareness. It improves coordination, stimulates the flow of blood and lymph through the body, accelerating your metabolism, immune responses, and removal of toxicity. Vinyasa done with the whole

body, and more specifically, sequences in which the spine must change shape, will most powerfully achieve these effects.

Simple movements for one portion of the body at a time, such as arms, or even just one leg, can be used for working with specific issues in joints or muscles and increasing awareness in those areas. Vinyasa is a good way to warm up the body for deeper stretches in static asana and helps focus the mind on the physical sensations and breath awareness. All parts of the body should keep a feeling of connection to the centre of the body while moving. Vinyasa is often done in repetitions. Vinyasa is also the way we explore from one static asana to the next to experience different states of consciousness by patterns of the nervous system.

Yin and yang yoga

Yin and Yang refer to a duality of energies. Yin, like the moon, is reflective, cooler and more feminine. Yang is active, heating, and dynamic. We contain both energies and require a balance of both for optimum health. Dynamic asana practice such as Sun Salutations, back bending and arm balancing is Yang in nature. Yin refers to a style of practice that focuses on long-held postures, usually seated, that focus not on heating and stretching muscles, but on elongating and strengthening connective tissue. Yin Yoga practice can be very intense, as sensations move through the body and mind. In this way Yin Yoga can also prepare us to face adversity with steadfastness.

The key principles of Yin Yoga are quite simple:

- Find an appropriate edge in the posture after aligning muscle, bone and connective tissue.
- Move as little as possible so the muscles of the body relax and the connective tissues begin to stretch.
- Remain still.

The simple beauty of this practice is in itself very Yin in nature. Good times to do a Yin practice are early in the morning, later at night, or before a Yang style practice. Yin is an excellent counterpoint to a regular dynamic asana practice.

Appropriate stress

All living things require appropriate stress and rest to function optimally. Yin, or connective tissue, has often been seen as “inert” tissue by western medicine–meaning it does not have the ability to move on its own. Applying Yang style training to Yin tissue is indeed dangerous, and since all studies of training applied to Yin tissues were Yang in nature, attempting to train Yin tissues was seen as unsafe. What the studies failed to understand was that appropriate training for Yin tissue was needed. Because of this lack of understanding, “safety” in training the body generally has been understood as “don’t stress the joint tissue” –joint tissue is Yin tissue. However, connective tissue is always shortening and lengthening, therefore not inert. If it is not stressed at all, it will atrophy just like muscle tissue does. A good example of this is setting a broken arm bone, and putting it in a sling for protection. When the cast comes off, the bones have healed, but the shoulder that was immobilized by the sling is now “frozen.” The connective tissue has shortened to the minimum it thinks it needs to for that new environment; that is, the environment of immobilization created by the sling. This same principle is at work when we sit at a desk all day. The result is tight hips– the connective tissue in that area has shortened, and will stay that way unless appropriate training of the connective tissue (and muscles) strengthens and lengthens it again.

Yin Yoga method

Almost all Yin Yoga postures are done in a seated, prone or supine orientation. This is because the muscles of the body need to be relaxed in order to target the connective tissues. When a muscle engages, it pulls the bones it is attached to closer together and shortens the distance between them. When this happens, the connective tissues around that joint get shorter, not longer. When the muscles around a joint are relaxed, and some stress to that area is applied in the form of a yoga posture or a pull of some kind, the connective tissue will be targeted and encouraged to respond to the stress by strengthening and lengthening.

(Try pulling on your right index finger with your left hand, with the muscles of your right hand relaxed. You should feel the bones of the finger separate and bump back together as you release the tension on the finger. Now try the same thing with the muscles of your right finger fully engaged. You will not be able to pull the bones apart). The sensations are quite different than a Yang style practice. There is often quite a bit of intensity of sensation during the posture, and a temporary feeling of fragility upon exiting the posture–this is normal in Yin practice. Yin and Yang are not absolutes–just like the Yin/Yang symbol, there is always an element of Yin within Yang, and Yang within Yin. It may not be possible to completely relax all the muscles of the body in a given pose, but relaxing the targeted area will result in the connective tissues of that area experiencing the majority of the stress.

Yin Yoga asanas

Many poses are similar if not the same in external shape as Yang style asana; the difference is a muscularly contracted and controlled pose versus a Yin approach. Paul Grilley has deliberately given the Yin postures English names in order not to confuse a Yin posture with a Yang posture. If you experience numbness or tingling in any area of the body during a Yin (or any!) posture, adjust the posture to relieve that sensation–it is indicative of nerve impingement.

Some Yin Postures

- Ankle stretch
- Butterfly
- Half butterfly
- Cat pulling its tail
- Childs pose
- Frog
- Happy baby
- Lying twist
- Shoelace
- Snail
- Sphinx/seal
- Square
- Seated forward bend
- Sleeping swan
- Toe squat

Teaching Yin Yoga

A Yin Yoga class feels very different than an active, or Yang class. There can be components of both Yin and Yang within a Yin class, and there are no “rules” for sequencing Yin postures. Yin postures can be held anywhere from 2-20 minutes. After 20 minutes, research so far seems to indicate diminishing returns as far as stimulating connective tissue goes.

Generally, some Yang movement between postures is beneficial in moving energy in the body and to “clear” before the next Yin posture. Yin Yoga is not Restorative Yoga. The sensations are often intense. A student with injuries should take care practicing Yin Yoga, and not all Yin Yoga poses are right for everyone.

Students should be encouraged to find an appropriate edge and remain still, using any props they find helpful, and moving deeper into any posture as appropriate for them. Yin Yoga is a quiet practice, and a great introduction to the principle of "Pratyahara" or sense withdrawal. Students who have difficulty sitting in mediation might find Yin Yoga a great tool to move deeper within as preparation for a sitting practice. As a teacher, you will find that there is lots of time and space to talk. Observation and physical adjustments are not as essential as in a Yang style class. The nature of the practice allows the teacher time to talk about the effects of Yin, or introduce and expand on philosophy related to this practice. Allowing space for silence is also very nice for the student–space to truly experience the practice.

Yin Yoga versus Restorative Yoga

If you walked past a Yin Yoga class, and then walked past a Restorative Yoga class, you might think the same thing was going on in both classes. Both Yin and Restorative Yoga use props to support the body, both are done mostly in seated, supine or prone positions, and both require the postures to be held for a relatively long duration. The difference is Restorative Yoga's aim is to create an environment where the body's "relaxation response" takes over. When this happens the organs of the body are stimulated to health and the nervous system also benefits in an environment of decreased agitation. The goal of propping the body in Restorative Yoga is to make sure there is total comfort so the Relaxation Response kicks in. Yin Yoga's aim is to target the connective tissue and stress it appropriately. This usually involves a certain amount of discomfort.

Four reasons to stress the joints:

1) Degeneration
2) Contracture
3) Fixation
4) Hyaluronic Acid

Degeneration

As has been stated, connective tissue needs to be stressed appropriately as does muscle tissue. Without periods of stress and rest this tissue is in a state of immobilization and will degenerate–meaning it will become less massive and weaker. Degeneration is often seen in older people, and the accompanying fragility, especially in the spine, is visible in an older population.

Contracture

Connective tissue shortens without movement or stress, and lengthens with appropriate stress. To maintain the body's maximum mobility, this tissue, as well as muscle tissues, needs to be stimulated regularly. In our modern daily activities such as sitting, driving, sleeping, there is almost no articulation of the joints of the lower back.

Fixation

Fixation occurs when two smooth surfaces are compressed and surrounded by a fluid, like a cold glass of water on a coaster on a hot day. The water drips down the glass and creates a seal between the bottom of the glass and the coaster. When you pick the glass up, the coaster comes with it. The pressure from the glass on the coaster and the fluid around the bottom of the glass creates fixation. It takes force to pop the coaster off the bottom of the glass. (Try pushing your palms together, wrapping your fingers around the

back of your hands and squeezing all the air from between your palms. Then as you pull your palms apart quickly, you will hear a “pop”–this is de-fixation). This example is mirrored in the joints of the spine. If not articulated regularly, the joints of the spine are in an environment where they can easily become fixated. Compressed due to gravity and the surrounding fluid, once fixated they require movement and tension to become de-fixated. As we age, it becomes more difficult to de-fixate the joints of the spine, the connective tissue and muscles become too short and too tight due to immobilization.

Hyaluronic Acid

Hyaluronic acid is the major constituent of synovial fluid, and is produced in the connective tissue of the body. This coiled molecular structure draws over 1,000 times its own weight in water to itself. As we age, we literally dry out: hyaluronic acid production decreases. Stimulating connective tissue has been show to increase production of this important lubricating molecule. In ancient Yogic teachings, vast numbers of “Nadis,” or meridians of energy, are mentioned. Of these innumerable nadis, we are told three are of interest to the Yogi–Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. The Nadis, according to modern meridian theory, are water-rich phases lying within the connective tissue of the body. These meridians are not visible to the eye, as they are not encased in a tube structure like a vein. Upon death, all fluids dissipate from the tissu-es of the body, so these nadis, or meridians, are almost impossible to locate when dissecting a corpse. It is possible that the ancient Yogis invented Hatha Yoga intuitively, in order to keep this energetic and communicative system of the body healthy.

The Future of Yin Yoga?

Both Yin and Yang Yoga are important to maintain optimal function of the body, both physically and energetically. Many students experience great benefit from Yin Yoga, and some postures can create discom-fort to an inappropriate level in some students. It is possible that employing alignment principles and appropriate propping of the body before surrendering into a Yin posture may alleviate this discomfort, thus helping to align the connective tissue and optimizing the benefits of Yin Yoga. The practice is still fairly new to many, and time will reveal the possible articulations and interpretations of the practice.

FUNTIONAL YOGA ANATOMY

The human body is the means to experience the world and our physical yoga practice. The physical systems–nervous system, digestive, endocrine and circulatory systems, and soon–serve as a barometer of this experience. You may notice, for example, your ability to remain calm, maintain space between yourself and stressful circumstances as a symptom of a regular yoga practice. Stress hormones are less agitated, the nerves remain calm as a result of the balancing effects of yoga and meditation. The musculoskeletal system responds to your practice in a variety of ways. You may experience less back pain as a result of the balancing effects of asana. As ranges of motion through the shoulders and chest increase, the ability to receive a full breath of air improves, and the incidence of shoulder and neck discomfort may decrease. A greater sense of wellbeing, clarity of mind, and absence of the distraction of pain may very well lead to the ability to approach life with more openness and humor. Understanding the workings of the body provides a foundation for communicating the body’s intelligence to others. By developing your fluency in functional, physical anatomy, your eloquence and creativity as a yoga teacher develops. Skillful instruction balances

science and art. This section provides a brief overview of the body systems as it applies to functional movement and asana. A basic understanding of functional anatomy will aid you as an instructor to orchestrate a creative, fun and effective yoga class.

The Key Difference Between Yogic Exercise and Regular Exercise

The common feature of typical physical exercises is that they often involve movements which are repetitive, rapid and jerky. Yogic exercises, on the other hand, involve little movement and are done in a non-repetitive, slow, and gentle manner. The yoga posture (Asana) is a static exercise that`s done with normal breathing.

All the Pranayamas are also to be practiced in a still meditative pose with no movement at all.

Mudras/Bandhas are the yogic practices done with minimum muscle contractions.

Typical Exercises: Typical Exercises emphasize on vigorous and fast movements, which stimulate the secretion of adrenaline and other hormones in the body and thereby stimulate the mind and the nerves. These are designed to strengthen voluntary muscles, making them well shaped and healthy. However, a lot of strength and energy is required to perform them. Physical exercise also produces a large quantity of lactic acid in the muscle fiber, causing fatigue.

Yogic Exercises: Asanas involve static and comfortable postures with a major emphasis on breath. They are designed to develop a state of deep relaxation and are very effective in strengthening the internal organs. These exercises are very helpful in preventing/curing diseases. However, typical exercises do not have such benefits. Yogic postures have a tremendous and direct effect on the involuntary muscles. They do not require a lot of strength and energy to perform. Non-yogic exercises focus primarily on the physical body while yogic exercises involve a holistic approach, taking care of both the physical and mental well-being of an individual.

These are the benefits of a regular yogic exercise practice:

a) Ensures a balanced and harmonious growth from childhood.
b) Helps children and adults develop greater concentration, memory, intelligence and creativity.
c) Helps to gain a high degree of flexibility and strength.
d) Helps in curing and preventing many diseases.
e) Helps to achieve a balanced state of mind.

Two Broad Categories of Exercise

1) Active Exercise

(a) Isotonic (Dynamic).

These are exercises in which muscle contraction is dynamic and the contracting muscle shortens against a constant load, as when lifting a weight. In isotonic exercises, movements are produced by which, tension

remains constant during the contraction of muscles and energy is increased. Examples of this type of exercises are weight training, running/jogging, aerobics, and other exercises which involve rapid movements.

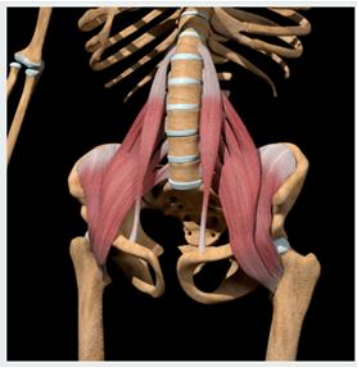
(b) Isometric (Static).

These are exercises in which muscle contraction is static and is taking place with minimal shortening of the muscles. In isometric exercises, no movements are produced but energy is still increased. Examples of this type of exercise are yogic practices such as: Asana (posture), Mudra/Bandha (gestures/energy locks) and Pranayama (breathing techniques).

2) Passive Exercise

These are exercises given by someone such as a therapist to a patient who is unable to perform exercises on his/her own due to diseases such as paralysis. Examples of passive exercises are body massage and manipulation of muscles by a therapist.

Psoas muscle



"Buried deep within the core of your body, the psoas affects every facet of your life, from your physical well-being to who you feel yourself to be and how you relate to the world."

The psoas is a muscle deep in the hip area; there are two, one on each side. They connect to the top of each thigh bone (femur) and fan up and out through the pelvis, over the hip and into the lower back. Connection points in the back are to the vertebra of the low back (lumbar L1-L4) and the lowest rib (thoracic T12).

The psoas are a major part of the abdominal cavity, forming part of the floor and back. The kidneys are positioned on either side, and the bladder and reproductive organs lie in front. They meet the diaphragm in the general area of the solar plexus.

In addition to being a hip flexor, the psoas provides stabilization to the spine. The psoas initiates the movement for walking and helps us maintain balance when standing. As the psoas is literally in the core of our being, they play a key role in every asana. Often when evaluating a pose, we look to the pelvis for alignment clues; the psoas plays a key role in our pelvis' position.

What happens when the resting length of the psoas is shortened? It could cause the pelvis to have an anterior (forward) tilt; the tailbone points back rather than down and the lower (lumbar) curve is exaggerated. A condition called lordosis. This can lead to issues in the shoulders and neck. If the psoas are unequal in length when at rest, this can cause twisting of the hips that translates to the spine and knees. Inequality can also lead to shortening of one leg.

Other issues caused by the structural changes include changes in breathing, food absorption and elimination. Issues can also be translated to reproductive organs increasing the occurrence and severity of menstrual cramps.

As the path of the psoas is similar to the sciatic nerve, it can also contribute to sciatic pain.

The psoas is also considered by some to be the seat of fear or the primary place a person holds fear within the body. Just as we hold tension in the shoulders or jaw, fear is held in the psoas. It is not unreasonable then to have feelings of fear or unrest when releasing the psoas.
From this point, it is not difficult to make the connection to our energetic or subtle body. If the psoas is shortened and holding fear, it is interfering with the flow of energy. Situated near Saturn and Jupiter, enforces the idea we are dealing with insecurities and fears that are characteristics of unbalanced energies in these centers.
The psoas is more than a muscle and has a profound effect on our entire well-being; physical, emotional and subtle.

Two types of tissue

Muscle tissue has been extensively researched in the West and the effects of exercise on this type of tissue are well documented. We know that muscle tissue responds to rhythm and repetition of movement by strengthening and lengthening. We also know that after a good workout, the muscles are temporarily weaker than before working them. We understand that after a day or two, the muscles respond to the stress put upon them by becoming stronger. Interestingly, even after all the research that has been done on muscle tissue and exercise, no one knows exactly how the muscles get stronger–we just know that they do. Yin tissue, or connective tissue, is everywhere in the body. It wraps around muscles and organs, it is interwoven into the muscle tissues, it helps to hold muscles to bones.

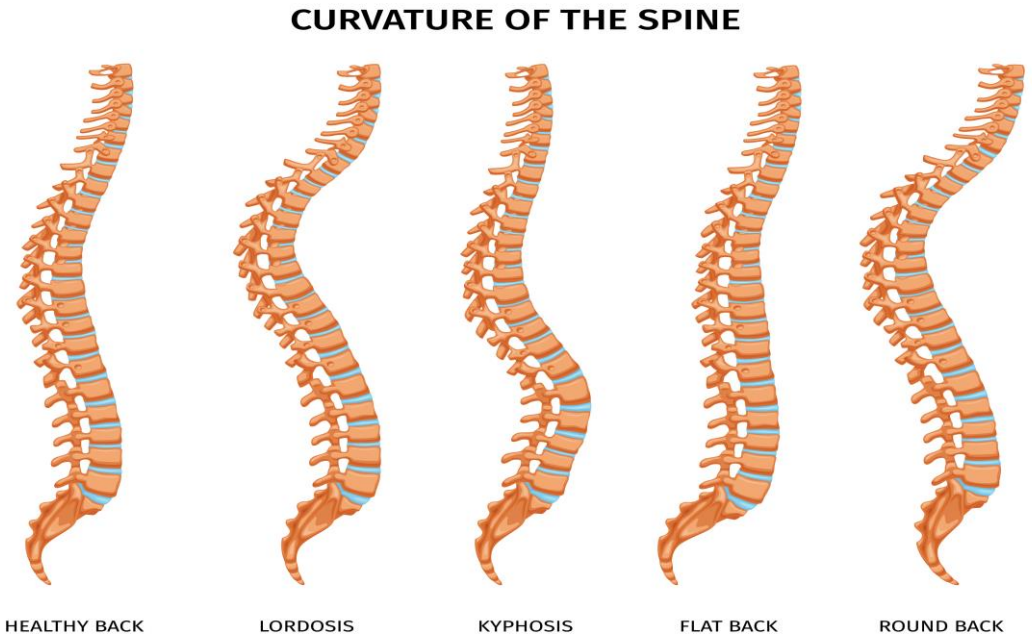
Connective tissue is much different than muscle tissue. It does not have the blood supply that muscle tissue does, it is dryer, and it does not respond well to the Yang style training of rhythm and repetition. It is much more plastic than elastic, meaning if it is pulled back and forth vigorously it could break rather than snap back like elastic muscle tissue. It is generally understood that trying to “exercise” connective tissue is dangerous for this reason– the dominant paradigm here being Yang style exercise. What needs to be understood is that Yin style training is fundamentally different than Yang exercise. To exercise Yin tissues, postures need to be held for a longer duration–two to twenty minutes–and without engaging the muscles around that area, in order for connective tissue to respond to this appropriate stress by strengthening and lengthening. Finding an appropriate “edge” in a given posture is also very important: the edge between no sensation of stress on the tissue, and an inordinate amount of stress.

The Spine

The spine consists of twenty-four moveable bones and 8-9 fused. The irregular shaped bones of the spine, or vertebrae, are joined and separated by intervertebral discs. The spinal column, like the spine of a book, is the axis around which peripheral movement occurs. The spine also plays the vital role of protecting and housing the central nervous system. The spinous and transverse processes of the spine provide attachment sites for ligaments and tendons, allowing expressive movement while providing quiet support. The nerves in the vertebral column transmit subtle body energies as well as muscular stimulation. Consider the frequency of incidents where financial worry and low back pain occur in conjunction, or the postural expression through the spine of emotions like pride or a diminished sense of self.

Parts of the spine

- The vertebral columns consist of seven neck bones (cervical vertebrae (7): C1-C7). These vertebrae are the smallest in the spinal column and they support the skull.
- twelve upper and mid back bones (thoracic vertebrae (12): T1-T12). This part of the spine has very little motion as they are attached to the ribs & sternum. However, because there is little motion in this region, it is usually not a source of chronic pain.
- five low back bones (lumbar vertebrae (5): L1-L5), This part extends from the lower thoracic spine

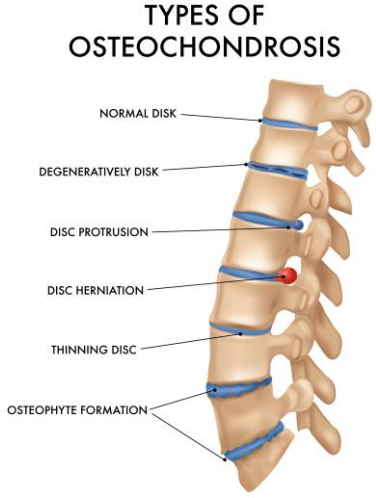


to the sacrum. The vertebral bodies stack on top of each other with a disc in between each one. These vertebrae are the largest in the spinal column and they transmit the weight down to the sacrum. These take the most strain during lifting.

- two fused sections of the spine (the sacrum (5 fused) and coccyx (4)). The sacrum is housed within the bones of the pelvis and it transmits the weight sideways from the spine into the pelvic girdle.

A healthy spine has four curves:

1) a concave curve through the cervical region;
2) a slightly convex curve through the thoracic region;
3) a concave curve through the lumbar region; and
4) a convex curve through the sacrum.



Function of Vertebral Column

• These bones compose the vertebral column, resulting in a total of 26 movable parts in an adult

• In between the vertebrae are intervertebral discs
• Support the head and arms
• Permit freedom of movement
• Provides attachment for many muscles, the ribs, and some of the organs
• Protects the spinal cord (extension from the Brain)

Intervertebral disc
• Made of fibrous cartilage
• Act as shock absorbers and allow the back to move
• As a person ages, these discs compress and shrink, resulting in a distinct loss of height (generally between 0.5 and 2.0cm) between the ages of 50 and 55 Coccyx

There are inter-vertebral discs between each vertebra. These discs consist of semi fluid and thick cartilage and act as shock absorbers. Once the disc is injured or starts to degenerate due to age, it can become painful for the spine and back. Injury, stress, and poor postural habits can cause progressive weakness in these discs and the muscles in the spine. It is recommended that you develop habits that reduce the pressure placed on the back.

The spine enjoys optimal weight-bearing capability, range of motion (ROM), disc health, energy flow, and general health when these four curves are present. The curves are maintained through balanced action, from a sound foundation, up through the hips and shoulders
Between each vertebrae is an intervertebral disc. The exterior of an intervertebral disc is composed of layers of fibrocartilage, like the layers of an onion, called the annulus fibrosus.
Within these rings is the central nucleus pulposus, a gelatinous shock absorbing substance.
Each disc is attached to vertebrae above and below, providing cushion as we walk, jump, lift, twist, and bend. When the spine is aligned, the discs receive equal pressure throughout. If, for example, the low back is chronically flat, the anterior portion of the disc receives the majority of pressure. Like squeezing a tube of toothpaste, the nucleus pulposus responds to this continuous compression by moving toward the back of the spine where the central nervous system descends. Sharp pain in the lumbar region is often the result of this postural pattern.

The spinal column
• Allows human beings to stand upright
• Help to maintain the balance of the upper body
• The thoracic and pelvic curves are termed primary curves, because they alone are present during fetal life
• The cervical and lumbar curves are not present in an infant
• The cervical curves forms around the age of 3 months (when the baby begins to hold its head up) and the lumbar curve develops when a child begins to walk (twelve or eighteen months)

Bones & Joints

Bone characteristics

These bones provide structure and protection and facilitate motion.

Bone is an organ, a living, vascular structure comprised of organic matter and mineral compound. Due to the balance of organic and inorganic material of bone tissue, bones have amazing tensile strength. If bone were void of their mineral component, you would bend like pasta cooked al dente. Without collagen, bone would be brittle like uncooked spaghetti. Your bones, though seemingly hard and unchanging are relatively adaptable. Consider the ancient Chinese tradition of foot binding where the metatarsal bones actually collapse together to accommodate petite footwear. A more common adaptation for the bones is the ability to reverse the effects of osteoporosis by applying resistance and stress to bone tissue. A consistent and appropriately weightbearing yoga practice can increases bone density. Bone shape is unique to individuals. We all have slightly different bone structure in our face, different lengths of limbs, hip bone width, and so on. This is easy to see. It makes sense, then, that bone structure in less visible parts of our bodies are also different. The size and shape of the bones of the spine can differ radically from person to person, affecting twisting, back bending, and forward bending. The angle, length, and orientation of the femur neck is not always the same, which can affect every yoga pose you do. For example, variations in femur neck to shaft angle (the shaft of the main length of the thigh bone) is one variable that affects range of motion in abduction of the femur (lifting the leg to the side). Imagine the thigh bone and hip socket with no muscle, tendon or ligaments. Full abduction is reached when bone meets bone, that is when the top of the thigh bone meets the top edge of the hip socket. Some range of motion restriction may be due to bone structure. This does not have to be the end of the road for any given posture, however. One may be able to make up for lack of mobility in one junction by implementing a safe, supportive opening from surrounding joints as well as improving joint alignment and stability. As an instructor, first and foremost remain open to the potential of a student's practice. When we start with a "yes," the possibilities become available.

Bone functions as

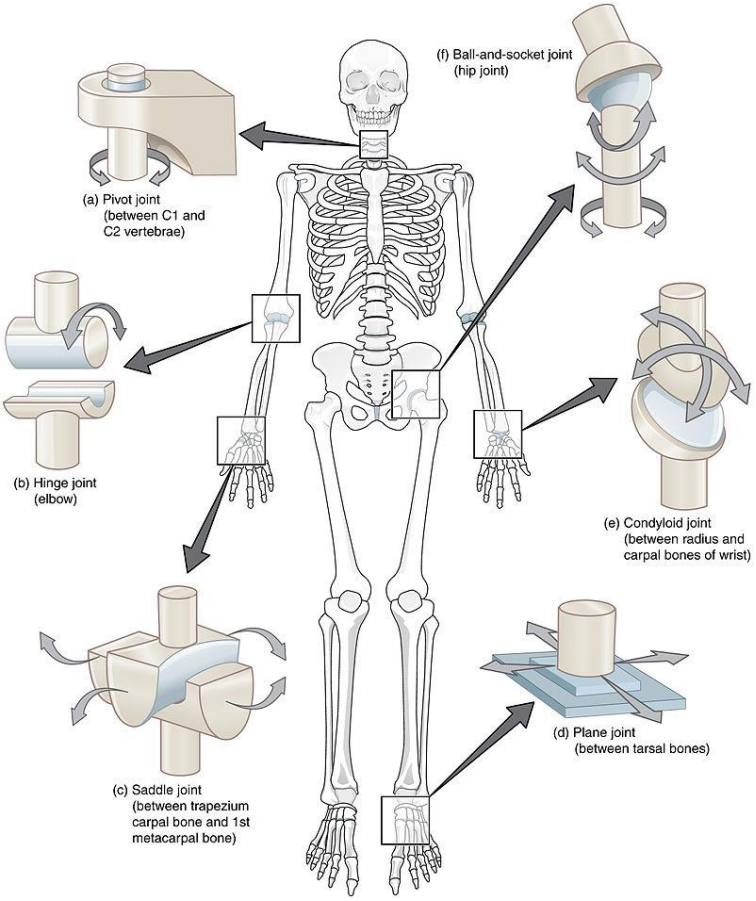
- A support structure—the body's framework.
- An anchor for attenuating musculature—ligaments, tendons, muscle.
- A nutritional reservoir—source of calcium.
- A site for blood cell development.
- Protection—the skull, sternum and pelvis are examples.
- Leverage—consider the long bones of the body.

Joints characteristics

Muscles move bones on joints. There are three types of joints: fibrous joints are fixed (sutures of skull, teeth); cartilaginous joints are immovable or partly move (rib attachment to sternum), and muscles move bones on freely moving synovial joints. A synovial joint is incased in a joint capsule and allows friction free movement with synovial fluid and bursa, a type of cushion within the joint.

Synovial joints can be sub-classified into several different types, depending on the shape of their articular surfaces and the movements permitted:

- Hinge – permits movement in one plane – usually flexion and extension. E.g. elbow joint, ankle joint, knee joint.
- Saddle – named due to its resemblance to a saddle on a horse's back. It is characterised by opposing articular surfaces with a reciprocal concave-convex shape. E.g. carpometacarpal joints.
- Plane – the articular surfaces are relatively flat, allowing the bones to glide over one another. E.g. acromioclavicular joint, subtalar joint.
- Pivot – allows for rotation only. It is formed by a central bony pivot, which is surrounded by a bony-ligamentous ring. E.g. proximal and distal radioulnar joints, atlantoaxial joint.
- Condyloid – contains a convex surface which articulates with a concave elliptical cavity. They are also known as ellipsoid joints. E.g. wrist joint, metacarpophalangeal joint, metatarsophalangeal joint.
- Ball and Socket – where the ball-shaped surface of one rounded bone fits into the cup-like depression of another bone. It permits free movement in numerous axes. E.g. hip joint, shoulder joint.



https://teachmeanatomy.info/

Knee Joint Complex

- Connecting the femur and the tibia
- Since in humans the knee supports nearly the entire weight of the body, it is the joint most vulnerable both to acute injury and to the development of osteoarthritis.

Factors to pain injury

1. Training errors - excess hill work, stairs, or too much distance
2. Biomechanical abnormalities - overpronation, "knock knees", poor pelvic control
3. Muscle tightness - calf, hamstrings, iliotibial band, or vastus lateralis
4. Muscle weakness - vastus medialis obliquus (VMO), gluteus

Hip joint complex

The strong but loose fibrous capsule of the hip joints permits the hip joint to have the second largest range of movement (second only to the shoulder) and yet support the weight of the body, arms and head.

Hip Joint Stability

• The strong but loose fibrous capsule of the hip joints permits the hip joint to have the second largest range of movement (second only to the shoulder) and yet support the weight of the body, arms and head

• In the healthy hip joint the femoral head is continually in close and stable contact with the socket during all movements

• The stability of the healthy hip joint is provided by:

- thick joint capsule
- a system of joint ligaments built in the joint capsule
- ligament inside the hip joint itself (ligamentum teres)

• These joint structures create a passive resistant force on the hip joint that keeps the femoral head in close contact with the hip joint socket during all movements

• Moreover, the 19 muscles surrounding the hip joint provide further dynamic stability to the hip joint

Shoulder girdle

The most mobile joint in the human body. The shoulder girdle is able to circumduct through a full 360° in the sagittal plane. This tremendous range of motion however makes the shoulder extremely unstable, and far more prone to dislocation and injury than other joints.

Pelvic girdle

Composed of: ilium, ischium, and pubis. In an adult, these three bones are firmly fused into a single bone. Back of two ilia meet on either side of the sacrum to form the sacro-iliac joint. In the front, the two pubi are connected by the pubic symphysis.

Pelvic gridle function

- Basin-shaped complex of bones that connects the trunk and legs
- Supports the weight of the body from the vertebral column
- Protects and supports the lower organs, including the urinary bladder, the reproductive organs, and the developing fetus in a pregnant woman

Sacro-iliac Joint

Formed from the sacrum and the two wings of the iliac bone.

The movement in this joint is very little. The motion that does occur is a combination of sliding, tilting and rotation. The most the joint moves in sliding is probably only a couple of millimeters, and may tilt and rotate two or three degrees.

The SI joint is held together by several large, very strong ligaments. Because the pelvis is a ring, these ligaments work somewhat like the hoops that hold a barrel together.

Sacro-iliac Joint Function

• The SI joint is held together by several large, very strong ligaments
• Because the pelvis is a ring, these ligaments work somewhat like the hoops that hold a barrel together
• The SI joint hardly moves in adults
• During the end of pregnancy as delivery nears, the hormones that are produced causes the joint to relax. This allows the pelvis to be more flexible so that birth can occur more easily
• Other than the role the joint plays in pregnancy, it does not appear that motion is important to the function of the joint
• The primary function is to be a shock absorber and to provide just enough motion and flexibility to lessen the stress on the pelvis and spine

Sacro-iliac Joint Dysfunction

• The SI joint is a very large joint and is frequently seen as being a pain generator in the low back
• Typical complains include: lower back pain, pain that radiates or goes into the upper buttock
• Pain may be worse on one side more so than the other
• Pain increases with walking and does not go below the knee
• People with stiff lumbar spine are especially prone to sacro-iliac joint dysfunction, probably from lack of motion above, causing increased stress on the SI joint
• More commonly, sacroiliac pain occurs from dysfunction- either stresses on the joint or too much movement (hypermobility)
• Stresses to the SI Joint can occur from the following activities: persistent standing on one leg, falling, swinging a golf club, lifting something, or even bending over
• If the joint is hyper mobile, pain occurs anytime the joint is displaced. This occurs more commonly in females due to their joint structure, hormonal changes, and childbirth strains

Difference between male and female Pelvis

Man: the pelvis is more massive and the iliac crests are closer together.
Woman: the pelvis is more delicate and the iliac crests are farther apart
Reason: woman's role in pregnancy and delivery of children. When a child is born, it must pass through its mother's pelvis. It is wider and shallower than man pelvis.

Muscle & Posture

Each joint has an agonist (primary mover) and an antagonist (opposing muscle). The body aligns through the complimentary opposite muscles balancing their actions on joints. The following are common posture types and muscle groupings that affect posture anteriorly (to the front) and posteriorly (to the back).

Deviation from ideal postural alignment is rarely isolated to one area. For example, forward head carriage is usually the result of imbalance through the shoulders, thoracic area, low back or hips. Muscular imbalance causes a chain reaction throughout the body.
Lateral and rotational deviation from neutral is also not uncommon. For example, tightness through the left lower back may result in elevation of the left pelvis. Often, rotation also occurs with unilateral imbalance. In this example, the left hip may rotate forward as a result of the tight lower back muscles.
Particular yoga postures may appear very difficult, or even injurious for certain posture types. Often, this is the perfect posture for re-alignment. For example, a student with an extremely round upper back (kyphosis) and forward head carriage will have great difficulty achieving Bhujangasana (cobra posture). Here, the instructor needs to remember that the practice isn't about the final form of the posture, but the intention–an ideal opportunity to discover muscular support, joint and muscular mobility through the thoracic spine, chest and shoulder girdle, typically restricted areas for a student with a kyphotic back. The posture can be broken down in steps. First, finding openness through the chest and front of shoulder girdle as well as strengthening the muscles in the middle/upper back. This could simply be Tadasana with hands interlaced behind the back, lengthening through the sides, expanding and lifting the heart, elevating the arm bones then drawing them back as the scapulae draw together toward the spine. By understanding common tightness or lack of mind-body connection to a particular muscle group that may result in misalignment, you can provide specific instruction to your students so they may attain greater alignment in their yoga practice and daily life.

Muscle properties

Reciprocal Inhibition: When main movers (agonist) contracts, the opposing muscle (antagonist) will relax
This principle is used in a facilitated stretching technique called "Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation", PNF.

Co-contraction: For every muscle (agonist), there is an opposing muscle (antagonist). When both the main mover (agonist) and its opposing muscle (antagonist) are contracting, "cocontraction" is achieved. The end result is "no movement" visible but maximum stability across a joint.
Co-contraction is very useful to avoid hyperextension in knees and elbows.

Muscle co-activation
Co-activation of opposing muscle groups is happening all the time and it is believed that it improves fine motor control. It also stabilizes joints. This is especially important in yoga asana to provide increased balance and also to protect the joints from injury. Everyone will have a unique degree of muscle recruitment between opposing muscles to create the proper balance of co-activation for the best joint stabilization.

Stretching
Stretching is the lengthening of muscles opposing to those that contract and shorten. Skill in controlling nerve impulse signals will allow it to stretch even farther. The stretch happens primarily in the belly of the muscles, nerves, and enveloping connective tissue, known as fascia. Healthy and frequent stretching in

yoga asana increases range of motion and strengthens muscles if a degree of resistance to the stretch from the opposing group is engaged.

Passive and active stretching

It is generally well known that when we try to stretch a muscle in its relaxed state it potentially dangerous, since it doesn't offer any additional support and stabilization to the joint structure; which can result in tearing of the muscle or/and cause damage to the surrounding structures. The rule is any muscle that is lengthened during a pose must be kept active to avoid any injuries.

To keep the muscles active you have to apply 'BANDHAS' or locks which are special techniques which help to stabilize the pose. You may for example try to press the base of the pose on the floor firmly, whatever the base may be. When you try this, you activate the group of muscles which eventually become firm and stable, thus avoiding injury.

Special attention:

1 If you activate the muscle in its lengthened state, then it gradually stretches further then relaxes more; eventually becoming stronger. So activate muscles that are stretched in a pose.

2 When a muscle is stretched long enough, then the muscle relaxes eventually. So always hold the posture longer [at least 15 seconds].

3 If you activate or tense one muscle, the surrounding group of muscles is also fired and eventually leads to better strength and stability.

4 Counter poses: In yoga you can use counter poses to successfully create balance. Vinyasas are counter poses [Upward dog/ downward dog]. It is important to use counter poses too in your classes since they balance and reset the muscles. For example, forward bends followed by back bends, side bends by doing on both sides, internal rotation by external rotation.

5 As you move from one pose to the next during a yoga session, try to enter and exit the pose with grace and elegance. A smoother, gentler and more controlled movement strengthens the body, quiets the mind induces relaxation and control.

6 Creating internal heat within your body gives you more flexibility and helps your body release to-xins.

7 Active stretching is where you assume a position and hold it by using the relative muscle groups. It builds up strength in muscles involved.

8 Passive stretching is where you assume and hold a pose with the help or support of parts of your body, partner, blocks or other assistance. It helps with cooling down and reduces post-workout soreness and tension.

Actions of the muscles

Lower Extremity

Quadriceps: Knee extension, Hip flexion and knee extension

Hamstring: Extends the thigh, flexes the knee, and also rotates the tibia medially, especially when the knee is flexed

Gluteus Maximus: Major extensor of hip joint

Calf muscles: Knee flexion and plantar flex ankle

Iliopsoas: Flex the torso and thigh with respect to each other

Trunk Muscles

Latissmus Dorsi: Extends, adducts, and medially rotates humerus; raises body toward arms during climbing

Trapezius: Upper Trapezius = elevate scapula / Middle Trapezius = retract scapula / Lower Trapezius = depress scapula

Abdominal muscles

Rectus Abdominus: Flexion of the trunk

External Oblique: Pull the chest downwards and compress the abdominal cavity, which increases the intraabdominal pressure / Flexion and rotation of the vertebral column

Internal Oblique: Rotates and side-bends the trunk by pulling the rib cage and midline towards the hip and lower back, of the same side / Acts with the external obliques of the opposite side to achieve this torsional movement of the trunk

Transversus Abdominus: Provides core stability / Creates Intra- abdominal pressure

Erector Spinae: Major extensor of the trunk

Respiratory System

Consists of

• Airways, the lungs, and the respiratory muscles

• Within the alveolar system of the lungs, oxygen and carbon dioxide are passively exchanged, by diffusion, between the gaseous environment and the blood

• Thus, the respiratory system facilitates oxygenation of the blood with a concomitant removal of carbon dioxide and other gaseous metabolic wastes from the circulation

• The system also helps to maintain the acid-base balance of the body through the efficient removal of carbon dioxide from the blood

Breathing Mechanism

Inhalation

• An active process

• Diaphragm contracts and lowers

• External intercostal muscles contracts to elevate the ribcage

• Increase in thoracic volume

• Decrease in intra-thoracic pressure

• Air moves into the conducting zone

• Inhaled air is filtered, warmed, and humidified as it flows to the lungs

Exhalation

• A passive process

• Diaphragm and external intercostal muscle relax

• Volume of thoracic cavity decrease

• Lungs relax due to the natural elasticity

• Pressure inside lungs increases

• Air flows back out
• Expiratory muscles including the abdominal muscles and internal intercostal muscles will be involved in forced exhalation

The effect of practice on the different human systems

The Effects Of Yogic Practices On The Digestive System

INVERTED POSTURES: The oral and pharyngeal cavities are benefited by the increase in blood supply. The tongue, salivary glands and mucus membrane are bathed in fresh blood. In inverted poses, the internal organs are massaged.
The constant strain on the digestive organs is reversed and fresh blood circulates around the abdominal organs, and they get relief from congestion. Fresh blood reaches the villi of the intestine. Hence, food absorption is better. The nerves of the abdominal organs get relief from the erect posture, and feel light and refreshed after inversions.

FORWARD BENDS: The quieting of the senses soothes the salivary glands. Forward bends are soothing because of flexion of the abdominal organs, which is compressed and massaged. This improves their digestive, absorptive and excretory functions. These asanas help massage the colon, thus properly eliminating waste matter. The simulative effect of compression increases gastric acidity. This arouses appetite and hunger as the vagus nerve is massaged.

SEATED ASANAS: Supta virasana gives relief to patients suffering from dyspepsia and peptic disorders.
In Baddha Padmasana and other postures where the pressure of the heels is on the nerve plexuses, the functions of the abdominal organs are improved. In seated postures, the abdominal organs are contracted and thus function better due to the massage given to them.

TWISTING POSTURES: Twisting postures improve blood circulation in the pelvic and abdominal organs by alternately squeezing and rinsing them. While one side of the abdominal organs is squeezed, the other side is rinsed with blood. Stomach disorders like dyspepsia and constipation are relieved.
The stomach, ileum and colon are massaged; this improves digestion. One of the best effects of asanas is that of the twisting poses on the gastrointestinal tract. The gall bladder is squeezed, thus ensuring better fat digestion.
Intestinal villi function is stimulated. Due to the softness of the cells, water regulation of the colonic contents is good, even in old age.

BACKBENDS: Due to the stretch of the vagus nerve (in lay terms, the vagas nerve helps to balance the levels of stomach acid), acidity decreases and dyspepsia is relieved. Backbends reduce excess hunger. The liver, gall bladder and pancreas get a better supply of blood so digestion, absorption are maintained.

THE EFFECTS OF NAULI: Nauli is an excellent exercise for the digestive organs. It maintains the optimum tone of the abdominal recti muscles by their repeated contraction and relaxation.

Introduction:

Understanding anatomy and physiology is important for any yoga teacher to lead students in a safe, responsible practice. This is a vast topic that can take lifetimes to understand. Developing a love for this topic will significantly advance your skills as a yoga teacher, allowing you to give more specific insights to your students and deliver them deeper healing.

The Effects Of Yogic Practices On The Endocrine System

Yoga is the only system where it is possible to consciously reduce glandular secretions. The main aim of Asanas is to preserve glandular function and maintain optimum energy levels. The stimulation also does not exhaust the glandular sections.

STANDING POSTURES:

These poses stimulate the glandular system. The glands are made to function properly.

INVERTED POSES:

In Sirsasana, the pituitary and pineal glands are soaked in blood. This helps maintain their optimum functio-ning. The thyroid and parathyroid are well fed with blood in shoulderstand and Halasana due to the chin lock. This massages the glands, improving their blood supply. Thyroid dysfunctions are prevented by these two poses. The adrenal gland is given rest. This conscious rest given to the sympathetic nerves in asanas is the mechanism by which recuperation occurs. As the nervous and endocrine systems are in harmony, they help affect each other's proper functioning. Age-related atrophy of the cells in the endocrine glands does not affect the practitioner of inverted poses.

FORWARD BENDS:

The hormonal status doesn't fluctuate from the baseline. All endocrine glands are soothed by the practice of forward bends. As the mind is kept quiet, the nervous system is resting. This in turn soothes the glandular system.

The adrenal glands derive maximum benefit due to the soothing action of these poses. The adrenal glands are profusely innervated with the sympathetic nerves and if this system is rested, the glands don't suffer exhaustion and its cellular contents are preserved. It is interesting that a regular practitioner of yoga feels the lack of energy by omitting forward bends, even for a day.

Metabolic activity slows down; this gives rest to the thyroid gland. The entire system recuperates by the regular practice of forward bends. The degeneration of the body slows down as one gets older.

BACK BENDING:

Through the practice of backbends, the major endocrine glands are stimulated in contrast to forward bends. The effect can be felt very fast. The adrenal, pituitary, pineal and thyroid glands are stimulated. The ovarian cells which secrete female hormones are also stimulated. As the asanas are intensive in nature, the metabolic rate is sped up. The degeneration of these glands do not occur as one grows older.

The effects of yogic practices on the skeletal system

The practice of yoga increases lubrication within the joints, ligaments and tendons. Yoga is very low impact, as the asanas work on precision and correct alignment. Because the poses are held for a set time, this gives the body an opportunity to increase blood flow and supply all areas of the body with the vital supplies that they need.

They also help to correct and balance the roles that the joints, ligaments and tendons play together, in providing the support that the body's limbs need to function properly.

It is very important that your joints remain well lubricated because if they are not, it will begin to limit your mobility and you will become more susceptible to injuries. If this is the case, you can say hello to all kinds of aliments that come when parts of your body fail to be maintained. It is never too late to start yoga and start reversing the signs of aging. Aging we believe is the result of failing to maintain your body. Once again we bring up the saying – 'use it or lose it!'

Yoga poses provide relief to stiff and damaged joints. Yoga's controlled movements and gentle pressures reach deep into troubled joints.

In addition, the controlled stretches in conjunction with deep breathing exercises relax and release the muscles that have seized up around the joints to protect them.

FORWARD BENDS:

The joints between the ribs and the spine on the posterior side are made stronger. The posterior intercoastal muscles are made elastic. The intervertebral joints are stretched and strengthened. As they maintain their elasticity, degeneration of the spinal joints doesn't occur. All parts of the spine are made stronger. The li-gaments of the spinal column are strengthened. Nutrition to the disc is made proper even in the old age. As the spine is flexible, lower back pain does not occur.

BACKBENDS:

Due to the specific nature of the backbends the blood is made to circulate well deep into the vertebrae, thus providing them with proper nourishment. The entire anterior surfaces of all the vertebrae are opened up and stretched out to maintain their optimum health. This avoids degenerative changes such as arthritis, spondilytis and so on. Vertigo caused by cervical spondilytis is controlled. The posterior surfaces of the discs are made stronger, preventing the occurrence of slipped disc. Discs are kept in healthy condition by their proper nourishment. As the surrounding tissues remain soft, the vertebrae are kept healthy. The breast bone, ribs, shoulders, collar bone, upper arms and wrists are made stronger.

Backbends successfully manage vertebral changes such as decalcification as one grows older.

BALANCING ASANAS:

All the arm-balancing asanas help to strengthen the wrists, arms and shoulders. The body acts as a weight and counterweight in theses asanas. The bones of the forearm, upper arms and the entire vertebral column are made stronger. The bones in the spinal column are massaged as a compressive load is applied. Bone remodeling is excellent as the load on the bones is precisely calculated according to ones capacity. This helps to maintain bone density even without lifting heavy weights.

TWISTING:

All the twisting asanas relieve spinal, hip and groin problems. The intervertebral joints are made elastic, compression doesn't occur, nor does the disc herniated. These asanas prevent internal derangement and calcification of the shoulder, pain in the shoulder blades disappears, and osteoarthritic hip joints are benefi-ted. Arthritic disorders of the knee and ankles are prevented. Twisting poses relieve from backaches.

SEATED POSTURES:

Poses like padmasana, virasana and supta virasana relieve arthritis of the knees and ankles. Hanumanasana tones the entire neuro-physio-venous system of the legs. It also prevents arthritis of the hips and knees. Kandasana, an advanced pose, keeps the ankles, knees and hips completely flexible as one grows older. Baddha padmasana gives elasticity to the shoulders, knees and the hips.

STANDING POSTURES:

Suppleness, strength and alignment of the spine are maintained due to a variety of geometric positions while practicing the standing postures. Hence, spinal disorders of a mechanical nature such as scoliosis, slipped disc, spondylytis, and lower back pain are alleviated. The intervertebral disc ruptures only if the ligaments, discs and muscles lose their elasticity. Nutrition to the disc is maintained through standing poses.

Injuries to the cartilage of the knee are healed by standing poses. In many cases even if the ligaments of the knees are damaged, the structures could be strengthened by standing poses.

The hip joints are made supple due to the stretching of the hamstring muscles.

The effects of yogic practices on the muscular skeletal system

INVERTED POSES:

Cervical and dorsal spinal muscles and vertebrae are made stronger, the deltoid and trapezius become elastic and strong. Balance, grace and agility are developed. All parts of the body are developed due to the various movements done while practicing variations in the postures like Sirsasana and Sarvangasana.

SPECIAL NOTE:

It is very important to keep the skeletal muscles active when you practice yoga. It not only helps to stabilize the joints but also enhances the energy flow and improves overall strength and flexibility.

The Effects Of Yogic Practices On The Respiratory System

FORWARD BENDS:

Some of the forwardbending Asanas are Janu Sirsasana, Paschimottanasana, Ardha Baddha Padamasana, Upavishta Konasana and Kurmasana. Yogis observed the animal kingdom and noticed the effect of postures where the spine is in a horizontal position. Yogis consciously assume such positions which have an effect on the nervous system and the flow of the energy. In forward bends, the frontal lungs are flexed and the posterior surface of the lungs is stretched out. The intercostal muscles are well exercised and made elastic. This is something that seldom happens in day to day life. The anterior surface of the lungs is

compressed and toned up. Due to restricted space, the anterior fibres of the lungs are well exercised by having to learn to breathe in a smaller compartment. The reverse occurs in back bends. The diaphragm is well massaged and toned up, and as breathing is restful, the heart recuperates. The respiratory rate is reduced due to the decrease in sympathetic discharge.

INVERTED POSTURES:

In the upper respiratory tract, the secretions of the nose and paranasal sinuses drain well and it prevents stagnation. Freshly oxygenated blood flows into the sinuses. The oral cavity derives better blood supply, maintaining the health of the mucus membranes. Regular practice prevents sinus disorders and allergy problems of the upper respiratory tract. In the lungs, an enhanced venous return occurs; more pulmonary veins and capillaries open up. This ensures better pulmonary circulation and cellular longevity. The rhythmic pressure of the lung movement against the diaphragm exercises the entire respiratory tree and the cells of the lungs. This happens without a rise in oxygen consumption. This is a peculiar feature of yogic exercises. Vital capacity of the lungs improves. The capacity to withstand higher altitudes is derived from inverted postures. Due to deep breathing in inverted postures the lungs open up. Immunity of the respiratory system is improved. Asthma, bronchitis and sinusitis are alleviated by the regular practice of inverted postures.

SITTING POSTURES:

Due to the erect position of the spine, the ribs and intercostal muscles are well toned. The dorsal spine is elasticized and this contracts the back of the lungs.

TWISTING POSTURES:

The thoracic spine is made elastic. The intercostal muscles are stretched and become healthier and supple. The diaphragm is made elastic and thus remains healthy; this promotes optimum expansion of the lungs. The lungs are alternately squeezed and expanded, maintaining their vital capacity. This gives longevity to the cells of the lungs. Venous return is healthier and thoracic, arterial and venous circulation is excellent.

BACK BENDING POSTURES:

Forward bends cause flexion of the anterior lungs and backbends cause expansion of the anterior lungs. In backbends the posterior lungs are contracted. As one grows older the intercostal muscles become rigid and weak, thus the lungs can't function properly. Backbends stretch the intercostals muscles and keep the lungs healthy. Backbends stretch the anterior fibers of the lungs and promote deep breathing, thus ensuring the optimum health of the entire respiratory system. Though medical science accepts decline in lung capacity as part of the normal aging process, yoga doesn't. The vital capacity of the lungs can be kept up throughout life by practicing backbends. Every bronchi and bronchiole is made to open completely. If deep breathing is done in these postures, mucous plugs are removed and narrowed bronchioles are opened.

STANDING POSTURES:

The dorsal spine which supports the lungs is well aligned in these postures. The intercostal muscles are toned and every alveolus is opened so that oxygenation is better and the vital capacity of the lungs doesn't reduce as one ages.

The effects of yogic practices on the cardiovascular system

Disease is a manifestation of underlying disharmony in the mind-body domain. The yogic way of life offers a solution to elevate the health of body, mind and soul. Yoga is a cure for many diseases - diabetes, obesity and psychiatric illnesses - as much as it offers immense benefits to alleviate heart diseases.

Yoga has an important role in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases; that includes recurrence of heart attacks, hypertension and coronary heart diseases. Yoga influences the hypothalamus directly, the area of the brain which controls endocrine activity and helps prevent heart attacks.

A complete yoga program involves exercises (asanas), breath control (pranayama), sleep control (yoga Nidra) and mind control (meditation). These are the tenets for cardiac health, and also probably the reason why cardiologists universally recommend yoga to their patients. The curative benefits of yoga enhances heart health, lowers blood pressure, reduces chronic stress, boosts the immune system and enhances cognitive ability. Relaxation through yoga helps many patients control their blood pressure. Yoga also improves blood flow and makes arteries and veins more elastic. Yoga can help reduce stress, a major contributor to heart disease.

FORWARD BENDS:

The cardiac chambers are compressed and massaged. Rest is given to the heart though the body is being exercised. Animals have a horizontal posture; their heart is placed along the line of the spine. There is no strain on the heart to pump the blood against gravity. Exhaustion does not occur easily in the horizontal position.

As the spine is in a horizontal position, blood flows to the extremities of the body easily. Elevated blood pressure is controlled in essential hypertension. This is due to the de-stressing of the pressure regulation centre in the frontal brain.

The pulse rate and blood pressure reduce in a normal as well as in a hypertensive individual.186

SITTING POSTURES:

The heart is well stretched in asanas where the spine is kept erect. In the eka pada sirsasana cycle, the heart is compressed, and the erect posture favours better mechanical function of the heart.

TWISTING POSTURES:

These poses alternately squeeze and stretch the lateral walls of the heart. They compress and stretch the thoracic cavity, ensuring excellent cardiac function. The major blood vessels in the thoracic cavity are well massaged.

BACK BENDING POSTURES:

These asanas help prevent atherosclerotic changes in the coronary arteries. If done from childhood, no atherosclerosis can occur in the coronary vessel. In cases where the vessels are blocked, either partially of fully, theses asanas maintain free passage in the vessels, or in certain cases reopen the vessels so that further reduction of blood flow doesn't occur and fresh blood is introduced to the starving tissues. A healthy heart is essential for the good health of the entire circulatory system. Bypass surgery can be avoided in many cases if yoga is started early enough. The benefits depend on the practice of an individual.

INVERTED POSTURES:

Inverted postures create better venous return. Blood flows to the heart without any strain. Cardiac output improves. Cardiac toning occurs, without a rise in pulse rate or blood pressure.
Pressure of the abdominal contents against the diaphragm exercises the muscles of the diaphragm and the heart. The chambers of the heart are massaged.
These asanas soak the entire system with fresh blood. They rinse, dry, squeeze and flush the various areas. An example of soaking can be given in sirsasana, where the brain is bathed in blood.
Through regular practice of headstand and shoulderstand, the lymphatic and venous systems of the legs are given rest from the constant strain of the force of gravity. The formation of varicose veins is prevented. Persons with varicose veins get great relief by inversions. Lightness is felt in the legs.

Energy lock in asanas (Bandhas)

According to Yoga Shastras, there are many Mudras, Bandhas and Kriyas. However, only some are effective for human body in terms of achieving physical and mental well being and curing diseases. Some of these are described below. They should always be performed with guidance.

1. JALANDHARA BANDHA.

Jalan means 'net' and dhara means 'stream', and so Jalandhara Bandha is the lock that controls the network of nadis in the neck. It is also commonly known as the 'throat lock'. In Jalandhara Bandha, the neck and throat are contracted by placing the chin on the chest in the notch between the collar bones while sitting in any meditative posture with the hands on knees.

Technique:

Inhale through both nostrils and then hold the breath while placing the chin on the chest. Continue to hold for a few seconds before exhaling and lifting the head to upright position.

Benefits:

This practice regulates the flow of blood and 'prana' to the heart, the glands of neck and head, along with brain. All diseases related with the glands of throat like tonsil, thyroid and parathyroid, pharynx and larynxare removed through regular practice.

2. MOOLA BANDHA

The Sanskrit word 'moola' means root and 'bandha' means lock. Here, the word 'moola' refers to the mooladhara chakra and also to the root of the spine, the perineum.

Technique:

Sit comfortably in any meditative posture with the back and head kept straight, hands on knees and eyes closed. Concentrate on the genital organs and exhale by squeezing the abdominal muscles and contracting the pelvic diaphragm and the muscles of the urogenital triangle, which involve the muscles associated with the genitals and urethra, pulling this area upward (as if pulling the genital organ towards the naval). Hold the breath along with the contracted muscles for as long as you can. Then slowly release the contraction