



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue No: 7

July 2007

Yoga Practice

Yoga is for everyone. You do not need to be an expert or at the peak of physical fitness to practice yoga postures. The strain of modern life can lead to physical pain and illness, as we neglect our bodies while trying to juggle too many things. The stress of modern life can also lead to mental suffering: feelings of inadequacy, isolation, or powerlessness. Yoga helps to balance the body and the mind.

Yoga can be practised at any age. With advancing age, physically vigorous exercises cannot be performed easily because of stiffening joints and muscles that have lost tone. The great advantage of yoga is that it can be practised by anyone, irrespective of age, sex and physical condition. In fact, yoga is particularly beneficial in middle age and after. Yoga is a gift to older people when the recuperative power of the body is declining and resistance to illness is weakened. Yoga generates energy and does not dissipate it. With yoga you can look forward to a satisfying, healthier future, rather than reflecting on your youthful past.

Importance of Practising Asanas (postures)

The practice of asanas has a beneficial impact on the whole body. Asanas not only tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints and nerves, but also maintain the smooth functioning and health of all the body's systems. They relax the body and mind, allowing both to recover from fatigue or weakness, and the stress of daily life. Asanas also boost metabolism, lymphatic circulation, and hormonal secretions and bring about a chemical balance in the body.

Pranayama

This is another part of yoga and is generally described as breath control. However, it goes much deeper than just breath control. Prana means 'vital energy' or 'life force'. Ayama is defined as 'extension' or 'expansion'. So, the word pranayama means extension or expansion of the life force.

The breath is the most vital process of the body. It influences the activities of each and every cell and, most importantly, is intimately linked with the performance of the brain. Breathing produces energy to power every muscular contraction and mental process.

Most people breathe incorrectly, using only a small part of their lung capacity. The breathing is then generally shallow, depriving the body of oxygen and life force essential to good health. Irregular breathing disrupts the rhythms of the brain and leads to physical, emotional and mental blocks. Pranayama establishes regular breathing patterns by taking control of the breath and re-establishing the natural, relaxed rhythms of the body and mind.

Pranayama is best practiced in the early morning and after sunset. It is okay to do fifteen minutes pranayama after your asana practice and before you lie down in Savasana (relaxation). There are many types of pranayama and I will slowly introduce you to a few of the different techniques. We will spend some time at the end of each class practising pranayama.

Nadi Sodhana Pranayama

A pranayama practice, which can be done every day, is Nadi Sodhana (alternate nostril breathing). A nadi is a channel of energy. Sodhana means purifying or cleansing. The object of Nadi Sodhana is the purification of the nerves and the balancing of the energy channels. It is always good practice to balance the body after your asana practice. I have explained how to do this pranayama over the page.

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Posture of the Month – Parsvottanasana

In Sanskrit, *parsva* means ‘side’ or ‘flank’, while *uttana* indicates the great intensity of the final stretch. Regular practice of Parsvottanasana stimulates and tones the kidneys, an effect you can feel once you are comfortable in the final pose. The asana also helps to remove stiffness in the neck, shoulders and elbows.

1. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain posture).
2. Stretch your arms out sideways. Take your hands behind your back and join your fingertips together with your fingers pointing down. Rotate your wrists, turning your hands inwards until your fingers point to the ceiling. **Beginners** – if joining your palms is too difficult for now, take your arms behind your back and hold onto your elbows or forearms. **Intermediates** – lift your chest and move your joined palms up to the middle of your back. The little fingers of each hand should touch your back. Ideally your hands should rest between your shoulder blades.
3. Take a breath in and as you breathe out jump or step your legs apart. If your legs feel overstretched or uncomfortably close together, adjust the distance accordingly. When you feel that your body weight is distributed equally – and comfortably – on both legs, you have the distance right.
4. Turn your left foot in and your right foot out and then rotate your body to face over your right foot. Keep your hips level. If you feel unbalanced, move your right foot a little way to the right edge of your mat until you feel strong in the posture.
5. Breathe in and lift the chest looking up at the ceiling.
6. Breathe out and bend forward from the top of both thighs, keeping both legs straight. Take care to bend equally from both sides of the waist.
7. Keep your back straight, relax your head and keep your elbows lifted so that your chest stays open.
8. Stay in this posture for five breaths, breathing deeply and evenly.
9. Pull up the mula bandha, raise the head and with a breath in, come out of the posture. Turn your feet to the front but keep your arms in position.
10. Repeat on the opposite side.
11. Breathe out as you jump or step back into Tadasana.
12. Release the arms and stretch the fingers.
13. Rest in Tadasana for at least five breaths before starting another posture.

Benefits of this posture

- Cools the brain and soothes the nerves
- Relieves arthritis of the neck, shoulders, elbows and wrists
- Strengthens the abdominal organs
- Improves digestion
- Stimulates and tones the kidneys
- Tones the liver and spleen
- Reduces menstrual pain



Nadi Sodhana – Alternate Nostril Breathing

Technique

- Sit in a comfortable position with legs crossed in front or feet sideways along the outside of each thigh. You may need to sit on a block, as it is important to keep your back straight and your chest open.
- Place your left hand on your left knee and join the tip of the thumb and index finger, keeping the other three fingers extended.
- Bend your right arm. Bend the index and middle fingers towards the palm. Place the right thumb on the right side of the nose, the ring and little finger on the left side of the nose.
- Breathe in through both nostrils and then breathe out through both nostrils.
- Close the right nostril with the right thumb and breathe in through the left nostril.
- Close the left nostril and breathe out through the right nostril.
- Breathe in through the right nostril, then close the right nostril and breathe out through the left nostril.
- Continue this practice of breathing out and then in through each nostril in turn.
- Complete eight full cycles of this pranayama and always finish by breathing out of the left nostril.
- If you feel dizzy or light-headed you must stop and resume normal breathing.
- After finishing the eight cycles, sit quietly for a few breaths and then lie down in Savasana, the relaxation posture. Stay in Savasana for ten to fifteen minutes until you feel completely rested.