



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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Home Practice – How difficult can it be?

You're not alone in finding it difficult or even impossible to start your own home practice. Despite realising that there must be benefits to doing yoga at home in addition to attending a weekly class, we still seem to resist it. Although I now love my daily yoga sessions at home, I remember the usual excuses I used to make: There isn't enough room, I don't have enough time, I can't do yoga on a full stomach, and, I don't know what postures to do. I would get home after a class and not be able to remember any of the postures! Such resistance, however natural, is not impossible to overcome and I know that many of my students now have a home practice.

Realistic Expectations

Your personal practice should be something you want to do and look forward to, not something you feel forced to do. You don't have to practice for an hour and a half like your weekly class, nor does it have to be in complete silence. For most of us that's far from possible, with children or partners interrupting in the middle of your practice. But in time it will hopefully become enjoyable rather than another item on your to-do list.

There isn't enough room

The only space you need is the size of your mat. Everyone should be able to find this small amount of space, even in your bedroom.

I don't have enough time

Learn to use the time you've got, whether you have a quick 15 minutes or a decadent two hours, and it can be at any time of the day. Try and start with 20 to 30 minutes – Sun Salutations are great for first thing in the morning.

I can't do yoga on a full stomach

Yes, that's true, and very difficult when other family members need meals at certain times. So some level of organised home practice has to exist. Try and work around meal times so that you manage to fit in a practice just before eating.

I don't know what postures to do

My monthly newsletters include 'Posture of the Month' which explains how to do a posture in great detail, and its benefits. Just follow the detailed instructions carefully and practice it every day for a week and see how much easier it gets. Most of you also have the 'Yoga at Home Lesson Plan'. If you're not sure of any postures then leave them out. At home you can practice whatever and whenever you want.

Useful Tips

Doing a practice at home is ideal for managing stress and settling your mind, as well as improving your postures: your body and mind learn from repetition, not occasional dabbling.

Your practice, however short, should always have a beginning and an end. Begin by getting quiet either by sitting cross-legged, on a back archer or standing in Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Bring your focus to your breath, feel the stillness and come into the present moment. Slow things down towards the end with a seated or lying-down twist. Finally rest in Savasana (relaxation) for at least five minutes, letting yourself ease back into the rest of your day feeling less stressed.

If you would like to know which postures particularly help with certain health problems then please ask me. Reading more about yoga also helps to get you motivated to start your own home practice. DVDs are helpful but only once you have learnt the basics of yoga at a class - use DVDs in addition to your weekly class. I subscribe to an excellent yoga magazine called *Yoga Journal*. They also have a website which is really useful for finding out how to do many, many postures and learn about absolutely everything to do with yoga. www.yogajournal.com

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Posture of the Month – Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I)

This asana is a warrior posture named after the mythic warrior –sage, Virabhadra. This vigorous asana strengthens your spine and increases the flexibility of your knees and thighs. The arms receive an intense stretch and this expands the muscles of your chest and enhances the capacity of your lungs.

1. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain posture).
2. Take a breath in and as you breathe out jump or step your legs wide apart.
3. Raise your arms up to shoulder -level, roll your shoulders back and rotate your arms so that your palms face the ceiling.
4. Raise both arms until they are perpendicular to the floor and parallel to each other. **Beginners:** don't force your arms too close to your ears as this can cause neck or shoulder pain. Keep your elbows slightly bent if you want. **Intermediates:** keep your arms straight and stretch from your elbows to your fingertips.
5. Turn your left foot in and your right foot out and then rotate your body to face over your right foot. Rotate your torso from the chest as well as the waist. The more you rotate to the right and stretch your upper arms, the more effective the posture. **Intermediates:** be conscious of your left leg and concentrate on the stretch from the back of your heel to the back of your thigh.
6. Take a breath in and as you breathe out bend the right knee until the calf and thigh form a right angle.
7. Go down into the posture with resistance and then stretch the length of your body up to the ceiling. Make sure you are not leaning forward as this will put too much pressure on the right knee.
8. Stay in this posture for five breaths, breathing deeply and evenly.
9. To come out of the posture – breathe in and stretch your arms out to your sides and then breathe out and straighten your right knee. Turn both feet to face forward.
10. Repeat the posture on the opposite side for five breaths.
11. Breathe out as you jump or step back into Tadasana.
12. Rest in Tadasana for at least five breaths before starting another posture.

Caution

Do not practise this asana if you have high blood pressure or a cardiac condition.

Benefits of this posture

- Relieves backache, lumbago, and sciatica
- Strengthens the back muscles
- Tones the abdominal muscles
- Relieves acidity and improves digestion
- Strengthens the bladder and corrects a displaced uterus
- Relieves menstrual pain and reduces heavy menstruation.



The Importance of Hip Opening

If you're like most students, you probably feel as though someone poured superglue into your hip sockets. There are perfectly good reasons for this. First, modern life requires sitting all day, which keeps your hips from the rotation, flexion, and extension they need to remain agile. If the hip is constantly kept in a flexed position—like sitting—for hours every day, day after day, the hip flexors will shorten and shrink, limiting your ability to fully extend (straighten) the hip.

Second, common sports such as running and cycling—and even an everyday activity like walking—demand hip strength but not flexibility. The third culprit is stress, which creates tension in your body, especially in your hip area, which is a complex cluster of powerful muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Even a little bit of stress-induced clenching can really lock them up.

Too much sitting can also contribute to serious health problems like obesity and osteoporosis. But did you know it also contributes significantly to back problems, including lower back pain in yoga postures? The connection between a sedentary lifestyle and lower back discomfort in yoga postures is the hip flexor muscles across the front of the hips. If left unstretched, shortened hip flexors affect the position of the pelvis, which in turn affects the position and movement of the lower back. Tight hips are a big cause of back pain.

So what can you do to unstick your hips and get them gliding freely again? If done with proper alignment, Virabhadrasana I (see posture above) can be a wonderful hip flexor stretch. When the hips are open, you'll be much more mobile both above and below them.

Over the next few months we'll be doing a variety of postures that will help to open those hips, which will result in more flexibility in lots of other postures.