



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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Heart and Circulation

The heart is the organ that pumps blood to all parts of the body. It is located in the thoracic cavity, nestled between the lungs. The circulatory system, composed of arteries, veins and capillaries, carries blood to and from the heart to the entire body, supplying oxygen and nutrients into every cell in the body. It also picks up carbon dioxide and other waste material produced by the cells and carries them away for removal from the body.

Common disorders of the circulatory system are cold hands and feet, varicose veins, high or low blood pressure, blocked arteries, angina or a heart attack.

Blocked arteries occur when the coronary vessels are blocked, reducing blood flow to the cardiac muscles. This process eventually damages these muscles and is a major cause of heart attacks. A common symptom is angina or chest pain. Angina pain characteristically radiates from the chest to the back, neck and arms and is accompanied by nausea, breathlessness and fatigue. Its causes include smoking, obesity, blocked arteries, high blood pressure and excessive alcohol consumption.

Exercising is an excellent way to improve your circulation especially to the extremities of the body, like hands and feet. Exercise also helps build lean muscle mass which acts as insulation and prevents us from getting cold. Fat is good insulation but muscle is much better. We need all-over insulation so we need to do exercises that strengthen the upper body as well as the legs. Yoga, of course, is a good form of exercise, which builds muscle all over the body.

Certain vitamins and other nutrients can also help to improve your circulation. If you take 400mg of vitamin E, a B vitamin complex and 40mg of the herb Ginkgo Biloba a day, your circulation will probably improve. Vitamin E also helps to thin the blood and helps to prevent blood clots. Ginger and cayenne are other circulation boosters, so drinking fresh ginger tea and using cayenne pepper in your cooking will boost your circulation.

Cold Extremities

This month we will be concentrating on improving the circulation system with particular emphasis on cold extremities. Cold hands and feet are caused by a slowdown in circulation, when blood collects in the torso and fails to correctly reach the extremities. It gives rise to ailments of the chest and of the intestinal and abdominal organs. It is often the result of a sluggish thyroid, stress, or nervousness. Blood flow can be impeded by stress as it constricts the smaller blood vessels. Yoga postures regulate breathing and eases stress and tension so improving the blood flow to hands and feet.

Improving the Circulation in Your Feet

- Sit on the floor or on a chair. Bend your right knee and place your right foot across your left thigh.
- Put the fingers of your left hand in between the toes of your right foot with your thumb on the outside of your big toe. Use your fingers to move your toes forward and back.
- Then move your toes on their own.
- Remove your fingers and pull each toe to stimulate the circulation.
- Finish by rubbing your foot with both hands and then slap the foot with both hands.

Do the same with the left foot.

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Posture of the Month – Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon)

In Sanskrit, *Ardha* means 'half, while *Chandra* translates as 'moon'. In this asana, your body takes the shape of a half moon. Regular practice enhances your span of concentration. It also improves co-ordination and motor reflexes. The intense stretch it gives to the spine strengthens the paraspinal muscles, keeping the spine supple and well aligned.

1. Place a brick or a block on the right hand side of your mat.
2. Stand in Tadasana (mountain posture)
3. Breathe in and as you breathe out, jump or step the legs wide apart. Raise the arms to the sides, in line with your shoulders, palms facing down.
4. Turn the left foot in slightly and the right foot out making sure that the right knee is in line with the right foot.
5. Breathe in and as you breathe out stretch to the right sinking into your right hip. Roll your left shoulder back opening up the front of the body. Raise your left arm and slowly turn your head and look up at your thumb. Now you are in Trikonasana, the triangle posture, which is one way of starting to get into Ardha Chandrasana.
6. Place your left hand on your hip and turn your head to look down at your right foot.
7. Bend your right knee and stretch your right hand forward and place it on the brick or block.
8. Lift your left leg parallel to the floor and straighten the right leg.
9. Raise your left arm and carefully turn your head and look up at your thumb.
10. Keep your weight on the right foot, thigh, and hip and not on your right palm. Use the block for balance and not for holding your weight.
11. Hold the posture for five breaths.
12. Turn your head to look down, lower your left hand onto your hip, bend your right knee and lower your left leg stretching it back until your foot is on the mat.
13. Straighten your right leg and come back into Trikonasana.
14. Pull up the mula bandha, breathe in and slowly come out of the posture.
15. Repeat on the other side.

Variation of the posture using a wall

1. Stand with your back against a wall.
2. Place a brick or a block near the wall on the right hand side of your mat.
3. Follow the instructions as above but use the wall for support and the back of your left hand should touch the wall.

Caution

Do not practise this asana if you have migraine, diarrhoea or chronic fatigue syndrome. If you have hypertension (high blood pressure) do not look up at your raised arm. Look straight ahead.

Benefits of this posture

- Rotates and flexes the vertebral joints, keeping the spinal muscles supple
- Tones the lumbar and sacral spine, relieving backache
- Corrects misalignment of the shoulders
- Improves blood circulation in the feet
- Helps relieve sciatica
- Relieves gastritis and acidity
- Corrects a prolapsed uterus.



The *posture of the month* is usually quite a difficult posture. This gives us time to practice the posture in every class and to develop the necessary techniques and strength to improve the posture. It may seem very difficult to do the posture at the beginning of the month but by the end of the month you will probably see an improvement.

Various modifications will be used, such as doing the posture against a wall or using a brick or block so that all levels of ability are able to practice the posture.

The main thing is to enjoy your yoga and to leave the class feeling happy and relaxed.