



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY YOGA POSTURES TO PRACTISE AT HOME

We all feel better after attending a yoga class but finding inspiration on your mat when practising alone can be difficult. Last month I wrote about some of the classic standing yoga postures. This month I've written about a few of the classic sitting postures and forward bends.

Stages of Learning Yoga

Last month I explained how the beginner's stage is important to build a strong foundation. The next stage is the intermediate stage, or *ghatavastha*, where the mind is affected by changes in the body. When you reach this stage, you are practising the movements correctly, your body is under your control, but you must now push your mind to touch every part of your body. At this stage, you must practise the asanas with reflective and meditative attention. You become aware of your tissues, organs, skin, and even individual cells. Your mind flows along with all of these parts.

Sitting Postures

All sitting asanas bring elasticity to the hips, knees, ankles, and muscles of the groin. These postures remove tension and hardness in the diaphragm and throat, making breathing smoother and easier. They keep the spine steady, pacifying the mind and stretching the muscles of the heart. There is an increase of blood circulation to all parts of the body.

We always start sitting postures with Dandasana, the staff posture. This is the basic sitting posture for all seated forward bends. Regular practice of this asana improves your posture when seated. Your legs are rested and it is recommended for anyone with arthritis or rheumatism of the knees and ankles. If you suffer with anxiety or mood swings, practise this asana to help increase your will power and to enhance your emotional stability. If you find it difficult to sit up with a straight spine, try sitting on a folded blanket or on a bolster. If this doesn't help, sit with the length of your spine supported against a wall.

Forward Bends

In forward bends, the abdominal organs are compressed. This has a unique effect on the nervous system. As these organs relax, the flow of blood to the entire brain is regulated. The sympathetic nervous system is rested, reducing the pulse rate and blood pressure. Stress is removed from the organs of perception and the senses relax. The adrenal glands are also soothed and function more efficiently. When the body is in a horizontal position in forward bends, there is less strain on the heart to pump blood against gravity and so the blood circulates more easily through all parts of the body. Forward bends also strengthen the paraspinal muscles, inter-vertebral joints, and ligaments.

Remember to keep your breath flowing in a forward bend to prevent creating tension and heaviness in your head. Use your mind to breathe into places of tension and so creating space in the muscles.

Contact Lynne on 00302892042356 or email lynne.gully@iremia.net

YOGA POSTURES TO PRACTISE AT HOME

<p>DANDASANA (staff posture) Sit on the floor with your legs together and extended in front of your torso. If your torso is leaning back, it may be helpful to sit on a blanket or a bolster to lift the pelvis. Sit towards the front of the sitting bones, and adjust the pubis and tail bone equidistant from the floor. Firm the thighs, press them down against the floor, rotate them slightly toward each other, and draw the inner groins toward the sacrum. Flex your ankles, pressing out through your heels. Hold for one minute or so.</p>	
<p>VIRASANA (hero posture) If the ligaments of your knee are injured, sit on your heels. Kneel on the floor, and touch your inner knees together. Slide your feet apart, slightly wider than your hips, with the tops of the feet flat on the floor. Sit back halfway, and wedge your thumbs into the backs of your knees and draw the skin and flesh of the calf muscles toward the heels. Then sit down between your feet, using blocks between the feet if necessary. Allow a thumb's-width space between the inner heels and the outer hips. Turn your thighs inward and press the heads of the thigh bones into the floor. Lay your hands on your thighs, palms down. Hold for one minute or longer.</p>	
<p>BADDHAKONASANA (bound angle posture) Regular practise of this posture increases the flow of blood to the abdomen, pelvis and back. It helps to treat arthritis of the knee, hip, and pelvic joints. Sit on a blanket if your hips or groins are tight. Bend your knees, pull your heels toward your pelvis, then drop your knees out to the sides and press the soles of your feet together. Lift the sternum and lengthen the front torso. Never force your knees down. Rotate the thigh bones back toward the floor. Hold for one minute or longer.</p>	
<p>JANU SIRSASANA (head to knee posture) Sit on the floor with straight legs, with a blanket under your buttocks if necessary. Bend your right knee, and draw the heel back toward your perineum. Rest your right foot sole lightly against your inner left thigh. Line up your navel with the middle of the left thigh. Place a belt around the left foot to help you lengthen the spine evenly. Exhale and extend forward from the groins, not the hips. Be sure not to pull yourself forcefully into the forward bend. Do not hunch the back or shorten the front torso. Lengthen forward into a comfortable stretch. Hold for one minute or longer.</p>	
<p>PASCHIMOTTANASANA (seated forward bend) This asana stretches the length of your spine, allowing the life-force to flow to every part of your body. Keep your thighs flat on the floor. This is more important than holding your feet. Sit on the floor or on a folded blanket. Pull the flesh away from your sitting bones. Lifting the sternum and keeping the front torso long, lean forward from the hip joints, not the waist. Use a belt around your feet if necessary or hold the sides of the feet with your hands. Keep your elbows straight, not bent. When you are ready to go further, don't forcefully pull yourself into the forward bend. Always lengthen the front torso into the posture. Hold for one minute or longer.</p>	