



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY YOGA POSTURES TO PRACTISE AT HOME

In May, June, and September I wrote about some of the classic standing, sitting, forward bends, twisting postures and backbends. This month I've written about a few of the classic inversions and reclining postures. Make sure that you always begin your yoga practice with some basic postures. I included these in the lesson plans sent to you in July. These postures will help to stretch the main muscle groups and your spine and so prepare you for the deeper postures.

Inversions

Some people are afraid that if they practise inverted postures, their blood pressure will rise, or their blood vessels will burst. These are complete misconceptions. After all, standing for long periods can lead to thrombosis and varicose veins, but no one is going to stop standing up. Standing upright is a result of evolution. Just as the human body has adjusted to an upright position, it can also learn to perform inversions without any risk or harm. In contrast to the twisting postures, inverted postures have a drying effect on the pelvic and abdominal organs, while vital organs like the brain, heart, and lungs are flushed with blood.

Salamba Sirsasana (headstand) is the king of asanas, and **Salamba Sarvangasana** (shoulderstand) is the queen of asanas. The health of your body and mind is greatly enhanced by the practice of these two asanas. It is essential that you learn these two asanas with the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher. Beginners will start learning headstands by practising against a wall. Do not practice this asana if you have high blood pressure or problems with your neck or upper spine such as cervical spondylosis. Always practice shoulderstands with support under your shoulders such as blocks or a folded blanket or yoga mat.

The inversion that is a favourite for many students is **Viparita Karani** (legs up the wall). This posture helps to regulate blood pressure, relieves palpitations, breathlessness, asthma, bronchitis, helps to reduce stress and anxiety and mild depression, alleviates arthritis and cervical spondylosis, improves circulation, and helps to prevent varicose veins.

Reclining Postures

Reclining asanas are restful postures which soothe the body and refresh the mind. While reclining postures are often practised at the end of a yoga session, they can also prepare you for other postures, as they help relax the body and strengthen the joints. They give the body the required energy for the more strenuous asanas. **Savasana**, for instance, helps to recover the breath and cool the body and the mind.

Practising Classic Postures

Practise the classic postures when you feel confident of the suppleness of your body and the stability of your mind. If you are a beginner or have stiff muscles or joints or any ailment, it is always best to use props in your practice. Use belts, blocks, and blankets to support you in the postures. Over time you may wish to reduce the number of props used in your practice.

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YOGA POSTURES TO PRACTISE AT HOME

<p>SALAMBA SIRSASANA (headstand) The king of postures. Standing on your head in proper alignment strengthens the whole body. Use a folded blanket or fold your mat to pad your head and forearms. If your legs are dropping forward, it means you have too much weight on your elbows instead of your head. Only for experienced yogis. Do not attempt this posture without proper instruction from a qualified teacher.</p>	
<p>SALAMBA SARVANGASANA (shoulderstand) Lie with your shoulders supported on folded blankets or on blocks and your head on the floor. Bend your knees and as you exhale, press your arms against the floor, and draw your thighs into the front torso. Bend your elbows and hold your lower back. If you cannot draw your elbows towards each other, so that you have a straight line from your shoulders to your elbows, come down and use a belt around your upper arms to keep them in place. Raise your pelvis over the shoulders, so that the torso is relatively perpendicular to the floor. Walk your hands up your back (toward the floor) without letting the elbows slide too much wider than shoulder width. Straighten your legs and press your heels up toward the ceiling. Move the sternum toward the chin. Press the backs of your upper arms and the tops of your shoulders actively into the support, and try to lift the upper spine away from the floor. Gaze softly at your chest. Do not attempt this posture without proper instruction from a qualified teacher.</p>	
<p>VIPARITA KARANI (legs up the wall) Use a folded blanket or bolster to support your pelvis. Practise circular breathing by inhaling from your kidneys, up your back and exhaling down the front of your body into the inverted lake. Stay for five minutes. If your hamstrings are tight, you may not be able to get your buttocks against the wall. This is ok. Just ensure that your pelvis is level.</p>	
<p>SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA (bound angle) Lower your back torso toward the floor using your hands and arms. Support your head and neck on a blanket roll or bolster. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together. Don't push the knees toward the floor as this will harden the groins. Instead, imagine that your knees are floating up toward the ceiling and continue settling your groins deep into your pelvis. As your groins drop toward the floor, so will your knees. Stay for one to five minutes.</p>	
<p>SAVASANA (corpse) Savasana is a posture of total relaxation of the body and the mind. Turn the arms outward and rest the backs of the hands on the floor. Your shoulder blades are resting evenly on the floor. Soften your breath and your face and relax fully for a few minutes. Then stretch your arms over your head and stretch from your fingertips to your toes. Bend your knees onto your chest and as you exhale, squeeze your knees toward your chest to stretch your lower back. Roll onto your right side and take three long deep breaths. Slowly come up to sitting and enjoy the rest of your day. Namaste.</p>	