



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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At this time of year you may be feeling a bit stressed trying to organise Christmas and thinking of what gifts to buy for your family and friends. Finding time to write Christmas cards is always stressful especially if you have to send them abroad before the deadline date. If you are buying gifts on the internet there is also a deadline date for ordering. Then we want to make sure we have something nice to wear for the Christmas parties or on Christmas day. We all create this pressure on ourselves, which causes so much stress in the body.

Here are a few tips to keep your stress levels under control:

- **Don't overdo it.** Just like in any yoga posture, if you overextend long enough the strain could eventually turn into real injury. Only you know if you're pushing too hard or doing too much – whether on your mat or off it – by how you feel. So take time out to assess the stress and ease off. Stop rushing around trying to get everything done at breakneck speed.
- **Keep your cool in queues.** Take a moment to be considerate to people while out shopping. Next time you find yourself in a huge queue first of all remember that there's nothing you can do to improve the physical situation but you can do something about the emotional angst. Say hello to the person at the checkout; smile and offer a kind word, recognise and appreciate them. You'll come away feeling good that you've passed on some measure of compassion and kindness – after all that's what Christmas should be all about.
- **Celebrate with song.** Sing along to your favourite song or any CD you find easy to listen to. Music is brilliant for changing your mood – uplifting your soul and relaxing your mind.
- **Offer thanks.** Get into the habit of being thankful for something or someone each day. Direct your gratitude toward family members, friends or colleagues as you put an image of them inside your mind and heart. By doing this it could help you to overcome the challenges that naturally arise at this time of year.
- **Take time out.** Try to find the time to practice yoga at home. You don't have to do the full 'At home lesson plan'; just choose the postures you like doing but always make sure you give yourself at least 10 minutes for relaxation (Savasana). Try not to be concerned or judge yourself if your mind races. Allow your thoughts to float by and focus on the present moment as your body and mind surrender to complete rest...and finally, don't forget to breathe!

Water: How much should you drink every day?

Every system in your body depends on water. For example, water flushes toxins out of vital organs, carries nutrients to your cells and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues. Lack of water can lead to dehydration, a condition that occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to carry out normal functions.

The average urine output for adults is 1.5 litres a day. You lose close to an additional litre of water a day through breathing, sweating and bowel movements. Food usually accounts for 20% of your total fluid intake, so if you consume 2 litres of water (a little more than 8 cups) along with your normal diet, you will typically replace the lost fluids.

Failing to take in more water than your body uses can lead to dehydration. Even mild dehydration – as little as a 1% to 2% loss of your body weight – can sap your energy and make you tired. Common causes of dehydration include strenuous activity, excessive sweating, vomiting and diarrhoea. Coffee is a diuretic and actually steals water from your body. Signs and symptoms of dehydration include: mild to excessive thirst, fatigue, headache, dry mouth, little or no urination, muscle weakness, dizziness and light-headedness.

If you are dehydrated you may experience stiffness in your muscles, which results in less flexibility. Always make sure you drink a glass of water about half an hour before a yoga class and drink water after the class to replace the lost fluid.

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Posture of the Month – Prasarita Padottanasana

In Sanskrit, prasarita padottanasana literally means ‘spread-out-feet intense stretch’. Not surprisingly for a forward bend, this posture stretches the backs of the legs and, because of its wide stance, the inner groins and inner thigh muscles (adductors). Because the head is brought lower than the heart, the posture is also classed as an ‘inversion’ and can serve as a substitute for Sirsasana (Headstand) for those with neck issues. Many benefits of inversions include bathing the poor old tired brain with freshly oxygenated blood to perk it up. Prasarita Padottanasana is a good warm-up for other wide-stance standing postures such as Virabhadrasana (Warrior) postures and Parsvakonasana (Intense Side Stretch).

The most appropriate distance between your feet will depend on the length of your legs: the taller you are, the wider the stance. One good way to find out is to start in Tadasana (Mountain Posture) with your arms stretched out to the sides, parallel to the floor. Step your feet apart until each is approximately below the same-side wrist. If you find that you can’t easily touch the floor with your hands with your knees straight, then position blocks to support your hands. And remember, never force yourself into a forward bend; rounding your torso forward from your belly to get your hands on the floor is counterproductive and potentially injurious. So don’t be stubborn – use blocks.

1. Stand in Tadasana.
2. Inhale and as you exhale jump or step your feet wide apart. Your feet should be parallel to each other with the toes pointing forward. Lift the inner arches of your feet and feel how your outer heels press more firmly into the floor.
3. Rest your hands on your hips with your fingers facing forward, inhale, and lean your upper torso back. Lift your chest a bit more and, on the next exhalation, tip your torso forward from your hips, maintaining as much length in your front torso as you can.
4. Take both hands off your hips and lower them to the floor. Place your palms flat on the floor with your fingers spread out. **Beginners:** if you are not ready to reach the floor place your hands on blocks as mentioned above.
5. Your hands should be below your shoulders with your elbows bending back.
6. Place the crown of your head on the floor between your palms.
7. Push your sternum forward and draw the abdomen in.
8. Move your thighbones and groin back to reduce the pressure on your head.
9. Stay in the posture for 1 minute.

Variation of the posture

If you are not ready to place the crown of your head on the floor you can do one of these variations.

- Place a bolster on the floor with its flat end between your feet. When you bend toward the floor, place the crown of your head on the centre of the bolster. Keep your head and neck relaxed. Then, shift your weight onto your heels. Hold the posture for 1 minute.
- Place blocks on the floor between your feet and below your head. Place the crown of your head on the centre of the blocks. Hold the posture for 1 minute.

The bolster or the blocks will help you if you have a stiff spine and find it difficult to place your head on the floor. Use the bolster or the blocks until your spine and the muscles of your back become more flexible.

Caution

Do not hold this posture for more than 1 minute, especially if you are a beginner. If you have low blood pressure, come out of the posture gradually, to avoid dizziness. Do not tilt your head or compress your neck while practising this posture.

Benefits of this posture

- Reduces depression, boosts confidence
- Soothes the brain and the sympathetic nervous system
- Energizes the heart and lungs
- Reduces blood pressure
- Relieves stress-related headaches, migraine and fatigue
- Tones the abdominal organs
- Relieves stomach ache by neutralising acidity
- Relieves lower backache
- Strengthens the knee joint and makes the hip joint supple
- Regulates menstrual flow.

