



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## What Is Yoga? Part 3

In the two previous newsletters I've been explaining that yoga is not simply a form of exercise but is often much more to some people. The longer you have been practicing yoga, the more you may have noticed changes in your body and your attitude to life. Yoga can be integrated into your everyday life in so many different ways.

### Eight Limbs of Yoga

I have already written about the first two limbs of yoga, Yama and Niyama. The third limb or step is asana or posture. In the Western world this is the most well known of the eight limbs of yoga. When most people think of yoga, they think of the yoga postures.

#### ASANA (posture)

There is more to practising asanas correctly than merely the physical aligning of the body. The postures when practised with awareness bring the body, mind, intelligence, nerves, consciousness and the self together into a single, harmonious whole. Asanas may appear to deal with the physical body alone but, in fact, different asanas can affect the chemical messages sent to and from the brain, improving and stabilising your mental state. Yoga's unique ability to soothe the nerves also calms the brain, makes the mind fresh and tranquil, and relaxes the entire body.

An asana is not a posture that you assume mechanically. It involves a thoughtful process at the end of which a balance is achieved between movement and resistance. Your weight has to be evenly distributed over muscles, bones and joints, just as your intelligence must be engaged at every level. You have to create space in your muscles and your skin, fitting the fine network of your entire body into the asana.

Newcomers to yoga have to learn that at first asanas are practised at the level of the anatomical body alone. This beginner's stage is important and should not be hurried through. In order to learn the asanas, beginners should be primarily concerned with getting their movements right. They need to grasp the whole asana, and not lose themselves in the finer details. It is more important for beginners to start by striving for stability within a posture. This provides a strong foundation.

While practising an asana, one must focus attention on the inner body, drawing the mind inward to sharpen the intelligence. Then, the asana becomes effortless. This is the turning point in the practice of asanas, when the body, mind and self unite. The regular practice of asanas stimulates and activates all the organs, tissues and cells of the body. The mind becomes alert and strong, the body healthy and active.

**“The body is your temple. Keep it pure and clean for the soul to reside in”. B.K.S Iyengar.**

# Posture of the Month – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Up dog)

In this asana, your body takes the shape of a dog stretching itself with the head up in the air. *Urdhva Mukha* means having the “mouth upwards” in Sanskrit, and *svana* translates as “dog”.

## Technique

1. Lie on the floor on your stomach, face downwards.
2. Keep your feet about one foot or thirty centimetres apart. Your toes should point straight back.
3. Place your palms on the floor by the side of your chest, your fingers pointing forward. The more experienced you are, the further back you can take your palms. Advanced or intermediate students can take their palms to the sides of their waist.
4. Inhale, raise your head and trunk, stretch your arms completely and push your head and trunk as far back as possible.
5. Keep your legs straight and tightened at your knees, but do not rest your knees on the floor. The weight of your body rests on your palms and toes only.
6. Your spine, thighs and calves should be fully stretched, and your buttocks contracted tight.
7. Push your chest forward, stretch your neck fully and throw your head as far back as possible. Stretch also the back portions of your arms.
8. Stay in the posture for 30 seconds to one minute with deep breathing.
9. To come out of the posture slowly bend your elbows, release the stretch and rest on your mat.

## Beginner's Tip

Beginners should not hold the final posture for more than 30 seconds, gradually increasing the duration to 1 minute. There's a tendency in this posture to "hang" on the shoulders, which lifts them up toward the ears and "turtles" the neck. Actively draw the shoulders away from the ears by lengthening down along the back armpits, pulling the shoulder blades toward the tailbone, and puffing the side ribs forward.

## Cautions

Do not practice this posture if you have a back injury or if you suffer with carpal tunnel syndrome or if you are pregnant.

## Benefits of this posture

- The movement is good for persons with lumbago, sciatica and slipped or prolapsed discs of the spine
  - Strengthens the spine, arms, wrists
  - Improves circulation in the pelvic region and back and tones the spinal nerves
  - Stimulates digestion and relieves constipation
  - Tones the liver and massages the kidneys and adrenal glands.
  - Improves posture and firms the buttocks
  - Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
  - Helps relieve mild depression and fatigue
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- Therapeutic for asthma

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