



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## Strengthening Your Abdominals

This month in our classes we will be concentrating on bringing strength and flexibility to our abdominal muscles and lower back muscles known as '**core strength**'. The modern sedentary lifestyle creates weak abdominals. When the abdominals aren't strong enough to do a posture, such as a leg lift while lying on your back, people will lift their legs by pulling from the lower back, which can cause injury.

When your core is strong, you feel easier in your postures and more capable in your life. The navel is the seat of the third chakra, the power centre, in your body.

Yoga is excellent for building healthy abdominals because it involves moving the body in various directions and angles through postures requiring stability and balance. The key is flexible strength, and that's what yoga develops. One reason the abdominals are so weak is that most people sit with their backs rounded, which makes the abdominal muscles go slack. Weak abdominals and damaged lower backs are common in our culture. For many people it is their arms and legs that get used the most but we have a large group of muscles in our centre that are begging for attention.

### Problems can occur if your core muscles are weak such as:

- Chronic lower back pain
- Hip and knee injuries
- Shoulder and neck tension
- Repetitive strain injuries in the shoulder, neck or arm due to posture and compensation changes.

### Muscles That Give us Core Strength

- ❖ **Rectus Abdominus** – this is the wide and long muscle that runs all the way down from the breastbone to the pubic bone. This muscle gives us correct posture.
- ❖ **Obliques** – these are located at the waist and there are both internal and external obliques. They allow us to rotate at the waist and to bend sideways.
- ❖ **Transverse Abdominus** – this muscle is located behind the rectus abdominus, like a girdle wrapped around your stomach. It is used when you draw your navel towards your spine.

### Positive Effects

Some of the positive effects you may notice from developing a healthy 'core' include an overall increase in energy levels, a decreased occurrence of injuries, improved posture, diminished muscle tension, and improved performance and quality of life.

### Importance of the Bandhas

**Mula Bandha** - A well functioning mula bandha has a deeply stabilizing impact on health and wellbeing. It is support for your internal organs, stability for your pelvis, and helps to strengthen your back.

**Uddiyana Bandha** –Activating the uddiyana bandha will help to strengthen the muscles covering the front of the abdominal wall from the pelvis to the bottom ribs. Full explanations of how to perform these bandhas will be given during our classes.

# Posture of the Month

## Jathara Parivartanasana – Stomach twist.

Jathara means the stomach, the belly. Parivartana means turning or rolling about.

### Technique

1. Lie flat on your back on the floor.
2. Stretch out both arms sideways in line with your shoulders.
3. Exhale and raise both legs together until they are perpendicular to the floor. Your legs should remain completely straight.
4. Stay in this position for a few breaths.
5. Exhale and lower both your legs sideways down towards the floor to the left until the toes of your left foot almost touch the fingertips of your outstretched left hand.
6. Keep your legs above the floor and try to keep your back on the floor.
7. When you first do this posture, your right shoulder will be lifted off the floor. Try placing a heavy object into your right hand such as a hand weight as this will help keep your shoulder down. Or you could hold a heavy piece of furniture with the right hand when the legs are turned sideways to the left. We could work in partners so that your partner could hold your shoulder down.
8. Both legs should go down together with your knees kept tight throughout. Try to keep the lumbar portion of your back on the floor and turn your legs only from your hips.
9. When your legs are near your outstretched hand, move your abdomen to the right.
10. Stay in this posture for about 20 seconds, keeping your legs stiff throughout. Then on an exhalation lift your straight legs back to the perpendicular.
11. Stay with your legs perpendicular for a few breaths and then repeat the posture on the opposite side by lowering your legs to the right and turning your abdomen to the left.
12. Stay in the posture for the same length of time and then on an exhalation, lift your legs to the perpendicular.
13. Gently lower your legs to the floor in front of you and relax.
14. Repeat another once on both sides.

### Beginner's Tip

When you first do this posture you may not be able to take your legs near the floor. That's okay. Just take your legs sideways as far as you can while still keeping control.

### Benefits of this posture

- Strengthens the oblique muscles
- Reduces excess fat
- Tones and eradicates sluggishness of the liver, spleen and pancreas
- Cures gastritis and strengthens the intestines
- Abdominal muscles are kept toned
- Abdominal organs are kept healthy
- Helps to relieve sprains and catches in the lower back and hip region.



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### Other Postures That Strengthen the Abdominals

Paripurna Navasana – the boat posture

Ardha Navasana – the half boat

Full plank – body in a straight line resting on hands and toes

Dolphin plank – same as plank but resting on forearms and toes