



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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How To Improve Your Posture

I'm always amazed when I see people working in a squat on the ground or just sitting and being comfortable in a squat. Unlike sitting in a chair while hunched over a desk, squatting in a posture like **Malasana** (Garland Posture) can actually improve your posture, stretch your back, elasticize your knees and ankles, and help improve your digestive function.

Malasana is also a forward bend—the back softens and releases from head to tail as the ankles, knees, and hips flex. The heels root the hips back, and the spine lengthens as it rounds. In addition to strengthening and stretching the feet and ankles and increasing mobility in the hips, the posture allows the back muscles to broaden.

If you are tight in your hips, groins, calves, and Achilles tendons, your heels may not reach the floor. Here some variations you can practice at home to loosen those regions.

Placing a blanket behind your knees

If your knees ache in the posture, place a blanket behind them, between your calves and thighs, to help decrease the amount of flexion. (The thicker the blanket, the less your knees will have to bend.) Just be sure to use a blanket behind both knees (even if you feel pressure on only one) so that your weight isn't skewed to one side, putting extra pressure on your other knee. In this variation, hold on to something firm, like a table, to help you find stability while you learn to press your heels down and lengthen your spine. The variation will also help you stretch your calves and ankles so that you can reach your heels to the floor. The object you hold on to should be fixed, secure, and high enough so that your arms can reach upward in the squat. Wall ropes, a countertop, a bed frame, or a banister may also work.

Leaning against a wall

In this variation, a wall supports your buttocks, which will help shift some of your weight into your heels while you reach forward. To begin, stand with your feet approximately thirteen centimetres (six inches) away from a wall, and your sacrum (lower back) against it. Bend your knees and slide your buttocks down the wall until you're squatting. If your heels don't reach the floor, step your feet a little farther away from the wall. If you find that your buttocks touch the floor, come a little closer to the wall. Keeping the feet together, spread your knees apart, press your heels down, and stretch them back toward the wall. With the bottom of your sacrum resting against the wall, extend your arms, side ribs, and waist between your legs and away from the wall. Reach forward from the bottom of your waist to your hands, and extend your arms and chest parallel to the floor. Notice that the more you reach forward with your torso, the more you have to ground your heels back and down. Keep your inner heels down so that the weight doesn't fall onto the outside edge of your foot. For this variation, look down at the floor.

The Final Posture

Now you're ready to try the final posture. If you practice the compact and soothing forward bend of Malasana regularly, you'll learn the art of squatting with ease. It's a skill that you'll find useful throughout your life—whether you are trying to improve your posture, getting close to a heavy object to lift it safely without straining your back, or creating your own restful seat when there are no chairs available.

Posture of the Month

Malasana I and II (the garland posture)

In these two postures the arms hang from the neck like a garland.

Technique - Malasana I

1. Squat with your feet as close together as possible. (Keep your heels on the floor if you can; otherwise, support them on a folded mat or on the edge of a block.)
2. Widen your knees, separating your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs.
3. Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms to together in front of your chest, and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen your front torso.
4. To go further, press your inner thighs against the sides of your torso. Reach your arms forward and rest your palms on the floor.
5. Then wrap your arms around your bent legs and take your hands one by one behind your back and clasp your fingers.
6. Then stretch your back and neck up.
7. Remain in this position for 30 seconds breathing normally.
8. To take the posture further, exhale and bend forward and rest your head on the floor.
9. Remain in this position for 30 seconds.
10. Inhale and raise your head from the floor. Release your hands and rest your palms on the floor.

Malasana II

11. To go into the second posture, reach around the outside of your ankles and clasp your back heels.
12. Exhale and move your head down to your toes and rest your forehead on them.
13. Hold the position for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then inhale, straighten your knees, and stand into Uttanasana (standing forward bend).

Contraindications and Cautions

Do not practice this posture if you have lower back or knee injuries. Avoid this posture if you are pregnant.

Beginner's Tip

If squatting is difficult, sit on the front edge of a chair seat, thighs forming a right angle to your torso, heels on the floor slightly ahead of your knees. Lean your torso forward between the thighs.

Follow-Up Postures

- Uttanasana – standing forward bend holding your elbows while in the posture.
- Adho Mukha Svanasana – Downward dog.
- Bhujangasana – Cobra Posture

Benefits of this posture

- Tones the belly
- Strengthens and brings flexibility to ankles
- Increases mobility in the hips
- Stretches back muscles
- Soothes some causes of backache
- Strengthens the abdomen



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