



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue no: 38

November 2010

## Yoga From The Feet Up

We generally don't pay enough attention to our feet. Then we join a yoga class and begin to realise the importance of good alignment in the feet. If we are not balanced in our feet we may experience pain in other parts of the body, such as knees, hips, back, and shoulders.

Paying attention to the way your feet connect with the earth can correct foot and ankle problems that have repercussions throughout your body. Many people end up standing and walking for a lifetime on feet that have fallen or weakened arches. This is like driving on semi-flat tyres. Walking on "flat tyre" feet leads to compression in the ankles and strain on the spine. The best way to check whether your feet are balanced is to check the soles of your shoes. Does the inside or the outside of your heel wear down? If there is excessive wear on one side, the foot is shifted off its central axis, likely putting strain on the knee, hip, or lower back.

One way to think about foot stability is to think of your feet as having four corners: the big and little toes, and the outer and inner heels. Distributing your weight evenly across your feet is central to healthy alignment. When you practice the postures like Virabhadrasana III (warrior III) and Ardha Chandrasana (half moon) pay attention to your feet. Don't just point the toes or press out with the heel; instead, press out with all four corners of the foot.

### Wake Up Your Feet

One good way to restore proper tone to the sole of the foot is to step onto a tennis ball. Stand on a tennis ball and roll it back and forth under your foot, working the toes, the ball of the foot, the arch, and the heel. After waking up your feet with the tennis ball, it's a good idea to stretch both the sole and the top of the foot. A simple way to stretch the underside of the foot is to kneel with the toes turned under. To stretch the top of the foot, Virasana (Hero Posture) is invaluable.

Another good exercise is to sit on the floor and strongly point your toes. You will feel a stretch in the tops of your feet and ankles and compression at the backs of your ankles, just above the heels. Then strongly press your heels away from you and draw your toes toward you. You'll feel a stretch in your calf muscles and Achilles tendons, while the front of your ankles will feel tight and short.

### Spreading your toes

In standing postures, focus on lengthening and spreading the toes to stretch the sole of your foot. There's a reason I'm always saying to spread your toes. It helps to create a stable base especially in balancing postures.

It's never too late to learn to spread your toes. You have muscles in your feet that are designed to spread your toes just as the muscles in your hands spread your fingers. If your toes stay glued together no matter how much you try to spread them, the muscles are probably atrophied from lack of use, and the toes themselves may have lost flexibility.

Make these exercises part of your life, and your foot bones (not to mention your leg bones and hip bones,) will be forever grateful.

# Posture of the Month

## THE TADASANA SERIES

Tadasana (mountain posture) is usually the starting position for all the standing postures. But it's useful to practice Tadasana as a posture in itself, along with the series of variations.

### Technique

1. Stand with the bases of your big toes touching, heels slightly apart (so that your second toes are parallel). Lift and spread your toes and the balls of your feet, then lay them softly down on the floor. Rock back and forth and side to side. Gradually reduce this swaying to a standstill, with your weight balanced evenly on the feet.
2. Press down into the four corners of your feet, especially at the bases of the little toes. Now you should feel the arches of your feet lifting, your kneecaps lifting and your thigh muscles firming.
3. Imagine a line of energy all the way up along your inner thighs to your groins, and from there through the core of your torso, neck, and head, and out through the crown of your head.
4. Press your shoulder blades into your back, then widen them across and release them down your back. Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight toward the ceiling. Widen your collarbones. Hang your arms beside the torso.
5. Balance the crown of your head directly over the centre of your pelvis, with the underside of your chin parallel to the floor. Soften your throat and your eyes.
6. Stay in the posture for 30 seconds to 1 minute, breathing easily.

### Variations

- ❖ **Tadasana Urdhva Hastasana** - stretch the arms upward, perpendicular to the floor and parallel with each other, with the palms facing inward.
- ❖ **Tadasana Urdhva Baddha Hastasana** - interlace the fingers, extend the arms straight in front of your torso, turn the palms away, then stretch the arms upward, perpendicular to the floor, so the palms face the ceiling.
- ❖ **Tadasana Paschima Baddha Namaskar** - cross your arms behind your back, holding each elbow with the opposite-side hand.
- ❖ **Tadasana Paschima Namaskar** – take your hands behind your back and place your palms together in Namaste.
- ❖ **Tadasana Gomukhasana** – one hand sliding up your spine and the other over your shoulder and link fingers together. Change sides after five breaths.

### Benefits of this posture

- ❖ Corrects bad posture by straightening the spine
- ❖ Improves the alignment of your body
- ❖ Counters the degenerative effects of ageing on the spine, legs and feet
- ❖ Strengthens thighs, knees and ankles
- ❖ Firms the abdomen
- ❖ Tones the buttock muscles
- ❖ Relieves sciatica
- ❖ Reduces flat feet



Contact Lynne at [lynne.gully@iremia.net](mailto:lynne.gully@iremia.net) or Tel +302892042356