



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## MOVING UP TO THE HIPS

During the months of November and December we focused on the importance of our feet and how to take care of our knees. Now we're moving up the body to the hips.

Your hips consist of your pelvis and your thigh bone (femur). When the femur moves on the pelvis, it normally moves in six directions – forward, behind, toward the midline of the body, away from the midline of the body, external rotation and internal rotation. When your hips become tight or limited in range of motion, any of these directions may be restricted. When that occurs, your body will compensate. It will find another way to move – a way that is usually inefficient. Over time, you may experience pain or strain in the sacroiliac joints, knees, ankles, back or neck.

If, for example, the hip abductors -- muscles at the outer hip -- are weak, this allows the knee to roll too far inward, towards the midline of the body. That can cause pain under, and around, the kneecap. If you begin stretching and strengthening the hips you can do a lot to prevent lower leg injuries.

If you're like most students, you probably feel as though someone poured superglue into your hip sockets. There are perfectly good reasons for this. Modern life requires sitting all day, which keeps your hips from the rotation, flexion, and extension they need to remain agile. Activities like running, cycling or even just waking demand hip strength but not flexibility. Another factor is stress, which creates tension in your body, especially in your hip area, which is a complex cluster of powerful muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Even a little bit of stress-induced clenching can really lock them up.

### What Can We Do To Release The Hips?

So what can you do to unstick your hips and get them gliding freely again? For starters, you can start to incorporate **King Pigeon Posture** into your yoga practice, which is this month's **Posture of The Month**. Remember to stretch all the major muscle groups and practice postures like Ananda Balasana (Happy Baby), Setu Bandha (Bridge), Supta Padangusthasana (Using a belt to stretch each leg vertically and out to the side) and Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Dog) before attempting to do King Pigeon Posture. During January we will be concentrating on postures that help to stretch and strengthen the hips and so creating more flexibility.

King Pigeon posture is perfect for tight hips because it stretches the hip rotators (the buttocks area) *and* the hip flexors (the long muscles that run along the front of your thighs and pelvis). It also requires substantial external rotation in the front leg and substantial internal rotation in the back leg. If you practice it consistently, you'll notice an increased suppleness throughout your practice. You may also find that your body moves more easily even after class, since your pelvis is the central hub of movement.

There is a lot of research that has linked our emotional states with the functioning of the pelvic area, which can impact the ability to release and strengthen. So remember to relax first before moving into any posture, bring a balanced rhythm to your breathing and just let go.

# Posture of the Month

## EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA

### One-Legged King Pigeon Posture

Find proper alignment in King Pigeon Posture, then practice it often, and those stiff, tight hips will start to feel open again.

#### Technique

1. Start on all fours, placing your hands directly below your shoulders, and your knees below your hips. Bring your right knee forward until it touches your right wrist, keeping your right thigh parallel to the sides of your mat. Slowly inch your right shin and foot toward the midline of your body until your foot is directly below your left hip. Now straighten your left leg toward the back of your mat.
2. Instead of leaning forward, walk your hands back and lower both sides of your pelvis toward the floor. As your pelvis releases, be sure your hips don't lean to the right. You'll know this is happening if your left hip lifts higher than your right. You need to keep your hips as level as possible to get the full effects of the posture and to keep your lower back safely aligned. If you're not able to lower the hips evenly, sit on a folded blanket or a block before starting the posture.
3. As your hips continue to settle, press your fingertips firmly into the floor and lengthen the sides of your waist to help keep your lower back long and free from strain. Using your arms this way allows you to modify the intensity of the stretch.
4. To take the posture further, walk your hands forward, inhale deeply as you lengthen your torso, and exhale as you fold forward, lowering your elbows to the floor. Again, use your arms to adjust the weight you release into your hips. If the stretch feels too intense, lift away from the floor and use your arms to support more of your weight. If you have space to spare in your hips, lower your torso and let your weight settle onto the floor.
5. Breathe into the sensations rumbling in your hips. Continue to breathe into your hips and allow your belly to melt toward the floor.
6. After 5 to 10 breaths in the forward bend, inhale to come back up. Press down through your fingertips as you lift your hips away from the floor and move into Downward Dog. Take five deep breaths and observe how your hips feel.
7. Repeat on the other side.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

Take care in this posture if you have a previous injury in the ankle, knee or sacroiliac joint. Move slowly if you have tight hips or thighs and do not move into the full posture.

#### Benefits of this posture

- Stretches the thighs, groins and psoas, abdomen and chest
- Exercises the neck and shoulder muscles
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Opens the shoulders and chest
- Rejuvenates the lumbar spine
- The thyroid and adrenal glands receive a rich supply of blood and function properly, increasing vitality
- Improves blood circulation around the pubic region, which is kept healthy.



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