



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## Strengthening Your Abdominals

We continue our journey up the body as this month we work on bringing strength and flexibility to our abdominal muscles and lower back muscles known as 'core strength'.

The modern sedentary lifestyle creates weak abdominals as most people sit with their backs rounded, which makes the abdominal muscles go slack. When the abdominals aren't strong enough to do a posture, such as a leg lift while lying on your back, it is possible to compensate by pulling from the lower back, which can cause injury.

### 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.

Yoga teachers have long understood the importance of strong abdominals. This is not just about developing the surface muscles, or "six-pack abs". Yoga also focuses on the underlying muscles to build abdominals that are both strong as well as flexible.

Abdominal muscles assist breathing, align the pelvis, flex and rotate the trunk, keep the torso erect, support the lumbar spine, and hold in the organs of digestion. Strong, toned muscles at the core of your body support good health.

Which postures can help you to develop stronger abdominal muscles? The Plank Posture is an excellent all-around toner that develops strength in the upper and lower abdominals. Navasana (Boat Posture) trains all four abdominal layers, particularly the lower abdominals, which often tend to be overlooked.

### Positive Effects

Through practising various postures you'll learn how to find your inner core muscles and how to activate them and to stabilise your back from the inside out. 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

## PARIPURNA NAVASANA – the boat posture

In this asana, the body takes the shape of a boat. The word *paripurna* means 'complete' or 'full' in Sanskrit, while *nava* means 'boat'. The use of a belt in this asana allows the posture to be held without straining the stomach and back muscles. Regular practice of this asana tones the abdominal muscles and organs. It also exercises the neck and stimulates the thyroid gland.

### Technique

1. Sit on the floor with your legs stretched straight in front. Place your palms on the floor by your hips, your fingers pointing to your feet. Stretch your hands straight and keep your back erect. This position is called Dandasana.
2. Breathe in and as you breathe out, lean back slightly putting weight in your hands and raise your legs from the floor. Keep your legs straight with your knees tight and your toes pointing forward. Balance only on your buttocks and no part of your spine should touch the floor. Keep your legs at an angle of 60 degrees so that your feet are higher than your head.
3. Remove your hands from the floor and stretch your arms forward, keeping them parallel to the floor and near your thighs with your palms facing each other.
4. Stay in this posture for half a minute, with normal breathing. Gradually increase the time to one minute.
5. Breathe out, lower your hands, rest your legs on the floor and relax by lying on your back.

### Variation of the posture using a belt.

1. Sit in Dandasana, as above.
2. Bend your knees and bring your feet close to your buttocks. Place a belt around the balls of your feet and hold the belt with your hands close to your feet.
3. Pull up the mula bandha and raise your feet off the floor. Keep your back straight and lift your chest. Carefully extend your legs without moving your hands down the belt.
4. **Beginners:** keep your knees bent and focus on keeping your back straight and staying on your sitting bones. **Intermediates:** Straighten your legs until your feet are higher than your head.
5. Stay in this posture for half a minute, with normal breathing.
6. Then breathe out, bend your knees and take your feet to the floor. Release the belt and relax by lying on your back.

### Benefits of this posture

- Strengthens the abdomen and hip flexors
- Reduces lower backache by strengthening the spinal muscles
- Tones the kidneys
- Stimulates the thyroid gland by increasing the body's metabolic rate
- Helps relieve stress
- Improves digestion



### Other Postures That Strengthen the Abdominals

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

Jathara Parivartanasana – stomach twist by lowering the legs from side to side

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