



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue no: 56

September 2012

YOGA THERAPY

Straightening the Upper Back

Welcome back to yoga after the long summer break.

During the summer I was observing how people sat at tables eating their meals or how they sat working on their laptops or iPads. Most people were sitting bent and hunched over with a pronounced roundness in their upper backs. Their shoulders were dropping forward and their chests were sinking back. I was hoping that when they stood up their backs would straighten up but sadly this didn't happen. There was still roundness in their upper backs. This is also quite common in elderly people as they don't have strength in the muscles of their back to hold them up straight.

Things to watch out for

Sitting or standing with a rounded upper back can have a detrimental effect on your health.

Breathing – as your back rounds, so you compress the chest area. This prevents the breath from flowing freely. It prevents the lungs from expanding and allowing enough oxygen to flow to all parts of the body. You find you can only breathe into the upper part of your lungs and never feel the benefit of a full breath, which helps calm the mind and relieves feelings of stress.

Digestion – as you sit with a rounded upper back you are also pressing down on the stomach. This has an effect how you digest food and can result in acid reflux or bloating. Elderly people often have problems with digestion and this could be caused by how they sit at the table. If you suffer with bloating or burning in the stomach then passive backbends will help as they lift the diaphragm and extend the abdomen creating space in the digestive system.

Lower Backs – sitting with a rounded upper back puts pressure on your lower back causing weakness in the muscles. Your spine is then not properly supported, which can lead to problem in the discs. Weakness in the lower back muscles will result in poor posture.

This month we will focus on straightening the upper back and the spine to improve your posture and your breathing. We will also stretch out those stiff muscles and bring your body and your mind back into balance after the summer break.

The four postures detailed on page two will help to straighten the upper back.

Contact Lynne on 00302892042356 or email lynne.gully@iremia.net

POSTURES TO STRAIGHTEN THE UPPER BACK

SUKHASANA (easy pose)

Sit on blocks or a folded blanket so that your knees are not higher than your hips. Press your hands down by your sides or just behind you in order to straighten your back. Maintain this straightness and rest your hands on your knees.

You can sit in this position for any length of time, but if you practice this posture regularly, be sure to alternate the cross of the legs. A good rule of thumb: On even-numbered days, cross the right shin in front of the left, and on odd-numbered days, do the opposite. Alternately, you can divide the practice time in half, and spend the first half with your right leg forward, and the second half with the left leg forward.



ADHO MUKA SVANASANA (downward dog)

Start with arms wide and feet wide to allow your back to lengthen and stretch. Squeeze shoulder blades together and lift your knee caps and your quadriceps. Firm the outer arms and press the bases of all your fingers and thumbs actively into the floor.

This posture stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands. It strengthens the arms and legs and straightens the back. This weight-bearing posture also helps prevent osteoporosis.



UTTANASANA (standing forward bend)

It is quite difficult to keep the back straight as you bend forward. We will practise this posture with our hands on blocks and focus on straightening the upper back.

With each inhalation in the posture, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend but keeping your upper back straight. Keep pulling up the knee caps and quadriceps muscles throughout the posture. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, between the shoulder blades.



PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA (wide-legged forward bend)

We will practise this posture keeping the back straight, placing hands on blocks if necessary. You need to keep your legs strong in this posture by pulling up the knee caps and the quadriceps.

To come out of this posture, inhale as you lift your front torso with a straight back.

This posture strengthens and stretches the inner and back legs and the spine. It tones the abdominal organs, calms the brain and relieves mild backache.



SOME WISE WORDS FROM B.K.S. IYENGAR

- I am always happy with the smallest improvement. I do not try to reach perfection but only the little perfection of every day.
- Yoga is circulation: by stretching, blood arrives, the thick blood is driven back, the energy goes on to feed the nerves. Little by little, intuition improves, but do not try to find it.
- You should always do a little bit more than you can, in quality and in quantity.
- In whatever you are doing, be one: body, soul, mind. Do it beautifully and with purity.