



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY

MOVING INTO POSTURES WITH THE BREATH

In last month's newsletter I wrote about restorative yoga and how to reduce your stress levels before the holiday season. Now it's time to stretch out all those stiff muscles after the Christmas break and to breathe well in every posture.

STRETCHING – Muscles need to be stretched slowly and carefully. Moving too quickly into a yoga posture may result in tearing a muscle. This rarely happens but always good to be aware of the possibility. We use many different muscles when we practice yoga and the lengthening of each muscle moves us further into every posture.

THE BREATH – Moving with the breath is so very important. We all know we need to inhale and exhale with a continuous flow during our practice, but we also need to link this with the actual yoga postures. When you stretch your arms overhead try and reach your maximum stretch just as you finish inhaling. Everyone breathes slightly differently so some people will finish their stretch before others, depending on the length of their breath. Another example of this is moving into Virabhadrasana II (warrior II). Inhale to start and as you exhale slowly bend your knee and reach your final posture just as you finish exhaling. The same applies to forward bends. It's difficult to reach your maximum bend in just one breath as your muscles need time to stretch and lengthen. Every time you exhale go a little further into the forward bend without any forcing.

THE SPHINCTERS – We have been working on the sphincter muscles of the urethra, vagina/testicles and anus since September. This is to help us understand what it means to pull up the Mula Bandha. You can practice pulling up the individual sphincters one at a time as you exhale and then all three together feeling a lifting sensation in your inner body. Using this control will bring more stability in standing postures and also bring your pelvis into correct alignment. Before moving into Virabhadrasana II (warrior II) remember to pull up the sphincter muscles.

OTHER TIPS – If you feel tension in your shoulders while practicing Adho Mukha Svanasana (downward dog), you may be dropping your head too much. Try lifting your head slightly so that your ears are in line with your arms. Very often this alleviates any tension.

If you feel tightness in your lumbar spine (lower back) try dropping the sacrum slightly. You may be unaware that you are compressing your lumbar spine. Think of the clock movements. As you move your pelvis forward and up towards twelve o'clock your spine will stay flat on the floor. Then move your pelvis back and down towards six o'clock and you will create a large arch in the lower back. When doing any postures, always keep your pelvis between 12 and 6 o'clock, never flattening the back or arching the lower back.

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USING THE BREATH TO MOVE FURTHER INTO POSTURES

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA

Place the loop of the belt around your right foot with your knee bent. Inhale and as you exhale slowly straighten your leg keeping your ankle above your hip and your back resting on the centre of your sacrum (the centre of the clock). Feel the hamstring muscles slowly lengthening with the breath. Keep the loop around your right foot but take the belt under your right arm, under your upper back and hold the end of the belt in your left hand. Inhale and as you exhale slowly take your leg out to the right. Feel the inner thigh muscles lengthening but keep your left hip on the mat and your pelvis level. It's unlikely that your foot will reach the floor. Stay for a few breaths and then do the same with your left leg.



RORY EARNSHAW

AHDO MUKA SVANASANA (downward dog)

Move slowly into this posture. Start on hands and knees and then as you lift your knees press into your hands and move backwards lifting the sitting bones. Come onto the backs of your toes and pull up the quadriceps and the sphincters. Inhale and as you exhale slowly take your heels down towards the mat.

Keep your head slightly lifted so that your ears are in line with your upper arms, as shown in the picture opposite. Don't let the lumbar spine drop down into a big curve. Keep pushing up into the sitting bones and keep breathing and pulling up the sphincters.



MARTY SCONDUTO

VIRABHADRASANA II (warrior II)

Stand with your legs wide apart. Place your hands on your hips. Turn your left foot in and your right foot out. Before you move into the posture, pull up the sphincter muscles and drop the sacrum, so that your bottom is not sticking out. Inhale and as you exhale slowly bend your right knee. Look at your knee and make sure it stays above your ankle and in line with your foot. You may not have moved into your maximum posture with the first breath, so inhale and slowly straighten your right leg and raise your arms overhead and as you exhale go back into the posture stretching your arms out to the side. Do this at least three times on each side and feel your muscles lengthening with each exhalation.



CHRIS ANDRE

PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA (wide leg forward bend)

Only take your legs as wide as in warrior II. If you take them too wide you will lose the control of the sphincter muscles. Stand with your hands on your hips and elbows squeezing back to open the front of the body. The outer edges of your feet are parallel with the edges of the mat. Inhale and as you exhale lift the chest, pull up the sphincter muscles and the quadriceps and slowly start to bend forward. Use blocks or a chair if you are unable to place your hands on the mat. Avoid dropping the lumbar spine into a curve. Every time you exhale you may be able to move a little further into the posture.



RORY EARNSHAW