



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY RELIEVING STIFFNESS IN THE BODY

The Spine

The spine or vertebral column consists of 24 moveable bones (vertebrae) plus the sacrum and coccyx. The bodies of the bones are separated from each other by intervertebral discs, consisting of cartilage. The vertebral column has five parts:

- 7 cervical bones
- 12 thoracic bones
- 5 lumbar bones
- 1 sacrum (5 fused bones)
- 1 coccyx (4 fused bones)

The movements of the spinal column are quite extensive and include flexion (bending forward), extension (bending backward), lateral flexion (bending to the side) and rotation. There is always more movement in the cervical and lumbar regions.

It is possible to experience compression in parts of your spine. Very often people are tight where the thoracic spine meets the lumbar spine (for the ladies it's the position of the bra strap). Another common place for compression is where the L5 (lumbar 5) meets the sacrum.

This month we'll be focusing on how to lengthen the spine and relieve joint compression allowing us to move further into forward bends.

Dehydration

Many people just don't drink enough water. Water is the most common constituent in the human body. 70 percent of the body is water and 80 percent of the brain is water. You can't expect your body or brain to function properly without adequate water. We can't store water like camels so we need adequate water on a daily basis.

One of the key signs of dehydration is sore, stiff joints, which are lubricated every time they are used. Stiffness in joints after a prolonged period of sitting or lying down is a clear indicator of dehydration. If you feel stiff first thing in the morning after getting out of bed and then the stiffness decreases after you move around a bit, this is a sign of dehydration. Such stiffness indicates that the body does not have enough water to lubricate joints. Forcibly bending joints increases the hydrostatic pressure and releases water, thereby lubricating them and relieving stiffness.

Another sign of dehydration is aches and pains in muscles. Strains and tears of muscles are also much more common in dehydrated bodies. A lack of water can affect the kidneys. The kidneys need adequate hydration just like the other organs of the body. Adequate hydration can prevent a decline in kidney function. Try drinking 2 litres of water every day. Drink water throughout the day. Increase your water intake if the weather is particularly hot and humid. Remember that coffee contains caffeine which is a diuretic that pulls water out of the body and can also cause dehydration.

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LENGTHEN THE SPINE AND REDUCE JOINT COMPRESSION

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA (reclining big toe)

Lie down on the mat and stretch right leg up to the ceiling with a belt around the foot. Pull down using the belt making a pumping action in the hip. This will increase the synovial fluid in the hip joint. Bend the knee and come into Supta Vrksasana (tree posture on the floor). Now stretch the right leg out to the side keeping the left hip down. Rotate the right leg in the hip socket which again increases the synovial fluid and the leg may move further down towards the floor. Repeat the same with the left leg.



ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA (downward dog)

Keep the thumbs at right angles to the fingers. Lift the wrist and then pressing into the bases of every finger slowly take the hand down taking the pressure from the outside of the hand to the base of the index finger. Keep a small gap in palm of hand and inner elbows facing each other. Lift the pelvis as high as possible, lengthening the spine, moving the weight of the body to the legs as if they are in Tadasana. Lift the pelvis as high as possible in order to get the heels down.



UTTANASANA (standing forward bend)

Stand with feet hip width apart with outer edges of the feet parallel and arches lifting. Lift the inner ankles and open the area between the inner upper legs. Place hands on hips and lift each side of the pelvis with your hands. Lift the front of the body and fold forward. Keep lifting the adductor muscles on the inner thighs. Slightly bend the knees to prevent pushing back into the calf muscles and work more into the hamstrings. Stretch the big toes forward to lift the front of the body and then stretch the little toes forward to enable you to go lower into the forward bend. To come out of the posture stretch the big toes forward to lift the front of the body and come up.



PASCHIMOTTANASANA (seated forward bend)

Sit in Dandasana. Lift the front of the body and fold forward. Hold the feet with hands or a belt. Lengthen sacrum away from L5 and move sitting bones towards the feet. Don't push the pelvis backwards. Now lift the front of the body and fold further forward. Stretch the inner arms and bring the outer arms back to the shoulders. You are increasing the flexibility of the lumbar spine and hamstring muscles.



VIRASANA (hero)

Kneel on mat and using your thumbs behind your knees, draw the calf muscles towards your feet and then move the calf muscles outwards. Sit on the floor between your feet or on a block(s). Big toe in line with the inner heel. Keep the sacrum moving down away from L5 and so avoiding moving into a backbend. Do not push the ribs forward and keep dropping the shoulder blades down the back.

