



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue no: 87

November 2015

## YOGA THERAPY STRETCH AND STRENGTHEN YOUR HAMSTRINGS SAFELY

Care has to be taken not to overstretch the hamstrings as it is possible to tear or strain a hamstring muscle when there is insufficient strength in the muscle to counterbalance flexibility. Overstretching can cause small tears in the muscle, ligament or tendon. We do a lot of hamstring stretching in our yoga practice. Many sequences contain a high percentage of hamstring stretches; including some standing postures, standing forward bends and seated forward bends.

Always include in your yoga practice **hamstring-strengthening** postures in order to build endurance in the actual muscle fibres. Working the muscle also creates strength and toughness in the tendons that attach the muscle to the bone, making them less likely to strain and tear.

### Hamstring Muscles

There are three hamstring muscles. Each one is attached to the sitting bones of the pelvis and run down the back of the thigh. There are two hamstrings on the inner side of the back of the thigh, and one on the outer side. All three are attached by long tendons crossing the back of the knee to the lower leg. Feeling a stretch on the middle of the muscle on the back of your thigh during your practice won't cause any problem. However if you feel pain or discomfort near your sitting bones as you stretch then you need to ease off, as your hamstrings will feel sore after your practice.

### Strengthening the Hamstrings

Strengthening the hamstrings increases blood flow and a good blood supply makes healthier, more resilient tissue. Some good hamstring-strengthening yoga postures are the bent-leg standing postures like Virabhadrasana I and II (warrior I and II) and Utthita Parsvakonasana (intense side stretch). Most of us are aware that the quadriceps on the front of the thigh are working hard in these postures, but the hamstrings are working too, co-contracting with the quads of the bent knee to stabilise that hip and knee against the pull of gravity.










You can also strengthen the hamstrings during **hip extensions** in postures such as Salabhasana (locust), and Setu Bandha (bridge). These hip-extending postures put more load on the upper part of the hamstring, helping to increase strength and bulk near the sitting bones.

### Stretching and Strengthening

Include yoga postures in your practice that will give you a good balance of stretching and strengthening the hamstrings. Do some of the hamstring-strengthening postures in the first part of your practice and then the stretching postures afterward when the muscles are warm and ready to relax. Our aim is to cultivate muscles that are strong and flexible and able to fully support our joints.

Contact Lynne on 00302892042356 or email [lynne.gully@iremia.net](mailto:lynne.gully@iremia.net)

## STRETCH AND STRENGTHEN YOUR HAMSTRINGS

<p><b>SALABHASANA (locust)</b>  <b>Strengthens</b> the hamstrings.          Start by rolling your shoulders back and stretching your hands toward your feet. Press your pelvis down into the mat as you lift your legs. Now lift your chest off the mat and push your palms up to the ceiling. Look down at the edge of your mat.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">MARTY SCODUTO</p>
<p><b>SETU BANDHA (bridge)</b>  <b>Strengthens</b> the hamstrings.          As you lift the pelvis, move your knees forward. Then roll up from the sacrum to the lumbar vertebrae to the mid-back and slowly coming into full Bridge.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">DAVID MARTINEZ</p>
<p><b>VIRABHADRASANA I (warrior I)</b>  <b>Strengthens</b> the hamstrings.          Slowly bend your knee and keep your knee in line with your ankle. Your torso is facing over your bent leg. Stretch your arms up and stretch the length of your body up to the ceiling.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p><b>VIRABHADRASANA II (warrior II)</b>  <b>Strengthens</b> the hamstrings.          Keep the shin of the bent leg perpendicular to the floor and in line with your heel. Keep your body upright so that when you are bending the right knee; keep your left armpit and left hip in a straight line.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">CHRIS ANDRE</p>
<p><b>UTTITHA PARSVAKONASANA (intense side stretch)</b>  <b>Strengthens</b> the hamstrings.          As you turn your right foot out, focus on turning out your thigh as this reduces pressure on your knee. Keep the body open and use blocks to support your hand on the outside of your leg.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p><b>UTTANASANA (intense forward stretch)</b>  <b>Stretches</b> the hamstrings.          As you bend forward, bend your knees and allow your body to rest on your thighs. Place your hands on your calf muscles. Very slowly try and straighten the backs of your legs feeling the stretch in your hamstrings but keep your body resting on your thighs. You probably won't straighten the legs and take care</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">DAVID MARTINEZ</p>
<p><b>SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA (reclining stretch)</b>  <b>Stretches</b> the hamstrings.          Place the loop of a belt around the sole of one foot. This makes it easier if you are stiff in your hips or pelvis. This posture helps to treat osteoarthritis of the hip and the knees by stretching the hamstrings and calf muscles and strengthening the knees.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p><b>UPAVISTA KONASANA (seated wide angle)</b>  <b>Stretches</b> the hamstrings.          Sit on a support if this helps you to keep your back straight. Use the loops of two belts around your feet. As you lift your sternum, drop your sacrum and slowly bend forward.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p><b>PASCHIMOTTANASANA (intense back stretch)</b>  <b>Stretches</b> the hamstrings.          Sit on a support if needed. Place the belt around both feet. As you lift your sternum, drop your sacrum and slowly bend forward. Always bend on an exhalation and keep your back straight and sternum lifted.</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">MARTIN SCODUTO</p>