



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY BACK TO BASICS FOR A NEW SEASON

IYENGAR YOGA

I was trained to teach by an Iyengar yoga teacher and my current teacher is a senior Iyengar yoga teacher. I am a qualified Karuna Yoga teacher, which incorporates all the discipline and precise alignments of Iyengar yoga but I also include pranayama (yoga breathing) in my classes for all levels.

Iyengar yoga requires discipline. It requires time just to understand the basics of the system. I'm talking years and not just days or months. It takes patience to understand the depth of this style of yoga. Older people are drawn to this style of yoga. Firstly, it's safe as students are taken safely in and out of postures. Secondly, modifications are available for those students who cannot attain the posture and props are available to help move into the postures. The detailed instructions are important as students will learn how to do a home practice safely.

STARTING YOUR YOGA PRACTICE

It's important to get yourself grounded at the start of your yoga practice. Start by sitting with your legs crossed. Sit on a support to ensure your knees are lower than your hips. You can use any number of blocks or blankets to achieve this position. Breathe slowly and deeply and settle into your practice. Move the pelvis forwards and backwards. Change the cross of your legs. Now make small circles with your pelvis feeling your sitting bones. Change direction of the circles. Then as you inhale lift the mula bandha and draw up the front of the body and widen the kidneys. As you exhale feel the mula bandha dropping and widening the sitting bones underneath you.

STANDING POSTURES

We all know our arm pits but have you ever considered your leg pits? These are located in your groins at the top of your legs. In every standing posture we should be pulling up in the leg pits and lifting the adductor muscles (inner thigh muscles). As you do this, you'll feel your outer legs moving down. In addition to this, we pull up the mula bandha and draw up the front of the body. You'll feel the difference as we work towards achieving this lift. Many people in our society have lower back problems. This is because they are not lifting the front of their body and they are creating an exaggerated curve in their lumbar spine which creates problems and often pain.

STRETCHING THE HAMSTRINGS AND CALF MUSCLES

We'll start the new season by finding effective ways to lengthen your hamstrings and calf muscles. Always stretch slowly on an exhalation. Feel the muscles stretching and lengthening. So many postures use the same muscles and you'll be able to identify the use of these muscles in postures as you lie down or stand up. Always remember it's not just about being in the final posture. It's the journey you take to get there using your breath.

STRETCHING THE HAMSTRINGS AND CALF MUSCLES

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA No 1

The picture shows the classic version but we'll be using a modification.

Step 1-Lie down. Bend your left knee onto your chest and stretch your right leg up using the belt on the ball of your foot. You can bring the leg back as far as possible because the other knee is bent onto the chest. Stretch slowly and carefully and feel the hamstrings in the back of the thigh slowly stretching and lengthening. Keep your leg straight without bending your knee. As you push your right heel up to the ceiling, draw your toes down towards you and feel the additional stretch in your hamstrings and calf muscles. Don't force anything.

Step 2-If you can hold your right big toe with the first two fingers without bending your knee you can stretch even further. Push the big toe into your fingers.

Step 3-Increasing the stretch, place your right hand over the top of your right foot and hold around the ball of your foot.

Step 4-Hold around the outside edge of your right foot with your right hand.

Step 5-Hold under your right heel with both hands and stretch as you lift your head. Now bend both knees onto your chest and feel the difference between the two legs.

Stretch the other leg using steps 1-5. Stay at step one until you can stretch further without bending your knee.



RORY EARNSHAW

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA No 2

Again the picture shows the classic version but we'll be using a modification. Place the belt around the ball of your right foot and stretch the leg up to the ceiling. Bend your left leg onto your chest and let the knee drop out to the side. This will act as a counterbalance and keep your pelvis level on the mat. You can hold under your left thigh with your left hand for control. Slowly rotate your right leg outwards from the ankle, knee and hip so that your toes are pointing down towards the floor. As you rotate you are moving the leg back towards your shoulder. Feel the stretch in the inner thigh (the adductor muscles). Repeat the process with the left leg.



SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA No 3

Again we'll start with a modification. Lie down and bend your right knee so that it comes above your hip. You now have a right angle. Your left hand comes across to the outside of your right knee. As you inhale, lift your right hip and slide your left hip under so that both hips are stacked one above the other. Take your right knee over to the left but keep your right shoulder down. Move the right hip away as you feel the right side of your body stretching. When you are ready you can straighten the right leg without losing the twist. Come out of the twist slowly. Repeat the process with the left leg.

