

Foundations  
of  
Yoga Practice  
Instruction Manual  
by  
Cindy von Miller

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# INTRODUCTION

The Foundations of Yoga Practice curriculum is a comprehensive yoga practice designed for people of various backgrounds and levels of wellness. If you are able to stand unassisted, sit in a chair or on the floor, and lie down prone and supine on a firm surface, you most likely can do all of the exercises in this program. The exercises are modifications of classical yoga poses or asanas which are found in many of the different lineages or schools of yoga. I have worked with most of the poses for several decades and have adapted them somewhat so that the movements are appropriate for people who have been sedentary for quite some time and now desire to be active and more physically fit. If you are physically fit, you will still benefit from this program. Each student will find his or her own expression of the basic form of the exercise. Someone who is strong and flexible will look quite different in the pose than someone who has limited strength and flexibility.

It is best to practice yoga on an empty stomach -- wait two or three hours after a large meal. Upon awakening is a great time to practice. I also like to practice in the late afternoon before preparing dinner, or before bed. I recommend setting a realistic goal of fifteen minutes twice a day in the beginning stages of your yoga practice. Once you develop this habit, you will find your practice times getting longer, because the practice makes you feel so good.

Yoga practice should feel good. Some of the positions may feel awkward at first. You want to feel an increased sensation or aliveness in your body as you work with the poses, but nothing that you do in yoga practice should create pain. Instructions are given in great detail in the hope that they will guide you to adapt the poses to your unique body and individual needs. If you have difficulty with the material you need to find a qualified teacher to help you with your practice. Ideally, the instruction book is to be used in conjunction with a Yoga and Health class.

The Mindfulness Meditation included on the Audio CD provides a resource for developing the mental skill needed for an effective yoga practice. We must learn to quiet our minds so that we can enter the moment and our yoga practice completely. If our minds are racing and preoccupied with events of the day or expectations for the future, we cannot practice yoga.

The Guided Therapeutic Relaxation included on the Audio CD is best used at the end of your asana practice, not at the beginning. Your mind and your body will be able to be still and receptive to deep relaxation. However, it is a complete practice and can be used on its own any time of the day or night.

Please read the instructions for each asana, including the list of cautions and contraindications, before you begin the practice. This curriculum is not intended to be used during pregnancy. Yoga can be used as a complementary practice and not as a substitute for health care. If you are under the care of a physician and/ or other health care provider, please show them this program and ask if it is appropriate for you.

# YOGA



Yoga is a philosophical system (ideas and practices) that dates back possibly 4,000 to 5,000 years. The literal meaning from the Sanskrit verbal root *yuj*, is to yoke or to join. Campbell (1974) explains, “What is to be joined through yoga is consciousness to its source, so that one lives in the knowledge of identity with that source and not merely with the limited ego of the daylight personality” (p. 303).

Throughout time and across cultures, yogis studied the effects of physical positions, mental attitudes and breathing techniques on the body, mind and spirit. They discovered that when performing certain movements with a meditative focus, the body is able to relax and to become still. When the body is relaxed, the mind becomes calm. Certain breathing techniques lead to an experience of peace and tranquility. The system of yoga was first codified by the Sage Patanjali around the time of Christ. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is the text on Classical Yoga. It has been widely translated and is readily available today.

## YOGA AS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE

The lessons learned on the yoga mat parallel those we stumble upon in life. According to Ryan (1995), yoga can be a metaphor for life:

Yoga became a metaphor for life, a place wherein my friend became conscious of internal attitudes, insecurities and fears. By allowing the body, in its own wisdom, to stretch and hold as much as it could without the interference of derogatory mental comments and unrealistic expectations, she began to develop a trust and a faith in her body and in herself. (p. 141)

The lessons encountered on the yoga mat mirror the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual challenges of life. The practice is to remain present and observant of what comes up as it comes up. It is an opportunity to become aware of what lies beyond the surface, and to reprogram habitual patterns of thinking and moving. The way to progress is to accept your condition unconditionally. The practice of yoga is done without striving and without forcing. We practice accepting ourselves as we are, in the present, changing from one moment to the next.

## YOGA ON AND OFF THE MAT



The beauty of yoga, is that it can be practiced anywhere, any time. Formal daily practice on the yoga mat seeps out into one's life in the world. Yoga is a guidebook which leads you through the terrain of body, mind and spirit on the journey of transformation. With dedication to regular practice, you begin to live your life in the conscious, meditative, accepting attitude with which you learn to practice. The fruit of the practice is a life full of joy.

## KINDS OF YOGA

- **Karma Yoga** is the active path of selfless service. According to Easwaran (1995), Krishna tells Arjuna:  
Every selfless act is born from the eternal, infinite Godhead who is present in every act of service. All life turns on this law. Whoever violates it, indulging his senses for his own pleasure and ignoring the needs of others, has wasted his life. ( p. 76)
- **Jnana Yoga** is the contemplative path of spiritual wisdom. The path of selfless service leads to wisdom. Easwaran (1985) translates Krishna's message to Arjuna, "The wise see that there is action in the midst of inaction and inaction in the midst of action. Their consciousness is unified, and every act is done with complete awareness. The awakened sages call a person wise when all his undertakings are free from anxiety about results" (p. 87).
- **Bhakti Yoga** is the way of love. The Buddha said; "Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world" (as cited in Borg, 1997, p.25). The Christ said; "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (as cited in Borg, 1997, p.24).
- **Hatha Yoga** is defined by Feuerstein (1998) as a "physical discipline, aiming at the awakening of the serpent power (kundalini-shakti) and the creation of an indestructible divine body" (p. 455).
- **Raja Yoga** is a holistic and comprehensive approach to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. According to Feuerstein (1998), Raja Yoga is "a late designation of Patanjali's Eightfold Yoga, invented to contrast it with Hatha-Yoga" (p.458). It is also commonly known as The Royal Yoga.
- **Classical Yoga** refers to the eightfold Yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the source text, The Yoga Sutras. Bachman (2004) provides the following translation of this yoga from Sanskrit (pp. 18--19):
  1. YAMA: social ethics.
    - Ahimsa: nonviolence, reducing harm.
    - Satya: truth.
    - Asteya: non-stealing.
    - Brahmacharya: appropriate use of one's vital energy.
    - Aparigraha: nonpossessiveness.

2. NIYAMA: personal ethics.
  - Saucha: purity, cleanliness.
  - Santosa: contentment.
  - Tapas: practice causing change.
  - Svadhyaya: study/ observation.
  - Isvarapranidhana: devotion, surrender to a higher force.
3. ASANA: posture, sitting.
4. PRANAYAMA: breath regulation.
5. PRATYAHARA: internalization of the senses, “drawing back”.
6. DHARANA: focus, concentration.
7. DHYANA: maintaining focus, meditation.
8. SAMADHI: complete absorption.

### YOGA IN THE WEST

Yoga was first studied academically in the West as Eastern Philosophy in the 1930s. By the late 1950s and 1960s prominent yoga masters began sending their disciples to the West to introduce yoga as a way of life for the average citizen. Swami Vishnu-devananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda Saraswati summarized the complex philosophy and practices of yoga with the following five principles of yoga (Sivananda Yoga Center, 1983):

- 1) Proper exercise.
- 2) Proper breathing.
- 3) Proper relaxation.
- 4) Proper diet.
- 5) Positive thinking and meditation.

Yoga asana practice promotes health of all of the organ systems of the body. Asana practice done with focused concentration and deep breathing enhances mental clarity and promotes relaxation. Yogic breathing techniques enhance our vital energy. Pranayama -- literally, extension and control of the breath -- gives us the tools that we need to calm our mind and diminish the effects of chronic stress on our bodies. Yoga Nidra is a technique used to induce complete spiritual, mental, and physical relaxation. Of all of the yoga practices, yogic relaxation is one of the most powerful for bringing all of the body systems into balance. Yogic diet is vegetarian. Foods that are natural, pure and easily digested are recommended. The yogi eats to live. She does not live to eat. In order to change our physical reality, we must first change our thinking. As we learn to step back and observe our thinking mind, we begin to develop the ability to respond to life's circumstances rather than to react in ways that are habitual and destructive.



# MEDITATION

In the most basic and generic form, meditation is simply focusing on one and only one thing. In concentrative meditation, you focus attention on a single object or thought to the exclusion of everything else. In awareness meditation, you try to be aware of all that you are experiencing. It matters not what form you choose, but it is important to choose a method and be consistent in your practice. Otherwise, you will not have the opportunity to discover the many benefits that result from consistent daily practice.

Mindfulness Meditation is described as a process of gradual awakening. It is a concentrative practice, and the breath is the “object” used. It allows one to develop the ability to live fully in the present moment. Formal practice involves sitting and watching the breath flow in and out, with awareness of thought, feeling or sensation as it rises, returning again and again to the breath. Anchoring awareness to the breath allows you to float in the present moment. Informal practice can occur at all other time of the day, eating, walking, driving, working and relating. It is a process that effectively allows us to become continually aware of the presence of something greater than ourselves.

Physiologically, meditation interrupts the body’s stress response. It also provokes deep relaxation coupled with a wakeful and highly alert mental state. Psychologically, meditation creates greater efficiency in everyday life. It also allows us to comprehend other views of reality. (LeShan, 1974)

Classical Yoga provides a comprehensive approach to the practice of meditation. Pranayama or breath control -- provides a tool for crossing a threshold from the material world into the realm of awareness and consciousness. Pratyahara -- involves withdrawing our awareness from our senses. We do not need to deny or negate the value or beauty of sensory stimuli -- sights, sounds, and smells, tastes, pleasure and pain. We do need to understand that we are more than receptors of physical stimuli. By focusing on the breath, we can draw our awareness away from our physical reality, and move inward towards pure consciousness. It is in the realm of consciousness that we are able to co-create healthier habits and a more peaceful world.

Kraftsow (2002) explains Patanjali’s Sutras that pertain to the last three limbs of classical yoga -- Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi:

Normal thought patterns can be characterized as the fluctuation between distraction and attention. Thoughts arise and move in different directions habitually and haphazardly through successive moments. The mind is an instrument of cognition and perception. Normal perception is mediated through a conditioned mind. Patanjali suggests that we develop capacity for attention to stay linked to an object of choice without distraction over a period of time. A second goal is to progressively reduce the degree to which past conditioning distorts our perception.

In the sixth limb -- Dharana -- there is an effort to concentrate awareness on one object only. The object may be the breath, a sound or mantra, a flower, a candle, or a holy person or representation of a deity. In the seventh limb -- Dhyana -- concentration becomes effortless and sustained. A relationship has formed between the mind and the object of concentration. In the eighth limb -- Samadhi -- the mind and the object become one. In this state the mind is able to absorb the true nature of the object. (pp. 185--189)

If all of these words about the process of meditation are confusing to you, don't worry. You are not alone. The end result of meditation is an experience that is ineffable -- beyond words or human description. The practices are safe and they have been used throughout time and across cultures.

The Audio CD which accompanies this manual includes a short Mindfulness Meditation using the breath as the object of concentration. Listen to it first without engaging in the practice so you will know that it is safe. There is one minute of silence at the very end that allows you to experience the practice on your own -- without words or prompting. Practice the meditation formally every day. You will find that you begin to practice informally at other times of your day. The practice is always accessible, because the breath is always with you. The practice can be used to help you find mental clarity and emotional calm, especially during times of stress and confusion. With daily practice however, you will find that you have fewer episodes in your life of feeling stressed or confused.

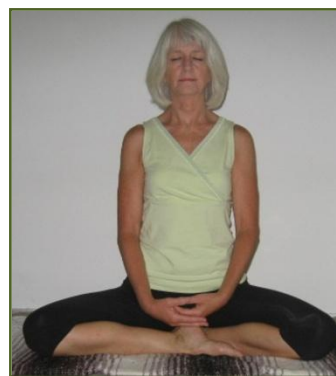
## **SUKHASANA**

### *Easy Pose*

Once the position has become "easy" for you, it is a great position for seated meditation. The pelvis and the legs become a supportive base from which the spine can rise up in a stable and comfortable position. Just like anything else, the more you spend time with it, the more comfortable it becomes.

#### Recommendations:

- Use a firm folded blanket or meditation cushion to elevate your pelvis.
- Sit towards the front edge of the blanket or cushion so your knees will be lower than your hips.
- Bend the knees and slide the feet toward the body until the feet rest comfortably on the floor.
- Place your hands and arms comfortably.
- As you breathe in, lift up out of the pelvis all the way through the crown of the head. Lengthen the spine and tuck the chin slightly toward the chest.
- As you breathe out, maintain the length of the spine, as you allow the weight of your body to press the sitting bones down into the blanket or cushion.



# THERAPEUTIC RELAXATION

For a moment, consider the very word relaxation and what it means to you. I often ask, “What do you do to relax?” The answers are numerous. “I like to listen to music, Mariachi music.” -- “I like to read the paper and drink a cup of coffee.” -- “I like to read a good book.” -- “I like to swim.” -- “I like to work out with weights.” -- “I like to play sports.” The idea of relaxation is often confused with recreation. According to Dictionary.com, recreation is a pastime, diversion, exercise, or other resource affording relaxation and enjoyment. Relaxation is abatement or relief from bodily or mental work. And it is also an activity or recreation that provides such relief; diversion; entertainment. Pondering the meaning Western culture assigns to these words is proof positive that we have much to learn about what relaxation really can be!

Relaxation as a physiological phenomenon was studied by Dr. Herbert Benson at Harvard Medical School in the 1970s. He designed a study based on the popular technique of Transcendental Meditation. He learned that TM induced physiological changes in the body and called these changes the Relaxation Response (Benson, 1975). It is now widely accepted that certain meditative practices, such as therapeutic relaxation, produce physiological changes in the body that repair damage caused by stress and even certain illness. Therapeutic relaxation techniques are easily accessible to everyone, not only those who are experienced with meditation.

The Relaxation Response is mediated by the nervous system and is diametrically opposed to the Stress Response. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems comprise the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system acts as a control system for all of the organ systems of the body. It functions largely below the level of consciousness. However, yoga practices such as meditation and deep therapeutic relaxation can have positive effects on the whole person -- body, mind and spirit by bringing the autonomic nervous system into balance. (See tables below).

## ***STRESS RESPONSE***

### ***Sympathetic Nervous System***

- Increases heart rate
- Increases blood pressure
- Increases blood sugar
- Increases mental alertness
- Increases skeletal muscle tension
- Increases ventilation
- Respirations rapid & shallow
- Increases clotting of blood

## ***RELAXATION RESPONSE***

### ***Parasympathetic Nervous System***

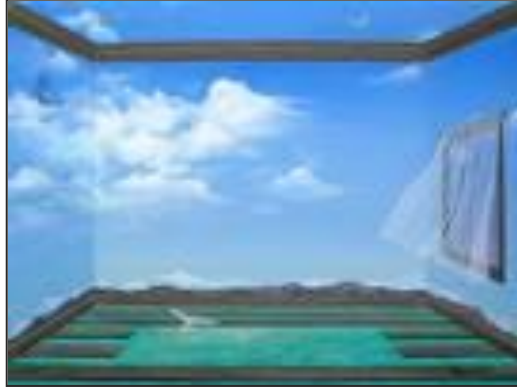
- Decreases heart rate
- Decreases blood pressure
- Decreases blood sugar
- Attention & concentration improves
- Musculoskeletal flexibility & joint range of motion improves
- Respiratory efficiency improves
- Respiratory rate decreases
- Cardiovascular efficiency increases

The practice of Therapeutic Relaxation on the Audio CD which accompanies this instruction manual is a form of Yoga Nidra, a technique of conscious relaxation. According to Saraswati (1998), during Yoga Nidra, one appears to be asleep, but consciousness is functioning at a deeper level of awareness. It is a threshold state between sleep and wakefulness where contact with subconscious and unconscious dimensions occur. When consciousness is separated from external awareness and from sleep, it becomes very powerful and can be applied in many ways such as to develop the memory, increase knowledge and creativity, or to transform one's nature. When relaxation is complete, receptivity is greater than when consciousness is connected to all of the senses.

The specific technique used in the Foundations of Yoga Practice is based on an ancient mystical idea that human embodiment contains five selves or layers. This idea is referred to as the Five Self Theory and the Koshas (Kheper) and has been found in other philosophies of human existence throughout time and across cultures. The earliest written description is found in the Taittiriya Upanishad, one of the earliest of the Upanishads which dates back possibly to 800 BCE. According to Premananda (1955), human embodiment is systematically described as containing a physical body -- anamaya, a bioenergetic body -- pranamaya, and emotional body -- manomaya, a wisdom body -- vijnana-maya, and a bliss body -- ananda-maya (pp. 99--102). When we touch ananda-maya we connect with our true nature. It is in the experience of ananda, or bliss, that we become whole.

During the relaxation practice on the Audio CD, you will focus your awareness on what is most dense -- the physical body, and gradually move your awareness to what is most subtle -- the bliss body. I encourage you to use the CD every day. It may be used for relaxation after your asana practice. It may be utilized for a period of rest and renewal in the middle of the day. Or it may be used as a prelude to deep and restful sleep. You will find it useful during periods of sleeplessness. Do not ever listen to the CD when driving!

# THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BREATHING



*The Breathing Room*  
*Painting by Sharon Ebert*

**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of God.**

*(The First Beatitude -- Matthew 5:3)*

**Now is the blessedly ripe time to find our home in the breath,  
Remembering that the breath is our first and our last possession.  
When we do this, we begin to touch a very deep source of power within us.  
We touch that power which says, “I Can” to all situations within us.  
We connect with that part of our being which no one can take away,  
That part which no one can destroy.**

*(Translation of the First Beatitude from Aramaic by Neil Douglas-Klotz, 2004)*

Breath is the animating force that gives life to all matter. It is synonymous with the word spirit. Like spirit, it is in some ways mysterious. We cannot usually see it. We can sometimes hear it when we are experiencing pain or ecstasy. If we allow ourselves to be quiet and listen closely we become aware of its calming effect. We learn to look, listen and feel for the breath when assessing signs of life. Throughout life, the breath may be the only constant that we can depend on. The breath is a close and reliable friend. It constantly flows in and out of our body, in dynamic rhythm from the moment we are born, until we take our last dying breath.

Throughout time and across cultures there have been mystical beliefs and practices associated with breath. Indigenous people offer up prayer to the Great Spirit. In Christianity there are references to the Lord as the breath of life. In Genesis 2:7, “the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” In Eastern cultures the breath is synonymous with life force and is called prana, chi or hara. Eastern practices such as tai chi, chi gung, martial arts and yoga utilize breath control techniques to harness the power of the breath.

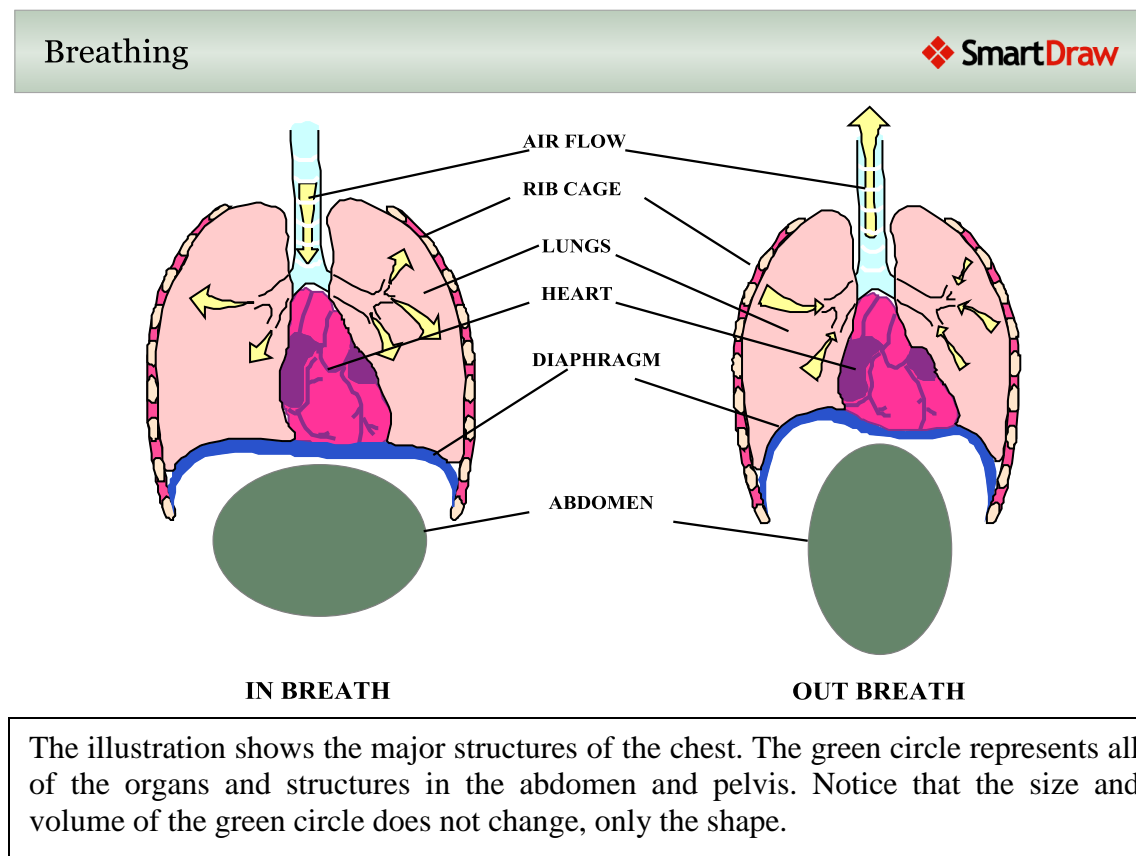
According to yoga philosophy, prana is found in all forms of matter, yet it is not matter. The major sources of prana are air, sunlight, and earth. We absorb prana from these sources and from the food we eat. Food from fresh plant sources has a great deal of prana; food from animal sources has very little prana, if any. In humans, the highest

manifestation of prana is thought and the lowest manifestation is the motion of the lungs. Literally, pranayama is the practice of controlling the life force by controlling the motion of the lungs.

Patanjali states, “Yoga is the control of thought waves in the mind” (as cited in Prabhavananda, 1946, p.11). We do this by controlling the breath. When the breath is short, fast and erratic, the mind is racing and unsettled; there is a feeling of anxiety. When the breath is long, slow and smooth, the mind is settled and clear; there is a feeling of peace and tranquility. In controlling the life force through pranayama we control the thought waves of the mind. In this way, pranayama provides entry into the practices which lead to contemplation and the experience of Unity described by mystics throughout time and across cultures.

According to scientific research, the breath and the nervous system are inextricably linked. Stress researchers report that during the stress response the sympathetic nervous system is stimulated and breathing becomes rapid and shallow. During the relaxation response the parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated and breathing becomes slow. It also happens that if we want to be more alert and energetic we can induce that state of being by consciously breathing fast and shallow. If we want to be calm, all we need to do is to breathe slowly. The breath is the link that connects mind and body. It infuses matter with spirit.

#### THE PHYSICAL DYNAMICS OF BREATHING



The diaphragm, a large flat muscle that separates the chest and abdomen, is the primary muscle of breathing. The shape of the diaphragm affects the shape of the chest and abdomen. During the out breath, the diaphragm is dome shaped. The top of the dome presses up towards the lungs, the ribs move closer together, the chest cavity gets smaller, and air is forced out. When the diaphragm contracts, it drops down as it flattens out, and looks like a Frisbee. The ribs separate, the chest expands creating negative pressure, and air flows in. The chest cavity changes both shape and volume with each breath. Contraction of the diaphragm causes the breath to flow in. Relaxation of the diaphragm causes the breath to flow out.

The abdomen is also affected by the movement of the diaphragm. During the in breath, the abdomen changes shape to accommodate the increased volume in the chest. When the diaphragm contracts and flattens out, it presses on the abdominal organs. The ability to soften the belly with the in breath, allows complete expansion of the lungs. The ability to contract the abdominal muscles on the out breath helps to press all of the air out. If you pay attention, you can see and feel the abdomen and chest changing shapes with each in breath and each out breath.

## SIMPLE YOGIC BREATHING TECHNIQUES

### DIRGHA PRANAYAMA

#### *Full Yogic Breath*

This basic breathing technique involves using the whole torso -- chest, abdomen and pelvis -- to maximize one's capacity to receive prana from the environment. It also maximizes our capacity to eliminate by products of metabolism. Movement of the chest wall strengthens the upper body, heart and lungs. Relaxation of the abdomen during the in breath helps us to connect with our feeling state. Contraction of the abdominal muscles with the out breath, strengthens the muscles that protect and support the lower back. The process of conscious slow deep breathing provides massage for all of the organs in the chest, abdomen and pelvis, and promotes overall health.

#### TECHNIQUE:

- Take long a slow, deep breath focusing on abdomen, chest and collar bones to stimulate complete expansion of the lungs.
- Allow the belly to soften and change shapes as the chest expands in all directions -- front to back, side to side and up and down. Allow the breath to fill the space all of the way from the pelvic floor muscles up to the muscles in the throat. Do not force or strain, simply allow the breath to enter as completely as possible.
- As you breathe out, gently activate the muscles in your belly by bringing the navel back towards the spine.
- Begin by practicing this technique for one minute, and extend the duration with daily practice.
- It may be used as the point of focus during formal or informal meditation.
- It may also be used during asana practice.

#### BENEFITS:

- Relaxes the body, calms the mind.
- Revitalizes.
- Breaks old pattern of shallow breathing and establishes new pattern of deep breathing and relaxation.
- Gives abdominal organs a gentle massage.
- Improves digestion and elimination.
- Helps relieve constipation.
- Strengthens abdominal muscles, diaphragm, heart and lungs.
- Very soothing during menstruation, especially when there is discomfort.
- Can be practiced during postures, for relaxation, with meditation and throughout the day.

#### NADI SODHANA *Alternate Nostril Breathing*



This is a beginner breathing practice that can be practiced by anyone. It brings the body and mind into balance. It can be used to energize when feeling lazy or bored. It can create calm when feeling anxious.



#### TECHNIQUE:

- Form the fingers of your right hand into Vishnu Mudra and bring your hand to your face.
- Touch the side of the left nostril with your ring finger and your right nostril with your thumb.
- Close the right nostril with your thumb and gently exhale and then inhale through the left nostril.
- Close the left nostril, exhale and then inhale through the right nostril.
- Continue in this pattern -- exhale, inhale, and switch.
- You may continue with this breathing technique as long as you like. Simply bring all of your focus to the breath. Notice how relaxed and alert you become.

#### BENEFITS:

- Balances right and left hemispheres of the brain and promotes whole brain functioning.
- Creates a deep sense of well being -- mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- Helps to alleviate headaches, boredom and restlessness.



# YOGA ASANA

Yoga asana, also commonly referred to as poses or exercises, has been developed over the millennia by men and women who used their body, mind and spirit as terrain to be explored. The exploration of body, mind and spirit utilizing the map provided by yoga will lead you on a journey of awakening into your full potential. There are as many ideas and approaches to yoga asana practice as there are people who practice. Each school of yoga or lineage may have different names for similar postures. Some schools insist on using the Sanskrit names. Other schools are comfortable using the common language of the culture. I provide the modern names in both English and Sanskrit. The importance, I believe is to communicate in a language that is understood by a particular audience.

My unique approach to yoga asana is informed by my education and experience as a professional critical care and emergency trauma nurse. I chose the yoga asanas for this program based on my understanding of human anatomy, physiology and pathophysiology, my training as a yoga therapist, and the usefulness of this set of poses in my own life. I firmly believe that this practice is accessible to almost anyone who has the desire to feel better and to be more fulfilled in their everyday ordinary lives. The instructions are detailed. Traditional instructions are modified to accommodate the prevalence of degenerative joint and disc disease and limited joint mobility created by the Western lifestyle. Above all, I wish to help and to do no harm.

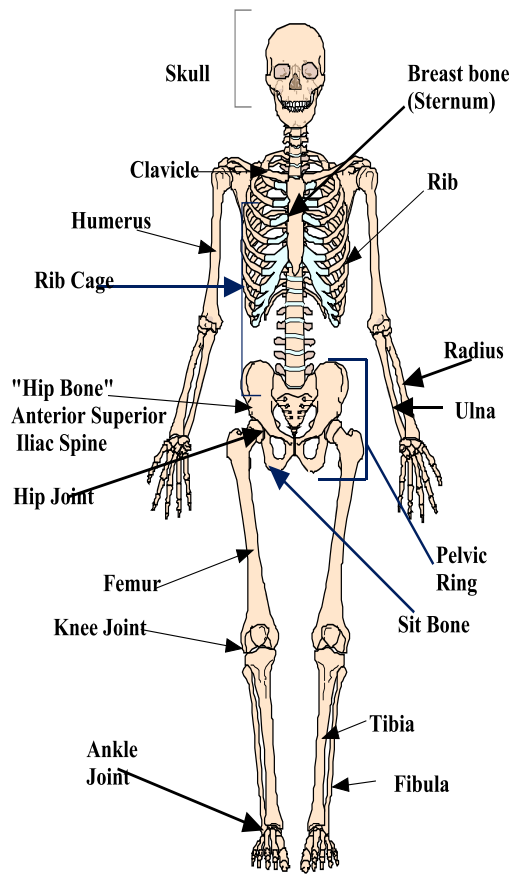
In writing instructions for the poses, I researched several texts in order to provide a comprehensive list of benefits and cautions. You will find the sources utilized on page 48. If you have the conditions listed under cautions use particular care in practicing these poses and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations. If you have a condition listed under contraindications, do not attempt the pose at all.

On the next page you will find an Anatomical Illustration of the human skeleton and the spine. It is important to know the names and functions of all of the parts of your body. For the purpose of this practice, it is sufficient to know the names of bones, joints and landmarks that are referred to in the instructions. It is also important to have an awareness of the structure of the spine and the normal curvatures. The structure of the skeleton and especially the spine contribute to the health of the whole body. In each pose begin with finding the most stable and comfortable position in the center of your body, the axial skeleton or spine. As you include arm and shoulder, leg and hip movements, do not compromise the stability and comfort of the spine.

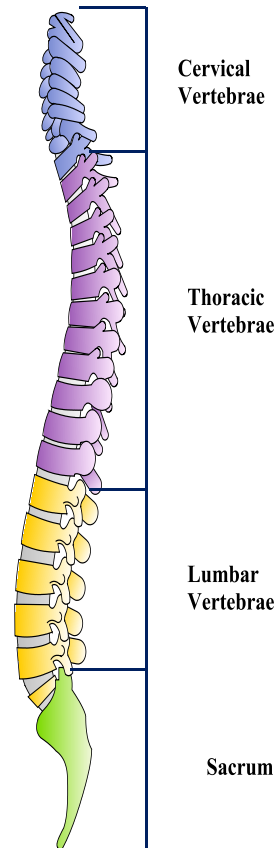
It is important to develop a relationship with your inner teacher. Explore the instructions with as much attention to detail as you are capable. Pay attention to subtle sensation as you practice. Sensations may be emotional or physical. Both have equal importance. It is through subtle sensation that our inner teacher or guide makes itself known.

Most of all have fun. Learn the poses and make them your own. You may find yourself using the asanas for a quick energy boost in the middle of your work day, or to warm up and cool down for other activities that you enjoy.

# Human Skeletal Structure



Spinal Column



## PAVANMUKTASANA

### *Joint-Freeing Series*

Stiles (2002), presents an excellent practice for keeping our joints healthy and increasing body awareness. I was introduced to this practice while preparing for Yoga Therapy Certification. I have incorporated the series into my own personal practice, and I teach it to all of my students. Mukunda Stiles provides a list of purposes for practicing this series on pages 121--122 of his text book, Structural Yoga Therapy. I have modified the list to highlight the usefulness that I personally assign to the practice.

1. To evaluate the suppleness of each joint.
2. To heighten awareness and distinction between stretching and contracting muscles.
3. To move each joint through specific anatomical directional ranges of motion which can enhance joint mobility and often relieve joint pain and stiffness.
4. To become aware of differences in mobility of symmetrical joints and to discern lifestyle habits that contribute to chronic underlying muscle tension that restricts movement.
5. To isolate muscles and test for comparative strength.
6. To alleviate conditions associated with poor circulation.
7. To provide a series that is especially beneficial for those with limited mobility due to injuries, arthritis or other chronic neurological or musculoskeletal ailments.
8. To become aware of movement that is habitually unconscious. Certain movements can evoke muscle memory of past trauma or injury. In order to escape any potential pain, the mind becomes unconscious as the body performs the required task of movement, often in a less than efficient or even destructive manner. It is by bringing consciousness to what was previously hidden that we become whole in body mind and spirit.

As in all of the practices of yoga, the relationship of the breath with the movement is important. For this series, the recommendation is to breathe in when extending or straightening a joint and to breathe out when flexing or bending at the joint.

The series can be used as a warm up for asana practice; it can be incorporated into a series of poses; or it can be used on its own before meditation practice or therapeutic relaxation. Start with three repetitions of each movement, and increase the number gradually to twelve with daily practice.

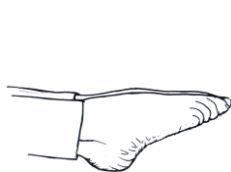
It is with gratitude that I share this information and the drawings on the next two pages which are reprinted with the blessing of Mukunda Stiles.

# Yoga Therapy Center

## JOINT FREEING SERIES

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1. INHALE point  
foot curling the  
toes



EXHALE feet toward  
head, toes spread



keep feet  
upright



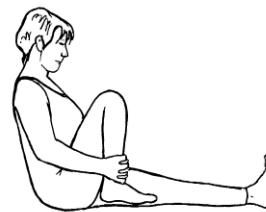
EXHALE  
Soles face in keep  
feet upright



3. INHALE circling out  
EXHALE circling in



4. INHALE with mild arm  
effort, straighten knee



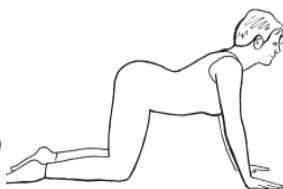
EXHALE hold lower  
shin as you pull heel to  
thigh



5. INHALE from  
Stick pose turn R leg  
out little toe down  
and swing leg wide  
apart



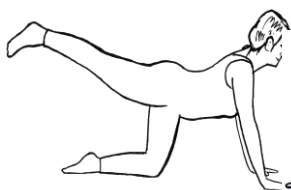
EXHALE lift R  
hip, turn leg in  
great toe down &  
swing it back



6. INHALE head up  
spine down



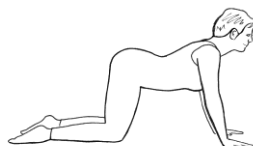
EXHALE back up  
abdomen pulled in



7. INHALE stretch leg  
back and up, spine  
down



EXHALE bring knee  
toward chest, spine lifted  
down



8. INHALE  
center pose  
squeeze thighs



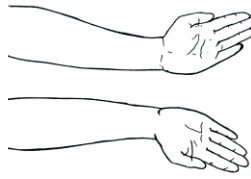
EXHALE hips to side  
feet opposite, toes  
forward



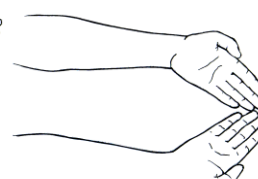
9. INHALE  
Hands down  
fingers curled  
toward forearms



EXHALE hands up  
fingers toward  
head & spread



10. INHALE  
palms flat & out



EXHALE palms  
flat & in



11. INHALE  
fists out  
EXHALE in  
3x then  
reverse circles



12. INHALE arms  
up with palms  
facing up



EXHALE arms  
behind your  
back



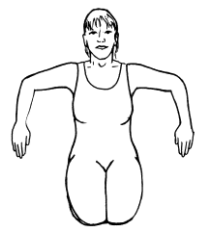
13. INHALE  
elbows wide  
apart



EXHALE  
elbows  
together



14. INHALE  
hands up  
palms facing  
forward



EXHALE  
hands down,  
palms face  
backward



15. INHALE  
arms facing up  
with palms  
facing in



EXHALE arms  
behind your  
back



16. INHALE arch  
back squeeze  
shoulder blades



EXHALE round  
back open  
shoulder blades



17. INHALE erect  
EXHALE side  
bend



18. INHALE sit  
erect EXHALE  
spinal twist



19. INHALE head  
up



EXHALE head  
down



20. INHALE sit erect  
EXHALE head to  
side



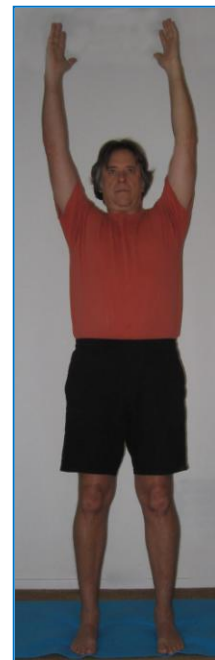
21. INHALE  
center head  
EXHALE  
rotate head

## TADASANA

### *Mountain*



- Stand with the outside edges of your feet parallel and hip bone (anterior superior iliac spine) width apart.
  - Focus awareness on the soles of the feet. Slowly shift weight onto the balls, then onto the heels; slowly shift weight to inside edges then to the outside edges; then allow your weight to be evenly distributed on the soles of your feet.
  - Lift and spread your toes. Notice that the arches lift and the leg muscles contract. Lower toes maintaining the lift in the arches and the action in the leg muscles.
  - Tilt your pelvis forward and then back. Find the position where the pelvis is a perfect bowl -- neither tilted back or forward.
  - Bring up a gentle squeeze in the buttocks.
  - Draw the navel in towards the spine on each exhalation.
  - Allow the shoulders to draw downward away from the ears, without collapsing the chest forward.
  - Draw the inner edges of the scapula towards the spinal column, and allow the outer edges to open out and back so that the front body opens, lifts, and expands.
- Focus attention on the seven vertebrae in the neck. Lift the head and create an equal separation between each of those seven vertebrae. Be sure that you are not tilting the head to one side, forward or back.
  - For most adults, the head weighs about eight pounds, as heavy as a bowling ball. The correct alignment of the head and neck will create a sensation of lightness and spaciousness and will diminish muscle tension in the upper body.
  - Place your arms at your sides with the palms facing inward. Reach towards the floor with the finger tips. Lift the arms slowly out to the sides as you breathe in. Keep the shoulder blades down as you reach out through the fingers.
  - Turn the palms up, and take arms over head, palms face each other. On the out breath lower the arms down to the sides with the same focused concentration.
  - Repeat several times. Then you can hold arms over head for several breaths. Then lower the arms.
  - Allow the arms to then rest at your sides. Close your eyes. Allow the breath to flow naturally and easily. Notice sensation in your body.



#### **Variation:**

- As you breathe in raise the arms and lift up onto the balls of the feet.
- Press into the big toe to prevent rolling out on the ankles.
- As you breathe out, lower the arms and the heels.

**Focus for the Breath:**

- In both variations practice wedding the breath to the movement.
- Allow the in breath to flow evenly as the arms move smoothly over head.
- Allow the out breath to flow evenly as the arms move smoothly down.
- When you lift the heels, coordinate the timing so that every part -- the arms, the feet and the breath -- move as perfectly coordinated dance partners.
- As you practice the other asanas in this booklet, continue to think of the breath in this way -- as if the breath and the movement are wed one to another.

**Meditation in Mountain:**

Now that you have discovered your most efficient posture, close your eyes and relax. Allow your chest to expand in all directions as you breathe in. As you breathe out, gently pull the navel towards the back body, pressing all of the breath out of your lungs. Focus on sensation in the body as you allow the natural breath to flow deeply in and out. Invite a sensation of lightness and lifting up into the heavens with the in breath. Invite awareness of heaviness drawing feet down into the earth as you breathe out.

**Yoga off the mat:**

I like to practice Mountain Pose -- with my arms down -- many times during the day. I often retreat into the pose when I find myself waiting in a line or performing any task that requires standing still for a period of time. It reminds me of what Krishna tells Arjuna: "The wise see that there is action in the midst of inaction and inaction in the midst of action. Their consciousness is unified, and every act is done with complete awareness" (as cited in Easwaran, 1985, p. 87). Bringing complete awareness into the mundane and necessary actions of our material existence allows us to be connected with the Truth, the Beauty and the Goodness that is within us and all around us moment to moment.

**BENEFITS:**

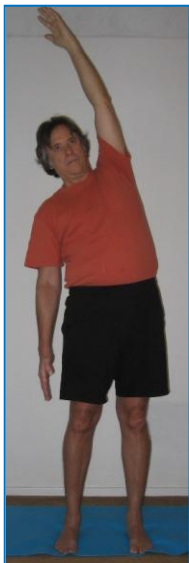
- Provides lessons of postural awareness, pelvic positioning, and leg strengthening that are crucial to overall health.
- Promotes confidence and inner strength.
- Promotes a strong postural foundation and is the basis of all other asanas.

**CAUTIONS:**

- People with headaches, insomnia, and low blood pressure should exercise caution when performing prolonged standing poses.
- The most common error is striving to achieve the perfect posture. Strive to become steady and comfortable while remaining open and receptive to your real teacher, who lives inside of you.
- People with severe imbalance or plantar fasciitis may need to avoid lifting the heels.

## ARDHA CHANDRASANA

### *Half Moon*

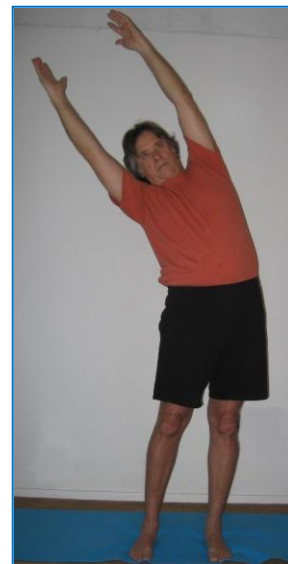


#### **Preparation: QUARTER MOON**

- Stand in Mountain.
- Breathe in. Raise the right arm to shoulder level.
- Turn the palm up and bring the arm in line with the ear.
- Breathe out. Continue to reach with the finger tips, stretching your side body. Lengthen the spine and stretch to the left. Do not allow the spine or shoulders to rotate forward.
- Breathe in and come back to center.
- As you breathe out, lower the arm down to your side.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Do several repetitions. Focus on joining the breath and the movement.
- As you mindfully explore repetitions of QUARTER MOON, notice if you can make any small adjustments to allow more comfort and ease of movement.

#### **The Pose: ARDHA CHANDRASANA (*Half Moon*)**

- Stand in Mountain.
- Send your attention to the soles of your feet.
- Evenly distribute body weight on the soles as you activate the muscles in your legs and bring up a squeeze in the buttocks.
- Breathe in and lift the crown of the head towards the sky.
- Breathe out and reach the finger tips towards the earth.
- Notice the even flow of your breath in and out.
- Raise both arms out to the sides, turn the palms up and reach arms over head as you breathe in.
- Try to bring your arms in line with the ears. This may be difficult if you habitually round the shoulders and cave the chest in.
- Be gentle and focus on the natural steady flow of the breath. Breathe in -- lift and lengthen.
- Breathe out -- draw the shoulders down and back. Press the hips to the left as you reach your arms to the right. Imagine that there is a pane of glass ¼ inch in front of you and ¼ inch behind you. Avoid touching that imaginary pane of glass with any part of your body. Feel the stretch in the side body.
- You may remain in the stretch for several breaths as long as your breath is smooth and even. Bring the spine and arms back to center on an in breath.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Come back to center on an in breath and relax the arms down to you sides.
- Close your eyes. Focus on your breath and body noticing sensations that arise.





- You may remain in the stretch for several breaths as long as your breath is smooth and even. Bring the spine and arms back to center on an in breath.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Come back to center on an in breath and relax the arms down.
- Close your eyes. Focus on your breath and body noticing sensations that arise.

#### BENEFITS:

- Alternately contracting and lengthening the side body promotes circulation to all of the organs and tissues in the torso.
- Tones and strengthens ankles, knees, hips, back, shoulders, neck and every muscle in the torso.
- Increases flexibility of the spine.
- Regulates kidney function.
- Stimulates digestion and helps to prevent constipation.
- Improves circulation and respiration.
- Energizes and builds confidence.
- Develops concentration, coordination, balance, poise, strength and stability.

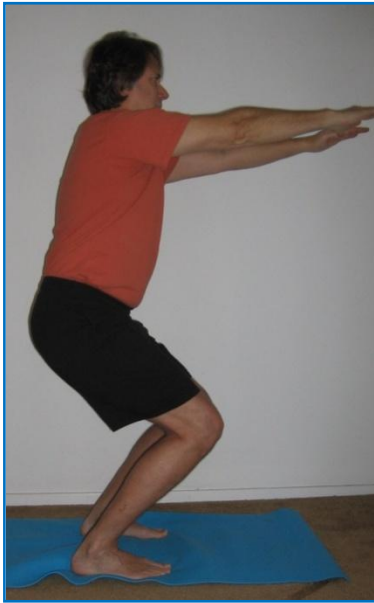
#### CAUTIONS:

Practice with caution if you have:

- High blood pressure.
- Heart conditions.
- Nervous disorders.
- Menstruation and pregnancy.
- Injury or inflammation of shoulders.

## UTKATASANA

*Chair Pose or Standing Squat*



- Stand in Mountain.
- Inhale and raise arms in front of you to shoulder level, palms down, fingers and thumb together. Press out through the finger tips as you also press the arms into the shoulders.
- Exhale and slowly bend knees. Lower the buttocks towards the floor. The torso may angle forward. Maintain a neutral curvature of the back and neck. Keep the heels on the floor.
- Be sure that the knee caps face forward, and that the knees track in line with the hips and ankles.
- You may remain in the pose as long as your breath is smooth and even, you are able to maintain your alignment, your muscles are not quivering, and you have no pain in your joints or lower back.
- Counter pose: Forward Bend

### BENEFITS:

- Strengthens ankles, knees, hips and shoulders.
- Develops leg muscles evenly.
- Stretches the low back.
- Tones the abdomen.
- Full expansion inhalation strengthens the chest.

### CAUTIONS:

Practice with caution if you have:

- Imbalance.
- Severe osteoporosis.
- Profound weakness.

Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to:

- Inflammation or injury of ankles, knees, hips or shoulders.

## UTTANASANA

*Forward Bend*



- Stand in Mountain with your hands on your hips.
- Connect with the natural easy flow of the breath.
- Engage your leg muscles by stretching toes apart and lifting them. Lower the toes back to the floor maintaining awareness of your active and strong leg muscles.
- Breathe in. Lengthen from the base of the spine to the top of the head.
- Bend the knees. As you breathe out, rotate the pelvis as you hinge forward from the top of the leg bones. Maintain neutral spinal curves and lengthen the spine as you fold forward.
- When you can fold no farther with a long and neutral spine, relax over, allowing the head, shoulders and arms to dangle.
- Connect with the natural easy flow of the breath.
- Slowly roll up on an out breath beginning with the lower spine. Set each vertebrae one on top of the other. Stop when you need to breathe in and continue to roll up on the out breath. The head is the very last part to lift.
- Close your eyes. Breathe easily and notice sensation in your body.

### BENEFITS:

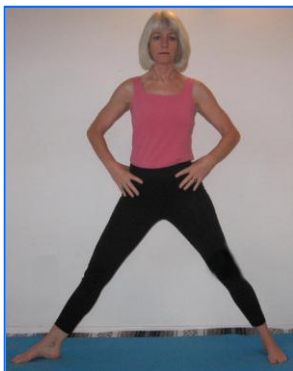
- Relieves stomach pain. Tones the liver, spleen and kidneys.
- Relieves menstrual cramps.
- Cooling -- promotes a calm mind and attitude.
- Counter stretch for all standing poses.
- Lengthens the thoracic and lumbar spinal muscles and the hamstrings.
- Promotes freedom of movement in the pelvis and hips.

### CAUTIONS:

- Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to spondylolithesis, herniated disc, hamstring tear or lightheadedness.
- If you are treated for high blood pressure, or if you have low blood pressure do not remain with your head down very long and return to standing very slowly.

## VIRABHADRASANA II

### *Warrior II*



- Stand with feet wide apart and parallel. Lift toes to be sure thigh muscles are active then set the toes down. Place hands on hips. Be sure that the pelvis is placed so that it is neither tilted back or forward, and that the spinal curves are neutral.
- With each in breath, lengthen from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head.
- With each out breath gently draw the navel back towards the spine to activate the abdominal muscles to support the lower back.
- Adjust your posture moment to moment while practicing this asana so that the spinal curves remain neutral.
- Pivot on the ball of the right foot and bring the right heel forward so it is in line with the inner step of the left foot. In the correct position, you will be able to draw straight line from the hip bone, through the center of the knee cap, to just between the second and third toes.
- Bend the right knee until it is just above the ankle. If you set the foot in the correct position, the knee will track in line with the ankle. This is important for avoiding joint injury.
- Maintain an upright position of the torso -- do not lean towards the bent knee.
- Avoid the tendency to twist the pelvis and spine around towards the bent knee.
- Equalize the distribution of weight and effort on both legs.
- Connect with the breath as you find a place of comfort and stability.
- Engage the finger tips. On an in breath reach the arms out from the shoulders. Press the scapula (angel wings) towards the spine as you reach out with the hands and fingers. This will activate the arm muscles. Keep the shoulders down and away from the ears.
- Turn your gaze to the right hand.
- Connect with your breath. Find a place of stability and comfort where the breath is smooth and even. Allow your whole body to be active but not tense. You may remain in the pose as long as your breath is smooth and easy, your muscles are not quivering, and there is no pain in your joints.
- To release from the pose, straighten the right leg, square the feet, bring the gaze back to center, and place your hands on your hips. Notice the subtle differences between the sides of your body.
- Repeat on the other side.

#### BENEFITS:

- Increases strength in the muscles that support the spine, as well as the legs, buttocks, abdomen, shoulders and arms.
- Teaches how to properly align and move the legs in coordination with the pelvis.
- Improves flexibility in the legs, buttocks, hips and pelvis.
- Generates heat.
- Energizes the body.
- Stimulates the mind.
- Improves endurance.
- Provides opening through the pelvis, hips, and inner thighs.
- May relieve compression of the lower back as you focus on lengthening the spine.
- Promotes a feeling of self-sufficiency, self-confidence and inner strength.

#### CAUTIONS:

Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to:

- Inflammation or injury of the ankles, knees, hips, or shoulders.
- High blood pressure or heart disease. (Practicing with hands on hips can reduce strain on the heart).

## DANDASANA

*Stick Pose with strap*

**Preparation:** Working effectively in this pose requires a seated position, which allows the spine its natural curves. It is common to roll back on the pelvis and to round the chest and shoulders forward when seated which creates misalignment of the spine. Correcting these misalignments will promote health not only of the spine, but of all of the organ systems in the pelvis, abdomen, chest and throat.

Let us begin our exploration of the spine by sitting on a firm chair with the soles of the feet flat on floor. You may have a friend assist you, or use a mirror so that you can see how you normally hold yourself. If you naturally roll backward on the pelvis, roll forward with the pelvis, bringing the pubic bone down and forward. Pull the navel back towards the spine. Press the sit bones down into the chair. Notice if you can feel the bones and muscles that make up the floor of your pelvis. Find the same perfect bowl of the pelvis that we explored in Mountain pose. Now you can lift up from the sacrum, and allow the lumbar vertebrae to stack one atop the other. As you inhale lift from the tailbone to the navel. As you exhale, maintain the lift as you draw navel towards spine, and press down into the sit bones.



Next focus attention on the thoracic spine -- or that area of the backbone that is found at the level of the navel and extends up to the shoulders. A common misalignment is to exaggerate the normal rounding forward of the thoracic spine, caving the front of the chest inward. This posture chronically constricts the organs of circulation and breathing found in the chest, the organs of digestion found in the abdomen, and the endocrine organs found in the throat. To find a healthy thoracic alignment, place your hands on your thighs relaxing the arms and shoulders. Draw the inner edges of the scapula towards the spinal column and allow the outer edges to open out and back so that the front body opens. As you inhale, expand the chest in all directions (front to back, side to side, and up and down) creating more space in the chest, between the ribs, and between the vertebrae. As you exhale, draw the navel towards the spine, lifting the diaphragm up into the rib cage.

Moving awareness up the spine to the neck or cervical vertebrae, simply bring the crown of the head directly over the pelvis. This may feel forward or back from what is normal for you depending on the posture you have developed over time. As you inhale, simply lift the crown of the head, creating more space between each vertebra. As you exhale, drop the shoulders towards the ground, releasing chronic tension and tightness.

Now close your eyes, and visualize all twenty-four vertebrae lifting up evenly out of the sacrum. Imagine each vertebra perfectly placed one on top of the other. As you inhale, lift up creating more space between each vertebra. As you exhale, notice the comfort and stability provided by allowing the spine its natural curves.

### The Pose:

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended. If you roll back on your pelvis, you may place a folded blanket beneath you. This will allow the pelvis to tilt slightly forward bringing the spine into its natural alignment.
- Place the strap around the balls of your feet.
- Use the strap to gently pull the feet towards you as you push your heels away. This motion allows lengthening in the back side of your body.
- Engage the arm muscles, drawing the elbows in towards the waist and the shoulders down.
- Bring the inner aspects of the shoulder blades (scapula) together and forward allowing the outer edges to open out. This creates opening in the front of the chest.
- Bring the crown of the head over the pelvis.
- As you breathe in, expand the chest in all directions and lift from the lower vertebrae to the crown of the head.
- As you breathe out, maintain the lift through the spine while allowing the weight of the body to sink down into the earth.
- Remain in this pose for three to eight breaths or as long as you feel both stable and comfortable.



### BENEFITS:

- Strengthens muscles that support the spine.
- Promotes ease in all sitting poses.
- Tones hip flexors, abdominal and back muscles.
- Increases vitality.

### CAUTIONS:

- Keep knees bent if you are experiencing sciatica. If this does not provide comfort, avoid the pose and concentrate on gentle back bending in cobra and locust poses.
- Use the strap only for support in finding a place of both comfort and stability.

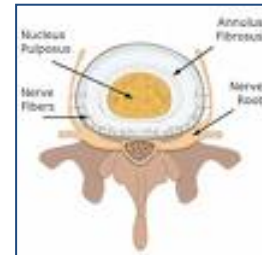


## MATSYENDRASANA

### *Spinal Twist*

#### **Anatomy of the Spine:**

Intervertebral discs make up about one-third of the length of the spine and constitute the largest organ in the body without its own blood supply. The discs cushion and separate each vertebra. They are made of a strong fibrous outer ring and a soft, pulpy, gel center. The center of the disc is like a sponge and soaks up needed nutrition and hydration from surrounding tissue during non--weight--bearing rest. During weight bearing activity fluid is squeezed out and will be replenished again during the next period of rest. This mechanism is required to keep the discs healthy and it is inhibited by poor posture and loss of flexibility. The combination of strong muscles to lift and separate the vertebrae, posture which maintains a neutral spine and movement of the spine through full range of motion daily promotes optimal functioning of the intervertebral discs. (Schatz, 1992, pp.11--14)



#### **Standing Spinal Twist:**

This variation safely provides the benefits of the pose without the increased demand that sitting places on the spine. It is important to maintain neutral spinal curves when twisting. For most people, this is easier to do when standing. You will need a chair or a stool for this pose. You may use a chair if you are able to flex your hip enough to place your foot on a chair without compromising the alignment of the spine or the pelvis. Otherwise use a stool. Correct alignment is required for safety in spinal twists.

#### **The Pose:**

- Place a stool (or chair) next to the wall and stand next to the wall facing the stool.
- Come into Mountain Pose.
- Place the foot next to the wall on the stool.
- Be sure that the foot support you choose is not so high that your hips become uneven when you lift the thigh.
- Begin the twist by breathing in and gently turning the head to look at the wall.
- With the next exhalation place the hands on the wall at shoulder level, bringing the twist into the thoracic spine or chest area. Finally, you may allow the low back to also twist as much as it is able to do so comfortably.
- Remember to engage abdominal muscles to support the lower back.
- Do not force the twist, simply allow each vertebra to lift, separate and gently twist slowly and smoothly. Allow all parts of the spine to be active. Notice that the degree of mobility is greatest in the neck and diminishes gradually until there is very little movement in the lower back.





### Seated Spinal Twist:

If you are able to sit on the floor comfortably and maintain a neutral spine you may progress to this seated variation.

#### The Pose:

- Sit on the floor with legs extended. You may place a folded blanket beneath your sits bones if you roll back on your pelvis. If this position is not stable and comfortable practice only the standing spinal twist. If you consistently practice all of the poses in this program, you will in time be able to practice a seated twist safely and comfortably.
- Bend the left knee and place the foot comfortably close to the thigh.
- Press with the right heel and draw the toes towards the face.
- Wrap the arms around the left leg. Lift and lengthen the spine as you breathe in.
- As you breathe out, place the left hand next to your left hip or behind you. Gently turn your head to the left looking as far behind you as you can. Allow the length of the spine -- from the neck to the lower back to twist.
- As you breathe in, use the arms to help support and lengthen the spine.
- As you breathe out, keep the shoulders away from the ears, avoid rounding the chest and continue to explore the ability of the spine to twist.



- Continue to focus on the breath. Allow the in breath to lift and separate the vertebrae. Notice how much more natural mobility there is in the neck compared to the low back.
- You may remain in this pose for three to twelve breaths, as long as you are stable and comfortable and your breath is easy and smooth.
- Repeat on the other side.

#### BENEFITS:

- Strengthens back muscles.
- Promotes optimal health and function of intervertebral discs.
- Tones the oblique abdominal muscles.
- Provides massage to abdominal organs and increases peristalsis.

#### CAUTIONS:

- Twists should be avoided during pregnancy and in the case of sacroiliac pain or instability.
- Be sure that the sits bones are even and be sure to lengthen with a neutral spine before twisting.

## ARDHA SALABHASANA

### *Half Locust*

#### Preparation:

- Lie on the floor belly down with palms down beneath the forehead.
- Place the legs close together with the toes pointed. If the feet cramp, you may place a four to six inch roll under the ankles for support.



#### Warm Up:

- Press feet, thighs, hips and pubic bone down and bring up a squeeze in the buttocks.
- Exhale. Bend the right knee and press the heel towards the buttock.
- Inhale. Set the leg down.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Keep the muscles in the buttocks and legs active so that the hip bones (anterior superior iliac spines) remain level as you bend the knee. Attention to this detail will help strengthen muscles in the pelvis, low back and legs that are weak, and begin to release muscles that are habitually contracted.
- You may do three to twelve repetitions, allowing the breath to be smooth, even, and synchronous with the movement.
- You may alternate pointing and flexing the feet.



#### The Pose:

- Leave your hands beneath the forehead if that is comfortable. Or you may place the hands palms down at your side with your chin or forehead on the mat.
- As you exhale, press feet, thighs, hips and pubic bone down and bring up a squeeze in the buttocks.
- As you inhale lengthen from the right hip to the toes, extending the leg so long that it lifts itself up off of the floor.
- Be sure to keep the pelvis stable by bringing up a squeeze in the buttocks and pressing the hip bones down towards the ground.
- Repeat on the other side.

- Do several repetitions, lifting and lowering in rhythm with the breath.
- You may also hold the stretch on each side for as long as it feels stable, comfortable and your breath is even and smooth.



Counter

- Place your hands beneath the shoulders, and press yourself up and back reaching buttocks toward heels.
- Rest here for a few breaths.

Pose:



#### BENEFITS:

- Tones and strengthens the back.
- Energizes.
- Can relieve sacral and lumbar back pain.
- Stimulates digestion and peristalsis.
- Improves tone and function of pelvic and abdominal organs.
- May relieve menstrual cramps if practiced throughout the month.
- Strengthens the immune system and promotes healthy endocrine functioning.
- Improves the return of blood from the legs to the heart and helps prevent varicose veins.

#### CAUTIONS:

- Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to spinal stenosis or spondylolisthesis
- If you have a colostomy you may still do this pose if your appliance is empty and you lie on a pad or mat to provide comfort in the abdomen.
- For weak back muscles, or chronic back pain, focus on squeezing the buttocks together and lift the legs only slightly.

Do not do this pose if:

- You have had recent abdominal surgery, inflammation or infection.
- You are more than three months pregnant.

## BHUJANGASANA

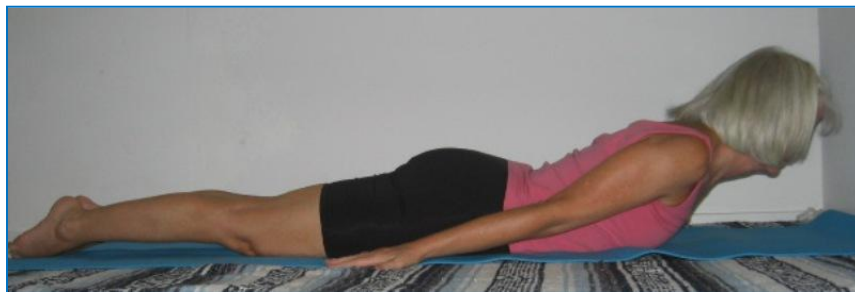
### Cobra

#### Warm Up:

- Lie on your belly with palms facing down, chin or forehead on the mat.
- Place the legs close together and flatten the tops of the feet onto the mat.
- If your feet cramp in this position, you may roll a thin blanket and place it beneath your ankles.
- Breathe in. Lengthen the whole body
- Breathe out. Squeeze buttocks together. Press hips, pubic bone, legs and feet into the floor.



- Breathe in. Lengthen spine, press breast bone forward, and lift the upper body off the mat.
- Keep head in alignment with the spine. Do not lead with the chin or press the head back between the shoulders.



- Breathe out. Lower chest to the floor and turn head to the right.
- Breathe in. Lengthen spine, press breast bone forward, and lift the upper body off the mat.



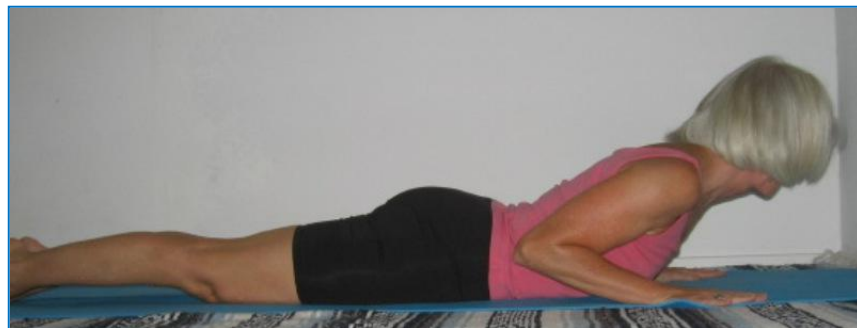
- Breathe out. Lower chest to the floor and turn your head to the left.
- Repeat the movement pattern three to six times on alternating sides.
- Allow the movement to flow with the rhythm of the breath.

### The Pose:

- Place hands near the shoulders and bring the elbows in close to the waist. Forehead or chin is on the mat.
- Keep the legs close together if you can.



- Press the feet and legs into the floor. Squeeze the buttocks. Press hips and pubic bone down.
- Breathe in. Lengthen the spine and keep the head in alignment -- do not lead with the chin or press the head back between the shoulders.
- Press the breast bone forward and lift the upper body off the mat.
- Breathe out. Press into the palms. Keep elbows in towards the waist. Squeeze the inner edges of the scapula (angel wings) together and open the front of the chest.
- You may remain in the pose for several breaths and increase the amount of time with regular practice.
- Keep the breath smooth and even. Use the in breath to open and expand the chest. Use the out breath to strengthen and lengthen the back, abdomen, wrists, arms and shoulders.



### Practice Note:

Snakes slither on the earth. In cobra pose we must, like a snake, discover a solid connection to the earth. It is our connection to the earth that provides stability so that we can rise up towards the heavens. The lift in this pose comes from lengthening the body, pressing down with the parts of the body that touch the earth, and expanding the chest forward. All parts of your body are equally active and participating. Do not fake the pose by pushing yourself up with arm strength alone. Anyone who knows about snakes will recognize your pose as a weak imitation. Snakes do not have arms!

#### BENEFITS:

- Relieves compression of the abdominal diaphragm and promotes more effective breathing.
- Improves circulation through the kidneys.
- Stretches and strengthens abdominal muscles and viscera.
- Can release gas trapped in the upper digestive tract.
- May relieve menstrual disorders and pain.
- Strengthens the deep muscles of the spine, wrists, arms and shoulders.
- Aligns the spinal column.
- Energizes the entire body, increases body heat and builds self--confidence.

#### CAUTIONS:

- If you have a colostomy you may still do this pose if your appliance is empty and you lie on a pad or mat to provide comfort in the abdomen.
- Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to spinal stenosis or spondylolisthesis.
- For weak back muscles, activate the muscles in the legs and buttocks and attempt only a minimal lift of the upper body.

#### Do not do this pose if:

- You have had a recent back injury or inflammation.
- You have had recent abdominal surgery, inflammation or infection.
- You are more than three months pregnant.



## **APANASANA** *Wind Relieving Pose*

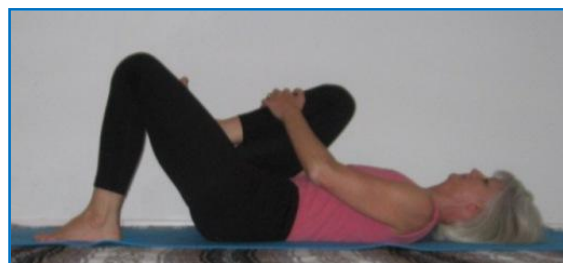
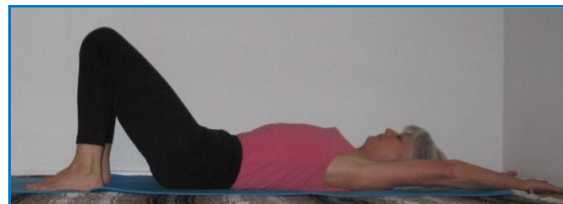
### **Level One:**

- Lie on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor near your buttocks.
- Bring awareness into the body by focusing on the breath.
- On the in breath allow the belly to soften and the chest to expand in all directions.
- On the out breath activate the abdominal muscles and bring the navel back towards the spine.
- Lift your feet, bring your thighs towards the abdomen and cup your hands on your knees.
- On the in breath, soften the belly, straighten your arms and allow your thighs to drop away.
- On the out breath, gently press the thighs closer to the abdomen pulling the navel back towards the spine.
- Repeat the movement three to twelve times or more as you join the breath to the movement. The breath is long, smooth and in rhythm with the movement.



### **Level Two:**

- Lie on your back with knees bent, feet on the floor near your buttocks, and arms at your sides.
- Breathe in. Raise your arms overhead as far as they comfortably go.
- Breathe out. Lift the right thigh towards the abdomen and wrap your arms around your legs.
- Breathe in. Raise your arms overhead and place the foot back on the floor.
- Breathe out. Lift the left thigh towards the abdomen and wrap your arms around your legs.
- Repeat three to twelve times on each side.
- Lift both thighs towards your abdomen, wrap your arms around the legs, and give yourself a big hug. You can rest in this position as long as it is comfortable.



**BENEFITS:**

- Provides gentle massage to the abdominal and pelvic organs.
- Improves digestion and relieves gas and constipation.
- Relieves pain and stiffness in the lower back.
- May relieve menstrual cramps.

**CAUTIONS:**

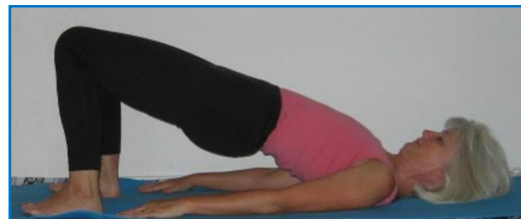
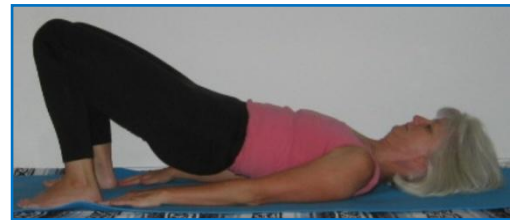
- If wrapping the arms around the shins is not comfortable, you may hold on behind your thighs.
- If lying on your back creates tension in the neck, you may place a thin pillow under your head.



## SETU BANDHASANA

### *Bridge*

- Lie on your back, arms at your sides, palms down.
- Bend knees and place feet close to the buttocks and in line with the hip bones (anterior superior iliac spines).
- Reach hands towards the toes, drawing the shoulders away from the ears.
- Lengthen the neck reaching the top of the head away from the shoulders.
- Gently turn the head from side to side, relaxing the neck muscles.
- Soften the belly as you breathe in and notice the space between the lower back and the floor.
- Breathe out. Pull the navel towards the spine, and gently press the lower back towards the floor.
- Allow a slight pelvic tilt forward on the out breath. Relax on the in breath. Repeat just this much three to twelve times.
- Next, breathe in deeply, and as you breathe out tilt the pelvis forward and lift the buttocks off the floor.
- Think of tucking the tail bone between the legs and reaching the pubic bone towards the front ribs.
- Breathe in. Expand the chest. Press into the hands, wrists, arms and shoulder blades. Avoid shifting any weight onto the back of the neck.
- Breathe out. Activate the abdominal muscles and set the spine down one vertebra at a time.
- Breathe in and relax the belly.
- Repeat three to six times. Activate the abdominal muscles to support the spine on the out breath when you are coming up and going down.
- Finally, you may move up into the posture and stay there as long as you feel stable and comfortable.



### BENEFITS:

- Strengthens muscles of the back, buttocks, shoulders, arms and legs.
- Regulates function of the thyroid gland.
- Increases blood flow to the kidneys and enhances elimination of toxins.
- Stimulates the nervous system.
- Aligns and improves elasticity of the spinal column.
- Expands the chest, strengthens the lungs and facilitates deeper breathing.
- Stretches and strengthens abdominal muscles.

- Increases circulation and body heat.
- Energizes.
- Builds self -- confidence.

**CAUTIONS:**

- To strengthen weak back muscles, bring up a squeeze in the buttocks with only a minimal lift of the pelvis.
- Avoid this pose if you are experiencing back pain.

## SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA

### *Reclining Big-Toe Pose*

**Preparation:** If you have tightness in the lower back and legs, it will be helpful to practice Apanasana (Wind Relieving Pose) prior to this pose.

To begin work on Supta Padangusthasana, lie on your back with knees bent. To support the lower back or neck in a position of comfort, you may place a folded blanket one to two inches thick beneath your head, shoulders and back so that the lower edge comes to the small of your back. If needed, you may place a folded blanket under your head.



### **The Pose:**



Take your strap, and place it around the ball of the right foot. Keep the spine neutral as you straighten the right leg. The goal is to find a place of comfort and stability. The leg may not be perpendicular to the floor. It is better for the leg to be as straight as it is when you are standing, and to be as close to the floor as it needs to be. Focus on the breath. With each in breath, become aware of the connection of the top of the leg bone (femur) connecting into the hip joint. With the out breath, extend your awareness from the hip joint all the way to the heel. Press the heel away and draw the toes close. After exploring this position for a minute or longer, notice that the muscles in the back of the thigh and the low back begin to relax and lengthen. Allow the muscles to relax even more with each out breath. You may remain in the pose as long as your breath is smooth and easy, and you are comfortable. Repeat on the other side.

### **BENEFITS:**

- Balances strength and flexibility in the legs. When straightening the knee, the quadriceps, (large muscles in the front of the thigh) are contracting, and the hamstrings (large muscles in the back of the thigh) are relaxing. If the quadriceps muscles are weak and the hamstrings are tight, the knee will bend if it lifted too high from the floor. Place the leg close enough to the floor so the leg is in a full extension, but the knee is not locked.
- Stretches the muscles in the back -- paraspinal and quadrates lumborum.
- Improves circulation in the legs and hips.
- Reduces spondylolithesis and lordosis, and improves pelvic alignment.

**CAUTIONS:** Use particular care in practicing this pose and stop if you experience any unpleasant sensations due to hamstring sprain, gastroesophageal reflux, disc herniations or sciatica.

## BACK RELEASES

- Lie on your back with knees bent and feet as wide apart as your mat.
- Stretch your arms out from the shoulders with palms up.
- As you breathe in, expand the chest in all directions, creating more openness in your body.
- As you breathe out, draw your navel back towards the spine and invite all of your muscles to relax.



- On an out breath, take both knees to the right, allowing the feet to turn on their sides. The left buttock may lift up off the floor. Continue to breathe in and out, evenly and smoothly. With the in breath, allow openness in the body. With the out breath, release tension and tightness.
- You may turn your head to the left to relieve tension in the neck.
- On an out breath, bring the knees back to the center. Breathe in.
- On the next out breath, take both knees to the left, allowing the feet to turn on their sides. The right buttock may lift up off the floor. Continue to breathe in and out, evenly and smoothly. With the in breath, allow openness in the body. With the out breath, release tension and tightness.
- You may turn your head to the right to relieve tension in the neck.
- Bring the knees back to center on an out breath when you are ready.

### BENEFITS:

- This is a wonderful way to relieve tension in the body, especially in the neck, the upper and lower back and hips.

## VIPARITA KARANI

### *Legs up the Wall Pose*



- If your chin points up to the ceiling when lying on the floor, place a folded blanket on your yoga mat and adjust the placement so the head will be supported when you lie down.
- Sit near the left edge of your mat with the right shoulder near the wall.
- If you have stiffness in the lower back, and your legs are not perpendicular to the floor in Hand to Foot Pose, move away from the wall six to twelve inches.
- Support yourself with your arms as you bring your back down onto the mat and swing your legs up onto the wall.
- Keep your legs straight but relaxed.
- Place the arms away from the sides. Experiment with the arm position to find the place where the shoulders feel most relaxed.
- Turn your palms up. You may lightly touch the thumbs to the index finger.
- Close your eyes relax and simply observe the breath.
- Observe sensation in the body as the circulation in the feet and legs is reversed.
- You may remain in this pose for five or ten minutes or longer.

#### BENEFITS:

- Relieves tired and achy feet and legs.
- Helps to prevent varicose veins.
- Reduces swelling in the feet and legs.
- Calms the mind.

#### Do not do this pose if:

- You are menstruating.
- You are more than three months pregnant or at risk for miscarriage.
- You have a hiatal hernia.
- You have sciatica.
- You have congestive heart failure.

## SAVASANA

*Corpse or Sponge Pose*



- Lie on your back with the legs comfortably apart.
- If this is not comfortable, place several folded blankets or a bolster beneath your knees.
- Place the arms out from the sides slightly, with the palms facing up.
- Turn your head gently from side to side to release any tension in the neck.
- You may place a thin pillow beneath your head if you need to.
- You may want to cover yourself with a blanket.
- Close your eyes and draw attention inward by focusing on the breath. You do not need to control the breath, simply observe the in breath, and the out breath.
- Scan your body mentally from head to toe, simply noticing how you feel.
- If you notice areas of tension or tightness, breathe it away on the out breath.
- Continue to rest in this pose. Imagine that your body is warm and heavy. Allow your body to become more and more relaxed with each breath.



### BENEFITS:

- Resting in this pose after asana practice allows the body to assimilate the changes and benefits.
- When practiced for twenty minutes or more Savasana reverses the physiological changes that occur in our bodies as a result of stress.
- When practiced daily, Savasana reduces blood pressure.
- Deep therapeutic relaxation in Savasana is an integral part of Dr. Dean Ornish's program to reduce clogged arteries in the heart.

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#### PERMISSIONS:

Sharon Ebert, The Breathing Room. [www.sharonscapes.com](http://www.sharonscapes.com).

Mukunda Stiles, Joint Freeing Series. The Yoga Therapy Center.  
[www.yogatherapycenter.org](http://www.yogatherapycenter.org).

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