



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Feet

In November we started with the feet. We focused on stability in the feet by connecting with the four corners of the feet - the big and little toes, and the outer and inner heels. We practiced distributing the weight evenly in the feet to create healthy alignment. Whenever you practice the postures like Virabhadrasana III (warrior III) and Ardha Chandrasana (half moon) don't just point your toes or press out with your heel; instead, press out with all four corners of your foot.

The Knees

In December we moved up to the knees. We discussed how to prevent knee problems by focusing on hip movement and correct alignment; using props to support the knees, legs and hips; never moving into pain or forcing the knee and shortening the distance between your feet in standing postures to lessen the strain on your knees.

The Hips

In January we concentrated on the hips. Most of us experience some restriction in the hips. As the hips can move in six directions it is possible for one or more of these directions to be restricted. If you try and compensate for these restrictions you may experience pain or strain in the sacroiliac joints, knees, ankles, back or neck. We practiced postures to help unstick the hips such as Ananda Balasana (Happy Baby) and Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (King Pigeon Posture).

The Abdominals

In February we continued our journey up the body as we focused on our abdominal muscles and lower back muscles known as '**core strength**'. I know that February was quite a memorable month for many of you! We practised postures to find your inner core muscles and how to activate them. We learned that strengthening the core muscles could help to stabilise your back from the inside out. The posture for February was Navasana (Boat Posture), which trains all four abdominal layers.

The Shoulders and Arms

You will remember that last month we practised many postures to strengthen our shoulders and arms. We use our shoulders in virtually every posture, whether it's holding the arms out to the side or bearing weight on the arms. Strengthening the four muscles that make up the rotator cuff of the shoulder will help maintain flexibility in your shoulder joint.

Balancing your Yoga Practice

Try to maintain a well-rounded yoga practice. Always start by stretching the spine and then bringing attention to your breath. Practice a variety of postures to include standing postures, chest openers, balancing postures, sitting postures and inversions whether you do a yoga practice of fifteen minutes or two hours. Take into account the things you have learned about alignment and never move into pain. Try and use the mula bandha and uddiyana bandha in your practice to help protect your back.

If your lower back feels weak then always try to do back strengthening postures such as Salabhasana (locust) and the variations of the posture on a regular basis.

Posture of the Month

SALABHASANA (Locust posture)

Technique

1. For this posture you might want to pad the floor below your pelvis and ribs with a folded blanket. Lie on your belly with your arms along the sides of your torso, palms up, forehead resting on the floor. Turn your big toes toward each other to inwardly rotate your thighs, and firm your buttocks so your coccyx presses toward your pubis.
2. Inhale and as you exhale engage the mula bandha and lift your legs. Now lift your upper torso away from the floor and lift your arms pushing your palms up to the ceiling. You'll be resting on your lower ribs, belly, and front pelvis. Firm your buttocks and reach strongly through your legs, first through the heels to lengthen the back legs, then through the bases of the big toes. Keep the big toes turned toward each other.
3. Keep your arms raised and stretch back actively through your fingertips. Imagine there's a weight pressing down on the backs of the upper arms, and push up toward the ceiling against this resistance. Press your scapulas (shoulder blades) firmly into your back.
4. Gaze forward towards the edge of your mat being careful not to jut your chin forward and crunch the back of your neck. Keep the base of the skull lifted and the back of the neck long.
5. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation. Take a few breaths and repeat 1 or 2 times more if you like.

Contraindications and Cautions

Do not practice this posture if you have a headache or a serious back injury. If you have a neck injury keep your head in a neutral position by looking down at the floor and support your forehead on a thickly folded blanket.

Variations

A challenging variation of Salabhasana is called Makarasana (sea monster). The legs are raised in this posture exactly as in Salabhasana, but the fingers are clasped and then the palms are pressed against the back of the head, with the index fingers hooked up underneath the base of the skull. With the upper torso lifted, open the arms out to your sides.

Another variation is to stretch your arms forward and lift with your arms stretching forward while simultaneously lifting your legs.

Benefits of this posture

- Strengthens the muscles of the spine, buttocks, and backs of the arms and legs
- Relieves pain in the sacral and lumbar regions of the back
- Stretches the shoulders, chest, belly, and thighs
- Improves posture
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps to keep the bladder and prostate gland healthy
- Aids digestion and relieves gastric troubles
- Helps relieve stress



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