



200-HOUR TRAINING

YOGA TEACHER TRAINING MANUAL

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An Integrative Approach

Welcome to the Kripalu School of Yoga (KSY). The curriculum we have created draws inspiration from ancient tradition, primarily the classical yoga of Patanjali, along with modern science, to develop a profound understanding of yoga and its personal and universal impact. One of the goals of the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is to kindle trust for the body's intelligence, encouraging a practice rooted in self-awareness and self-care. This approach steadies the mind, invigorates the body, stimulates the heart, and cultivates self-observation without judgment—a key principle of Kripalu Yoga.

KSY has been training Kripalu Yoga teachers for more than 40 years. While our curriculum continues to evolve in service of our current global community, our school is inspired by dedicated yoga explorers like you. Thank you for choosing our certification program.

Namaste.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Yoganand Michael Carroll". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Yoganand" being more prominent and stylized than the last name "Michael Carroll".

Yoganand Michael Carroll

Dean, Kripalu School of Yoga

Student-Teacher Mantra

Also known as the Prayer for Harmony, and Shanti Mantra

Sanskrit Transliteration

Om Saha na-va-vatu
Saha Nau Bhu-naktu
Saha viryam karav-va-vahai
Tejas-vi na-vadhi-tam astu
Ma vid-visha-vahai
Om shanti, shanti, shanti

Asato ma sada ga-maya
Tamaso ma jyotir ga-maya
Mrityor ma amritam ga-maya

Om shanti, shanti, shanti

English Translation

May we be protected together
May we be nourished together
May we work together with great vigor
May our study be enlightening
May no obstacle arise between us
Om peace, peace, peace

Lead us from the unreal to the real
Lead us from the darkness to the light
Lead us from death to immortality

Om peace, peace, peace

Kripalu's Mission

To empower people and communities
to realize their full potential through
the transformative wisdom and practice of yoga.



KSY Guiding Principles

The Kripalu School of Yoga aims to fulfill the organization's mission by empowering individuals to experience, understand, and teach the Kripalu Approach to hatha yoga. Direct, experiential knowledge born of practice forms the foundation from which we serve others as Kripalu Yoga teachers. The Kripalu Approach to teaching yoga has three guiding principles: self-care, self-responsibility, and Self-Observation Without Judgment.

Self-Care

All Kripalu Yoga instruction must happen in the context of safety. Techniques should be adapted as necessary to be safe for the students to practice. We recognize that the context in which the techniques are taught and practiced are influenced by various factors specific to the individual.

We encourage a yogic lifestyle informed by Ayurvedic and common sense principles to keep your practice safe and increase benefits. We see self-care as a responsibility of both students and teachers.

As participants in this program, we encourage you to keep your body healthy and your mind clear by meeting your needs for food and rest, and to balance all the pulls on your energy and attention outside the program. Before helping another person to create balance, you must find it in yourself first. Self-care sets a solid foundation to explore yoga in the context of cultivating safety, meeting needs, and finding nourishment. Simply put, the more grounded you are, the safer your students will feel.

Self-Responsibility

As Kripalu Yoga practitioners and teachers, we must cultivate the responsibility to adapt the practices to our limitations and needs. As practitioners, we monitor our body closely to determine how long we should hold postures, and whether we should modify or use props. As teachers, we encourage our students to also take responsibility for their experience by determining where they should follow our guidance and where they should modify their practice.

Self-Observation Without Judgment

Self-care promotes sensitivity. Self-responsibility develops discipline. With sensitivity and discipline, we find integrity and the ability to see deeper into ourselves including parts that may be easy to judge. Seeing our own inconsistencies—what we might call "weaknesses" or "flaws"—can make us feel uncomfortable. Unless we are able to see ourselves clearly, we cannot take responsibility for the patterns and habits that do not serve us. The practice of accepting ourselves unconditionally allows us to digest the experience we have of ourselves and move forward more whole and complete.

The hallmark of Kripalu Yoga is the cultivation of witness consciousness, or as Swami Kripalu taught it, Self-Observation Without Judgment. This principle organizes all practical elements of Kripalu Yoga, and throughout this training you will explore the different layers of yourself (physical, mental, emotional, and energetic) and make skillful choices that lead to integration. A consistent practice that cultivates witness consciousness establishes safety, embodied learning, and integration in your own practice and in the classes we teach.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Curriculum: At a Glance

The 200-hour curriculum is organized into four weeks, providing a clear, step-by-step progression to becoming a certified Kripalu Yoga teacher. Each week is aimed at preparing you for that week's practice-teach. All reading assignments, lectures, posture-training sessions, and afternoon themed classes are geared toward building your success in the practice-teach sessions. For example, the focus for Week One is orienting you to the Kripalu tradition and preparing you for Practice-Teach 1. This program is composed of modular sessions. A template of sessions is provided below, which will guide you in preparing for upcoming sessions, help you review presented material, and support you in integrating the knowledge in your own way.

Daily Schedule

Sadhana: posture-training sequence
6:00–7:45 am

AM session
9:00–11:45 am

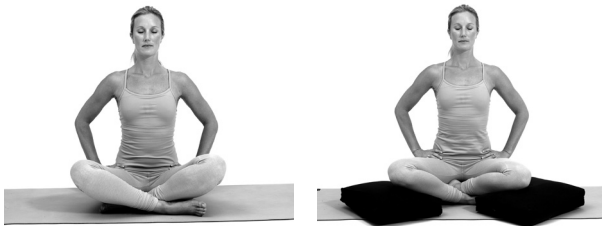
Check-ins with staff, required or optional on some days each week
12:00–1:00 pm

Study hall/open mentoring, required or optional on some days each week
1:30–1:50 pm

PM session, including a themed sadhana on some days each week
2:00–6:00 pm

How to Sit

A base for asana transitions, pranayama, and centering meditation practices.



Easy Pose *Sukhasana*

Essential cues

- From Dandasana, draw the sole of your left foot into the right thigh, left knee toward the ground.
- Bend your right knee and slide your heel toward the left shin.
- Place your hands on your thighs.
- Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.

To release:

- Extend your legs.



Half Lotus *Ardha Padmasana*

Essential cues

- From Dandasana, draw the sole of your left foot into the right thigh, left knee toward the ground.
- Bend your right knee and place your foot toward the left hip crease.
- Place your hands on your thighs.
- Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.

To release:

- Extend the legs.

Diamond Pose

Vajrasana

Essential cues

- Come onto your hands and knees with the toes uncurled.
- Sit back onto your heels.
- Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.

To release:

- Lean forward into your hands.
- Extend your legs.



Sadhana

Posture Training Sequence Sadhana

The intention of the morning sadhana is to create a daily personal practice, establish familiarity and muscle memory of the core 21 postures, intergrate asana/pranayama clinics, and model an effective Kripalu Yoga class. Having a consistent daily practice builds discipline, creates a foundation for effective teaching, and allows you to see the parts of yourself (body, mind, emotions, attitude) that are changing.



Morning Posture Training Sequence		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	
	Theme/Context	
	Opening Centering Meditation	
	Pranayama	Dirgha
		Ujjayi
		Kapalabhati
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Six Movements of the Spine, after third week of training use Sun Salutes
		Flexion
		Extension
		Lateral Flexion
		Rotation
	Asana	Tadasana (Mountain)
		Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon)
		Utkatasana (Standing Squat)
		Garudasana (Eagle)
		Virabhadrasana (Warrior)
		Parshva Virabhadrasana (Side Warrior)
		Prasarita Padottanasana (Standing Wide Angle)
		Trikonasana (Triangle)
		Vrikshasana (Tree)
		Urdhva Navasana (Upward Boat)
		Setu Bhandasana (Bridge)
		Ardha Sarvangasana (Half Shoulderstand)
		Supta Matsyendrasana (Knee-Down Twist)
		Bhujangasana (Cobra)
		Navasana (Boat)
		Garbhasana (Child)
		Yoga Mudra (Symbol of Yoga)
		Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)
		Kapotasana (Pigeon)
		Janu Shirshasana (Head to Knee)
		Paschimottanasana (Seated Fold)
		Matsyendrasana (Seated Spinal Twist)
Integration	Pranayama	Dirgha / Ujjayi / Nadi Shodhana
	Relaxation	Shavasana
	Closing Centering Meditation	

Themed Sadhana

The intention of the afternoon sadhana is to integrate key topics of the day and support students in teaching gentle and intermediate yoga classes. These classes are taught by experienced Kripalu Yoga teachers, who model the techniques skillfully. Each class includes a theme, a creative sequence from the core asanas, and pranayama.



Gentle

The aim of Gentle Kripalu Yoga is compassionate self-awareness, mild stretching, and relaxation. This class includes slow warm-ups to soothe the body, basic postures to release muscular tension, simple breathing practices to calm the nervous system, and time for rest and integration. This class is appropriate for beginners and for people with injuries.

Gentle Kripalu Yoga Flow		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	Welcome to Gentle Kripalu Yoga
	Theme/Context	Compassion/Trust/Acceptance
	Opening Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5
	Pranayama	Dirgha Ujjayi
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Sun Breaths (7.15)
		Extended Seated Side Stretch (7.11)
		Hip Openers with Twist (7.19)
		Table Cat and Dog (7.21)
		Table Cat and Dog Circles (7.22)
		Cross-Crawl (7.30)
		Hips Side-to-Side (7.31)
		Puppy pose (7.23)
		Child's Pose (7.58)
		Hamstring Stretch (7.34)
		Runner's Lunge (7.35)
		Table Twist (7.36)
		Arm Circles (7.27)
	Asana	Tadasana (8.77)
		Prasarita Padottanasana (8.125)
		Yoga Mudra (8.133)
		Navasana (8.7)
		Bhujangasana (8.23)
		Setu Bandhasana (8.15)
Integration	Relaxation	Shavasana (12.7)
	Closing Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5

Intermediate

Intermediate Kripalu Yoga aims to balance strengthening and stretching. The encouragement throughout practice is to find your own balance of effort and ease. The class could include Kapalabhati and Sun Salutations. You'll strengthen the body by sustaining postures for several breaths, develop mental focus (chitta), and cultivate sensitivity to your body's energy (prana). This class is for those who have a fundamental understanding of yoga practice, and for those who are new to yoga but are fit and strong.

Intermediate Kripalu Yoga Sample Flow A		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	Welcome to Intermediate Kripalu Yoga
	Theme/Context	Gratitude
	Opening Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5
	Pranayama	Dirgha
		Ujjayi
		Kapalabhati
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Modified Sun Salutation (7.55)
		Sun Salutation (2 times) (7.55)
	Asana	Utkatasana (8.117)
		Vrikshasana (8.141)
		Virabhadrasana (8.165)
		Parshva Virabhadrasana (both sides) (8.109)
		Prasarita Padottanasana (8.125)
		(lower to table)
		Adho Mukha Shvanasana (8.31)
		Kapotasana (both sides) (8.85)
		Plank (7.60)
		Garbhasana (7.58)
		(Roll over)
		Setu Bhandasana (8.15)
		Janu Shirshasana (8.61)
		Matsyendrasana (8.101)
Integration	Pranayama	Nadi Shodhana
	Relaxation	Contract and Release with Affirmations
	Closing Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5

Intermediate Kripalu Yoga Flow Sample Flow B		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	Welcome to Intermediate Kripalu Yoga
	Theme/Context	Ahimsa
	Opening Centering	Body awareness
	Pranayama	Dirgha
		Ujjayi
		Kapalabhati
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Upper-Back Cat and Dog (7.8)
		Seated Twist (7.13)
		Side Stretch Arm Circles (7.14)
		Table Cat and Dog Circles (7.22)
		Runner's Lunge/Lunge Arm Circles (7.35/7.24)
		(step up to standing)
	Asana	Tadasana (8.77)
		Ardha Chandrasana (8.45)
		Garudasana (8.39)
		Trikonasana (8.149)
		Parshva Virabhadrasana (8.109)
		Utkatasana (8.117)
		(to forward fold)
		Adho Mukha Shvanasana (8.31)
		Plank (7.60)
		Yoga Mudra (8.133)
		Bhujangasana (8.23)
		(roll onto back)
		Setu Bhandasana (8.15)
		Ardha Sarvangasana (8.53)
		Supta Matsyendrasana (8.69)
		(rock to seated)
		Urdhva Navasana (8.157)
		Paschimottanasana (8.93)
Integration	Pranayama	Dirgha/Ujjayi
	Relaxation	Kosha scan and visualization
	Closing Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5

Intermediate Kripalu Yoga Flow Sample Flow C		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	Welcome to Intermediate Kripalu Yoga
	Theme/Context	Sattva
	Opening Centering	Body awareness
	Pranayama	Dirgha
		Ujjayi
		Kapalabhati
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Head Lift and Tilt (7.6)
		Extended Seated Side Stretch (7.11)
		Table Cat and Dog Circles (7.22)
		Table Twist (7.26)
		Cross-Crawl (7.30)
	Asana	Urdhva Navasana (8.157)
		Setu Bhandasana (8.15)
		Ardha Sarvangasana (8.53)
		(knees to chest, roll over)
		Navasana (8.7)
		Bhujangasana (8.23)
		Child's Pose (7.58)
		(turn around)
		Adho Mukha Shvanasana (8.31)
		Virabhadrasana/ Trikonasana (both sides) (8.165/8.149)
		Plank (7.60)
		(step up to standing)
		Garudasana (8.39)
		Prasarita Padottanasana (8.125)
		(sit by back foot)
		Urdhva Navasana (8.157)
		Janu Shirshasana (8.61)
		Matsyendrasana (8.101)
		Paschimottanasana (8.93)
Integration	Pranayama	Nadi Shodhana
	Relaxation	Vedanta-based relaxation
	Closing Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5

Intermediate Kripalu Yoga Flow Sample Flow D		
Safety	Welcome/Introduction	Welcome to Intermediate Kripalu Yoga
	Theme/Context	Svadhyaya
	Opening Centering	Body awareness
	Pranayama	Dirgha
		Ujjayi
		Kapalabhati
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups	Head Side-to-Side (7.7)
		Torso Circles (7.17)
		Dolphin Dives (7.10)
		Hip Openers (7.18)
		Table Cat and Dog (7.21)
		Thread the Needle (7.25)
		Hip Circles (7.32)
		Puppy pose (7.23)
	Asana	Navasana (8.7)
		Child's Pose (7.58)
		Plank (7.60)
		Adho Mukha Shvanasana (8.31)
		Parshva Virabhadrasana (8.109)
		Trikonasana (8.149)
		(both sides, step up)
		Tadasana (8.77)
		Ardha Chandrasana (8.45)
		Garudasana (8.39)
		(Hands on thighs lower to mat)
		Yoga Mudra (8.133)
		Kapotasana (8.85)
		Urdhva Navasana (8.157)
		Matsyendrasana (8.101)
		Setu Bhandasana (8.15)
Integration	Pranayama	Dirgha/Ujjayi
	Relaxation	Body Scan
	Closing Centering	Choose from elements listed on page 11.5

Teacher Development

Teaching Clinics

Teaching clinics present the necessary information to teach asana and pranayama skillfully. These sessions offer exploration, instruction, discussion, and experimentation of the core postures and pranayamas, as well as the meditation and relaxation techniques taught in KSY200. In each clinic students will be empowered to adapt these techniques to meet their needs, and help one another to do the same. Each teaching clinic includes:

- Introduction of the technique
- Ways to adapt the practice
- Techniques to facilitate learning
- Practice-teach time with partners

Learning Packets

Each week of the training includes a lesson review assignment that will be discussed before each practice-teach. The lesson reviews reinforce and integrate material covered in the training by cueing students to 1) repeat key terms and 2) explain their understanding of the ideas. The review questions are drawn from lectures, teaching clinics, and anatomy and physiology sessions, as well as reading assignments.

Practice-Teach

The practice-teach sessions offer a progression of challenges that allow the students to practice and the staff to access the students' development. Practice-teaches are an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding and integration of the Kripalu Yoga teaching methods and tools taught in this program; they are a valuable lesson to foster growth at key points in the training. These sessions provide an opportunity to explore teaching and promote development by focusing on these areas:

- Cultivating the practice of nonjudgmental awareness
- Integrating material learned thus far
- Discovering your strengths and finding your own distinctive gifts
- Observing challenges, edges, and fears
- Practicing self-mentoring
- One-on-one mentoring with an experienced Kripalu Yoga teacher
- Discovering your next steps
- Experimenting with the Kripalu Yoga Tool Bag and teaching in new ways.

The practice-teach sessions are meant to be a productive learning experience. Have fun with your classes and use this time to find your personal expression as a teacher.

Conscious Communication

Conscious communication is an important tool for developing sensitivity to valid thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Conscious communication provides an opportunity for each individual to be sensitive, respectful, and skillfully nonreactive to their own feelings and the experience and others. This style of engagement creates an environment of responsibility, empathy, intimacy, and deep learning to best meet and honor what is truly needed in the given situation. Kripalu Yoga teachers have the ability to be aware of their own experience, witness another's, and learn from both.

Learning Journal

The KSY education process is rooted not only in memorization, comprehension, and recitation of terms and ideas, but it also values each individual's unique development through the content presented. Learning journals are meant to reinforce key principles throughout the training and help students identify their own narrative, intentions, learning process, insights, challenges, and ways of self-care. Students are asked to assess their own growth as both a practitioner and teacher, as well as observe and evaluate other teachers.

Extended Certification Process

The Kripalu School of Yoga is committed to serving a diverse range of individuals. Along with unique learning styles, we recognize that each person integrates information at their own pace. The Extended Certification Process may be offered to individuals who need more time to practice, digest, and demonstrate their understanding of the 200-hour curriculum. If at the end of the training a student has not demonstrated the required elements of teaching Kripalu Yoga as determined by the Director of KS, they may be given an extension of three additional months to integrate. This process includes:

- Identification of necessary areas of growth
- Personal practice assignments to support that growth
- Practice-teach assignments to demonstrate skill in delivering the Kripalu Approach

The KSY faculty will make every effort to communicate any observations or concerns that may affect certification process. The option of an extended certification is made available to students at the sole discretion of the Director of KS. If at the end of the extended certification process a student has not met the KSY200 program requirements, they will need to repeat the training.

Yoga is a vast tradition that includes many different philosophies, intentions, and techniques. This 200-hour teacher training program is meant to plant the seed of a lifelong exploration and practice, both on and off the mat. You don't need to worry about having all the answers, or master the art of teaching. Simply be present to what each moment is offering and your own authentic learning will naturally happen. Use this time to establish self-observation, collaboration with community, skillful actions, self-care, and a willingness to ride the waves of life. You will probably notice that as your life moves and changes, so does your interest and understanding of yoga. Trust that wherever you are right now is the perfect place to be, and that there is always more to come.

- 300-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training
- 1000-Hour Yoga Teacher Training
- Kripalu School of Ayurveda
- Kripalu School of Integrative Yoga Therapy

Part Two

Self-Care

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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The Kripalu Approach

Dear student,

Welcome to the Kripalu Schools!

Studying at Kripalu is a unique experience that immerses you in the practices of yoga and Ayurveda. At Kripalu, all of your basic needs are taken care of—we provide housing, three freshly prepared meals per day, and a wonderful environment in which to learn and grow. The only thing left for you to do is to take care of your personal needs so that you can thrive as you embark upon your training.

We invite you to commit to a personal self-care routine that helps you build a foundation for health, moves you toward balance, and aligns you with the rhythms of nature. The practices on the following pages also support digestion and elimination, restful sleep, and a relaxed and receptive mind—especially helpful as you integrate into a life at Kripalu in which you are exposed to all sorts of new experiences, people, food, and energies.

Sincerely,



Yoganand Michael Carroll

Dean, Kripalu School of Yoga

Receiving Care While You Are Here

If you are experiencing a digestive or sleep imbalance while at Kripalu, consider making an appointment for an Ayurvedic consultation, which may help identify some additional self-care options to assist you.

For recommended resources, please see final chapter.

**For more information on advanced studies
in self-care, please contact:**

Kripalu School of Ayurveda

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health

P.O. Box 309

Stockbridge, Massachusetts 01262

phone: 800.848.8702

e-mail: kripaluschools@kripalu.org

The Kripalu Approach Ayurveda: Aligning with Natural Rhythms

Ayurveda originated in India thousands of years ago and is the oldest continuously practiced health-care system in the world. Drawn from an understanding of nature's rhythms and laws, Ayurveda is built around the five elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth. It is understood in Ayurveda that humans, as natural beings, are governed by the same rules and laws as all other natural beings. The goal of Ayurveda is to teach people how to attain optimal health through a deeper understanding of themselves and their particular nature in relationship to the world around them.



Sleeping at Kripalu

Kripalu offers a number of room options. Some will find Kripalu to be a place conducive to rest, while others may find it challenging to be away from their own bed and other home comforts.

- If you know you are going to be sharing a room, bring along earplugs and an eye cover. These items are especially helpful in our dormitory housing.
- Before bedtime, massage a small amount of sesame oil into the crown of your head and the soles of your feet, to help ground nervous energy and promote sleep.
- Keep a journal—take some time to write down your thoughts and feelings each day to release any excess mental chatter.
- Bring a good book to read at night—something to take your mind off your studies.

Beneficial Daily Routines

- Don't hurry through your morning routines.
- Drink a full glass of room temperature or warm water (with lemon if you wish) upon rising.
- Take time and sit on the toilet, even if you don't yet have the urge. Clean your face, mouth, and nasal passages, and gargle with salt water.
- Scrape your tongue. Rinse your mouth and oil your ears with sesame oil.
- Meditate for 20 minutes.
- Take a walk or run for 30 minutes, three to four times per week.
- Have a nutritious breakfast according to your body type.
- Have a relaxing and complete meal at lunchtime.
- Relax for 30 minutes after lunch.
- Dinner should not be a heavy meal.

General Food Practices

Kripalu serves three meals per day in the Dining Hall. The food is freshly prepared, mostly organic, and full of variety. We offer a salad bar; a sandwich station; a Buddha Bar, with a simple vegan menu of legumes, rice, and vegetables; and our main line, featuring a selection of omnivorous options. Although the variety is wonderful, too much in a meal may cause a digestive imbalance. We encourage you to take a walk around the Dining Hall to see what is being offered before you begin serving yourself. Consider choosing a simple combination of foods that will be easy to digest.

General Tips for Healthy Digestion

- Give thanks.
- Sip warm water and/or ginger tea. Avoid ice-cold food or drink.
- Enjoy three meals a day without snacking in between.
- Choose only three or four different items at each meal. Avoid eating raw and cooked foods together.
- Leave one-third of your stomach empty, using your hands as your guide. Cupping both hands together is a good indicator to the amount of food to ingest and an equal amount of liquid to drink, leaving an equal amount empty. Eat only when you feel hungry. Allow a few hours between meals and bedtime.
- Eat quietly and focus on your food without distraction. Take advantage of the silent dining room option. Eat at a moderate pace. Never eat and run, and allow a few minutes after eating to relax or take a gentle walk.

Tips If Your Digestion Starts to Go Awry

- Eat simple dhal and rice with chutney and ghee (clarified butter).
- For constipation, add ghee, olive oil, and/or ground flaxseeds to your food.
- For excessive gas and bloating, avoid raw vegetables, kale, and large legumes such as chickpeas, kidney beans, pinto beans, and black beans; favor small beans, root vegetables, and ginger tea.

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- For loose stools, avoid yogurt, apple cider, citrus, peppers, spicy foods, sour foods, and oily foods; favor cooked greens, legumes, cilantro, apples, and mint teas.
- To heat up sluggish digestion, avoid dairy, wheat, and meat; favor steamed vegetables, legumes, barley, quinoa, ginger tea, ginger spice, cumin, coriander, fennel, cinnamon, turmeric, and cardamom.

Tips for Digestion and Nutrition

Include the six tastes at every meal

- In Ayurveda, foods are classified into six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. Ayurvedic practitioners recommend that you include all of these six tastes at every meal. Each taste has a balancing ability, and including some of each minimizes cravings and balances the appetite and digestion. The general North American diet tends to have too much of the sweet, sour, and salty, and not enough of the bitter, pungent, and astringent tastes.

Opt for whole, fresh, in-season, local foods

- From the Ayurvedic perspective, the most healthful diet consists of whole foods.

Include spices and herbs in your daily diet

- Spices and herbs are particularly revered in Ayurveda for their ability to enhance digestion and assimilation and cleanse toxins from the body, and their ability to transport the healing and nutritive value of other components of the diet to the cells.
- Ayurveda recommends spices and herbs to stimulate digestion before, during, and after a meal: ginger tea, ginger spice, cumin, coriander, fennel, cinnamon, turmeric, and cardamom.

Cleansing the Sense Organs

Our bodies naturally work on clearing excess toxins out of our system during the night. These toxins are deposited in our colon and skin, which is why it is important to take care of personal hygiene first thing in the morning. The following routines are helpful in clearing these excesses and preventing toxic buildup. Cleanse as follows:

- Mouth: Purchase a tongue scraper and scrape the tongue from back to front in long, smooth strokes; then floss and brush teeth.
- Eyes: Gently splash some fresh, cool water into the eyes. This can also be done with a few drops of rosewater added to a bottle.

- **Nose:** Purchase a neti pot and use it with salt water. Following the neti, add a few drops of nasya oil (medicated oil) or sesame oil into each nostril.
 - > **Neti:** Fill the neti pot with warm water and add a pinch of sea salt. Bring to sink. Tilt your head over the sink and place the spout into one nostril, breathing out of your mouth; allow the water to flow into the nostril and out the other nostril. Repeat on the other side. Blow your nose if necessary and gargle with a little salt water.
 - > **Nasya:** You can use a formulated nasya oil, ghee, or sesame oil. Apply by placing the oil on your pinky finger and inserting it into one nostril while closing the other nostril. You can also use a dropper or a squirt bottle. Sniff the oil until you feel it drip into the back of your throat. Repeat on the other side.
- **Ears:** Gently massage a drop or two of sesame oil into each ear. Do not penetrate deeply.
- **Skin:** Shower, then perform abhyanga, a self-applied, full-body oil massage. In the winter, perform abhyanga with warm organic sesame oil (not toasted). In the summer, use coconut oil.
 - > If you like, you can heat your oil in some warm water in the sink; otherwise, just apply at room temperature.
 - > Slowly apply the oil using long, slow strokes on each body part. Start with the extremities and move inward, applying to the core last. At each of the joints, rub the oil in slow circles.
 - > It may take up to 20 minutes to massage the entire body, so take what time you have available and enjoy the process.
 - > After the massage, you may want to step into the sauna for a few minutes to open your pores and assist the absorption of the oil into your skin.
 - > Follow with a short warm shower. There is no need to use excessive amounts of soap to wash off the oil; simply allow it to penetrate into the skin. This practice nourishes the nervous and lymphatic systems, as well as moisturizes the skin and settles energy.

Please do not enter the Kripalu whirlpool with any oil on your body.

This will damage our whirlpool system.

Notes

The Kripalu Approach Conscious Communication



In attempt to understand and engage with the vast, changing, and often challenging dynamics of life, it is important to explore how language choices can be critical to leading a fulfilled and happy life. The words we use to describe our experiences greatly impact our perspective and meaning-making processes. For instance, what may be explained as a crisis or insurmountable obstacle by one person might be an opportunity or hidden blessing to another. The way experiences are framed is often as important to the impact as are the events themselves. The more conscious, truthful, and clear language is, the greater the ability to engage in life in a meaningful and sincere way. By becoming aware of the language we use to express ourselves, we can learn self-responsibility and accountability for choices, perspective, and actions. Such awareness of language opens avenues to engage with self and others in an authentic, honest, and openhearted manner.

This chapter will introduce several key practices of conscious communication that will help foster healthy and nourishing patterns of relating. The first practice, “I” statements, is critical to owning statements and feelings. Looking for “I” statements behind another’s words can also provide insight into how to be a more empathic listener. The second practice, co-listening, provides a simple yet powerful tool for expressing yourself fully and holding space for another to express themselves fully without the interjection of another’s perceptions, biases, or judgments. The third practice, reflective listening, offers a chance to practice engaged listening and conscious mirroring. The final step, empowering feedback, cultivates the capacity to call upon your own critical thinking and experiences to offer support and insight to another.

Step One

“I” statement to awaken awareness and creative force

The first step in conscious communication is becoming aware of your experience. The clearer you are about your own thoughts, feelings, and actions, the easier it is to express them to another person. As multi-dimensional beings, there is potential to experience life through different layers. You may notice physical sensations (anamaya kosha), energetic experiences (pranamaya kosha), thoughts and emotions (manomaya kosha), intuitions (vijnanamaya kosha), and moments of interconnection (anandamaya kosha). Without judging good or bad, right or wrong, take time to explore the koshas, and see what is there.

Once you are aware of your experience, communicate using “I” statements. Speaking from personal experience is self-empowering, because you take responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. By using “I” statements, you also avoid making assumptions about others that may or may not be true. Rather than saying “you feel better after doing yoga,” try saying “I feel better after doing yoga.” Rather than saying “everyone loves Shavasana,” try saying “I love Shavasana.” Notice if you feel a difference when you use “I” statement, instead of generalizations.

Getting lost in togetherness

Using “we” rather than “I” can misplace responsibility and project your feelings or experience onto someone or something else:

- “We should fix dinner” versus “I’m hungry. I’m ready to start fixing dinner.”
- “People are always awkward at parties” versus “I feel awkward making small talk.”
- “It’s not easy to get a reservation there” versus “I’ve had difficulty getting a reservation there in the past.”

Externalizing your feelings

We often use “the,” “this,” “you,” “your,” and “that” when we really mean “my,” “mine,” or “I.” They can be statements we use to avoid our feelings.

- “This is a stupid assignment” versus “I feel uncomfortable doing this.”
- “That’s not a good idea” versus “I’m feeling nervous about you taking that risk.”

Questions can be “I” statements in disguise.

- “Don’t you think it’s hot in here?” versus “It feels hot in here to me.”
- “Where were you?” versus “I feel hurt that you didn’t ask me to join you.”

They include “I guess,” “I suppose,” “perhaps,” “maybe,” “kind of,” “probably,” “only,” “just,” and “sort of.”

- ## Nullifiers are ways of avoiding or escaping what is.

- “I should eat more mindfully” versus “I could eat more mindfully.”
- “I have to do this because...” versus “I choose to do this because...”

Step Two

Co-Listening

On co-listening, one partner listens while the other partner speaks. During this process, the listener gives full attention to the speaker, and practices non-judgmental awareness (witness consciousness), without responding in any way. It's natural for the listener to be aware of other sensory information or internal commentary. But, when the listener notices that their attention is drifting, they simply guide it back to their partner's voice. The speaker's role is to simply verbalize what they are aware of, without planning or needing to censor. The speaker notices what it's like to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions, without being judged, analyzed, or fixed. The listener notices what it's like to listen, without commenting, affirming, or fixing. When the first speaker is complete, the partners switch roles.

Notes

Step Three

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening is similar to co-listening, as it begins with one partner speaking and the other partner listening. For this practice, once the speaker is finished sharing, the listener reflects what they heard their partner say, without interpreting or analyzing. If the speaker feels like anything they expressed was misheard or not acknowledged, they have an opportunity to clarify. When this process is complete, the roles are reversed.

Speaker

"It is difficult for me to wake up so early each morning for sadhana. I am much more of a night person and it usually takes me time to get going in the morning. When I have to wake up before I want to, I feel sensitive and irritable. Even though I wouldn't choose to wake up so early for yoga, I usually feel calmer and centered by the end of practice. Thank you for listening."

Listener/Reflector

"What I heard you say is that it is difficult for you to wake up early for sadhana each morning. You are more of a night person, and it takes you time to get going in the morning. When you have to wake up earlier than you want to, you feel sensitive and irritable. Even though you wouldn't choose to wake up so early for yoga, you feel calmer and centered by the end of practice. Did I hear you correctly?"

Notes

Step Four:

Empowering Feedback

The next step of conscious communication is empowering feedback. When you engage with others, as in posture clinics or practice-teaches, there is the potential to learn and develop valuable skills. You can see and reflect to your peers what they might not be aware of themselves, and vice versa. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, it is important to be skillful in offering and receiving feedback so that you are self-empowered, can empower others, and continue to learn and grow creatively. To ensure that what you are offering has the best chance of being prepared, considered, and integrated, consider the following elements.

Intention of Learning and Support

When you offer feedback, keep in mind that the intention is to learn about your own unique needs, and communicate them to the other person in a way that they can understand and integrate. Feedback is not meant to criticize or make anyone “wrong”; it is meant to inform. Each person receiving the feedback has a free choice to make an adjustment, or not. When you speak with an intention of cooperation and learning, feedback becomes empowering, rather than judgmental.

Speak from Personal Experience / “I” Statements

It is important to understand that people experience things differently. When offering and receiving feedback, do not assume that others had the same experience you had. When each person takes responsibility for their unique experiences, particular needs, and preferences, the feedback is generally more well received. Speak about your own thoughts, feelings, and actions using “I” statements. Inform the other person of your experience and what you appreciated or needed. Communicating this way informs others about your experience, and supports their ability to empower others in the future.

Use Simple and Observable Examples

To keep the feedback process simple and clear, use observable examples that you can speak about directly. Feedback may be an affirmation or appreciation, or something that you needed differently from the teacher. The more specific your example is, the easier it is to understand. When offering feedback, reflect a specific example of something the person said or did, what your experience was, and if needed, an action they could have done to support you. This will help you integrate your own experience, and give the listener concrete information to empower their teaching.

Three Steps to Offer Empowering Feedback

1. When you (observable behavior)...
2. I experienced (feeling, thought, emotion, intuitions)...
3. I appreciated /needed...

Example of offering an appreciation:

- “When you taught Tadasana, you gave simple and detailed instructions.”
- “I experienced a feeling of safety and strength in my body.”
- “I appreciated your use of language to creatively describe the sequence.”

Example offering a potential improvement point (PIP):

- “When you taught Triangle pose, I was facing the side of the mat, and I couldn’t see you.”
- “I felt uncertain whether I was doing the pose correctly or not.”
- “I needed you to teach the pose from a place where I could hear and see you.”

Notes

Yoga Philosophy

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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- 3.36 The Sadhana of Swami Kripalu
- 3.40 Kripalu Yoga



The sacred texts of yoga provide principles that form a foundation for acquiring direct spiritual knowledge. Your first step as a student should be to learn those principles along with the core practices of yoga. By gaining this indirect knowledge, you will develop a strong conviction in the approach of yoga. Only then can your practice deepen to remove the impurities, distractions, and veils of illusion necessary to attain direct experiential knowledge.

—Swami Kripalu

Yoga is one of the world's oldest wisdom traditions. All wisdom traditions are composed of three building blocks: a philosophical view, a practice, and the direct experience of the practitioner.

A view is a particular way of seeing yourself and the world around you. A good view provides you with a solid intellectual framework to inform your practice and a clear map to guide your journey toward truth. A good view also has conceptual models designed to help you navigate obstacles.

Practice gives you a method to inquire deeply into the nature of reality and test the validity of the view. An effective practice activates the life force, heightens self-awareness, awakens intuition, and grants access to deeper states of consciousness.

Direct experience is the firsthand knowledge that comes from the unmediated contact with reality that is fostered through focused practice. A central tenet of the Kripalu Approach is that philosophical knowledge only becomes wisdom through lived experience.

The view of a wisdom tradition is qualitatively different than a religion, philosophy, ideology, or system of metaphysics because it's not adopted as ultimate truth. A wisdom tradition puts forth a view as a working hypothesis to be validated or discarded in the experimental inquiry of practice. It is understood from the beginning that direct experience will eventually shatter the view and replace it with revealed truth. Approached as a wisdom path, yoga emerges as a way to systematically refine knowledge, as opposed to promoting a fixed mindset.

Although they all point to a universal truth, wisdom traditions differ. As a teacher in training, it is important for you to understand the views of the yoga tradition, which developed over thousands of years. The traditional term for view was *darshana*, or revelatory insight granting direct knowledge of the ultimate principle underlying creation. This term speaks to the origin of the various schools of yoga, each of which was founded by a particular sage whose insight and direct spiritual knowledge led to a coherent view and set of practices to realize truth. As a school develops over time, its view evolves and grows more nuanced, based on the insights and discoveries of practitioners and teachers.

Yoga has always been a search for truth. India's sages were pragmatic and defined truth as that which liberates from ignorance and suffering. They reasoned, "If the truth can be found, then we can act in alignment with truth to live more happily and avoid unnecessary pain." Two different levels of truth were recognized, social truth and ultimate truth. Social truth includes all the attitudes, understandings, and moral principles that support healthy interpersonal relationships and create a safe, just, predictable, and humane society. Sometimes this level of social truth is called *dharma*. A related term you might hear is *svadharma*, which refers to an individual's unique expression of relative truth in a chosen lifestyle, value system, and way of contributing to society.

Ultimate truth is something different and deeper. India's sages believed there was an inner unity and truth underlying the apparent diversity of the external world. All the visible forces of nature were seen to have their source in this invisible unity, and the sages speculated that a person gaining access to this inner truth would discover an inexhaustible reservoir of power and intelligence lying at the heart of creation. Yoga philosophy records the attempts of these sages to conceptualize the ultimate truth in various ways and develop practices to experience it directly. Kripalu Yoga has always remained true to the spirit of this quest for truth. All of its practices are designed to help you establish a direct connection to your energetic source and use it to live a more empowered, authentic, open-hearted, creative, and conscious life.

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to the primary schools of yoga and their philosophical views. It is divided into the following seven subsections:

1. Vedanta
2. Sankhya
3. Classical Yoga
4. Tantra
5. Hatha Yoga
6. The Sadhana of Swami Kripalu
7. Kripalu Yoga

Notes

Vedanta

Vedanta Darshana is considered the highest expression of the Vedic scriptures because it focuses on the ultimate truth. A student can attain the light of this truth only by assimilating its essence, which is locked in seed form within Vedanta's esoteric terms. The final truth of Vedanta can only be gained through the practice of yoga because it involves the realization of the soul. This requires more than mere thinking.

—Swami Kripalu

The roots of yoga predate written history, and relatively little is known about its origins. Scholars agree that yoga practices arose as part of the religious expression of the peoples living on the subcontinent of India. The early Indian sages took great care in preserving, developing, and orally transmitting their teaching and practices, as they were considered sacred knowledge.

The first written texts that refer to yogic themes and practices are the four Vedas, which have the distinction of being the oldest books in humankind's library. Consisting of prayers, mantras, rituals, and other religious lore, the Vedas were composed around 3000 BCE. Both yoga and its sister science, Ayurveda, find their source in the Vedas and are at times referred to as Vedic wisdom. Unfortunately, the Vedas themselves are so old and cryptic that their meaning has been almost entirely lost.

The first teachings that remain relevant to today's yoga practitioners are collectively referred to as Vedanta. The word "Vedanta" means "the end of the Vedas." Along with linking these later teachings back to the Vedas, this term is meant to convey the notion that Vedanta distills the voluminous Vedas down to their essence.

Vedanta is not based on any single text but rather a collection of more than 100 different works called the Upanishads, written over a 500-year period starting about 800 BCE. The word "Upanishad" means "to sit at the feet of a master," and these texts preserve the spiritual dialogues between sages living as forest hermits and their close disciples. Where the authors of the Vedas sought illumination through performing religious rites such as fire sacrifices, it was the Upanishadic sages who first directed their attention inward to realize the truth within their own being through the systematic practice of contemplation, meditation, and other yogic techniques.

Over several centuries, these sages developed the view of Vedanta as summarized in the following terms and doctrines:

Brahman (the Absolute) is the term used by the Upanishadic sages to describe the inner unity and ultimate truth, which they saw as eternal and imperishable. Brahman is unmanifest and

invisible, the primal source and unchanging substratum of the manifest and visible universe, which is constantly changing and passing away. Vedanta was one of the first philosophical systems to see matter as arising from an undifferentiated spiritual essence. Although it exists everywhere, Brahman is impossible for humans to grasp with the mind because it is entirely devoid of all qualities and attributes. To realize Brahman, yogic techniques must be employed to go beyond the limited reach of the mind and the senses.

Atman (the Self) is the true individual, which is not the personality or ego, but rather one's innermost being that lies beneath the ever-changing world of the mind, body, and senses. Vedanta considers Atman the true self, which is seen as identical and one with Brahman. The nature of Brahman and Atman is described by the compound word sat-chit-ananda. "Sat" means "eternal existence"; "chit" is "pure consciousness"; and "ananda" is "infinite bliss." The path to realize Brahman is to discover it as the spiritual source and true nature of your own being—the Atman.

Maya (illusory power) is the external world perceived by the mind and the senses, which is transient and only appears to exist for a time. The sages renounced maya as illusion because they were searching for an ultimate reality that was always and forever true. Contemplating deeply, the sages saw that maya has no separate existence apart from Brahman, whose projection of the material universe is like sunlight that can't be separated from its source, the sun. When seen as a part of Brahman, maya is simply a facet of the ultimate truth. Its deluding power arises in the individual mind, which perceives external objects through the lens of the senses and considers them lasting and real. A core assertion of Vedanta is that external objects are not real but rather illusory projections cast on the screen of the mind.

The veiling power of maya is sometimes referred to by another term, avidya (ignorance), the primal nescience that keeps us unaware of Atman/Brahman and looking outside of ourselves through the senses for fulfillment. Where Brahman is a formless singularity, maya takes on a dazzling multiplicity of names and forms, causing us to lose touch with our true nature as Atman and satchitananda. Vedanta sees the root cause of human suffering as our willingness to accept maya as real, which leads us to wrongly identify with the body, mind, and ego. Seeing ourselves as small and separate, we seek fulfillment through gratifying our senses versus discovering our true identity as Atman.

Taken together, these terms expound the principle of advaita (nondualism), which is foundational to the view of Vedanta. The sages believed that Brahman could never be known through the dualistic mind, but as the essence of our being, it could be realized through direct identification with Atman. They refined this central message into two teaching maxims. The first was a clear statement that you are none other than Atman/Brahman, Tat tvam asi, which literally means "that thou art." The second was a affirmation to be used in meditation, Aham Brahmasi, which means "I am the Brahman."

The primary tools of Vedantic meditation are vairagya, the renunciation of desire, and viveka, the power to discriminate between what we truly are (Atman) and what we merely appear to be (maya). Meditation proceeds along a path of negation called neti neti (not this, not this) and the process of systematically rejecting all false identifications. What occurs upon the realization of Brahman is conveyed through the teaching metaphor of a rope being mistaken for a venomous snake. In the moment when maya's veil of illusion is drawn aside and reality is seen directly, its nondual nature is apparent. Any sense of separation and fear of the outer world falls away when the soul realizes its true identity as the eternal Atman/Brahman.

Vedanta gained prominence throughout India during the time of the Upanishads, but its influence waned with the growing popularity of Buddhism. An important figure in the revival of Vedantic thought and practice was Shankara, an eighth-century monk who travelled the subcontinent winning its inhabitants back to nondualism through his discourses and public debates. Historians credit Shankara with consolidating the ideas found in the Upanishads into a coherent philosophy and calling it Vedanta. His most famous work is Viveka Chudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination).

Although different names are used for the ultimate truth, the quest for Brahman remains a constant of yoga philosophy. What evolves over time to account for dynamic change or the force at work within Brahman, a parallel to the development in later philosophies of the concepts of gunas and prana, is the earlier notion of maya. Vedanta remains a vital wisdom tradition, with most of its Western practice schools drawing inspiration from Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), a modern sage who popularized Vedanta through the inquiries “Who am I?” and “What is my True Self?”

Notes

Practice and Experience

That is full, this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.

• *Invocation to Svetasvatara Upanishad*

Ashtavakra Gita

Chapter 7: Five verses on the nature of the Self

1. In me, the boundless ocean, the boat of the universe, moves here and there, driven by the wind of its own inherent nature. I am not affected.
2. In me, the limitless ocean, let the wave of the world rise or vanish of itself. I neither rise nor fall.
3. In me, the boundless ocean is the imagination of the universe. I am quite tranquil and formless. It is in this knowledge that I abide.
4. The Self is not limited to any object, nor does any object contain the Self, which is infinite and stainless. Thus it is free from attachment and desire and ever-tranquil. It is in this knowledge that I abide.
5. I am consciousness itself. The world is a juggler's show. So how and where can there be any thought of rejection or acceptance in me?

Sample Vedanta-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Ujjayi pranayama for several minutes. Practice this until your mind becomes calm.
- Release the pranayama and simply watch your body as it breathes. Observe the waves of breath flow in and out, and allow the image of ocean waves to form in your mind. Let your thoughts, feelings, and the sensations in your body float on the ocean waves.
- Stay with the experience as best as you can without struggle. If any disturbance arises, allow it ebb and flow.
- Now let your attention shift from the waves to the still ocean beneath the waves. Feel yourself sinking into that dark water until the waves are high above on the surface. Feel the water as a presence, an unchanging presence. It can take any form, become a wave, and then dissolve back into ocean water, timeless and eternal.

- Relax so fully that you sink to a place so deep, no wave can disturb you. Drift down to the very foundation of your being and experience the substratum beneath all thoughts and feelings, beneath all distinctions of self or other, mine or yours. Receive this as your true self.
- Begin to deepen your breath. Shift your attention from the ocean to the waves, and feel the waves of breath pulling you back to the surface. See thoughts and feeling beginning to emerge and float on those waves.
- With your next inhale, slowly raise your hands to your face and press your palms lightly against your cheeks and your fingertips against your forehead. Massage your face with your hands. Feel the passing experience, the flow of movement and sensation, and as you feel it, remember the depths of the ocean. See if, for a few moments, you can experience both.
- Lower your hands to your lap. Take five deep breaths, and slowly open your eyes. Let your body stretch and move in any way that helps you to come back to the surface.

Sample Vedanta-inspired relaxation script

- Guide your body into Shavasana and adjust your posture in any way you need to be comfortable. For a few moments, feel your body lying on the floor beneath you. Then bring all your attention to the space around you and the floor. Feel them containing, holding your body in safety and ease.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Begin with Dirgha, and then layer on Ujjayi. For a few cycles of breath, focus all of your attention on your breath. Feel it fully.
- Shift your attention and feel your body around your breath, contracting and expanding to give shape to the breath. Then release the pranayama and let your breath be completely free. Let it dissolve into your body.
- Let your attention drift in the space of your body. Every time you find a sensation, feeling or thought, let your attention go to it. For a moment, feel it fully, then take your attention to the space around that sensation, feeling or thought. Let the space be as real or more real than the things it contains.
- Again and again, experience sensation and the space around it. Affirm every thought, feeling, and sensation surrounded by space. Let yourself become the space. Let thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise within you and fade back into the space. Feel yourself formless, timeless.
- Find your breath and feel it moving in the space of your belly. The space of the belly is always the same—the breath rises and falls. The rising and falling breath generates waves of sensation, feelings, and thoughts. Our whole life arises from the waves of breath flowing in the belly.

- Deepen your breath now. The waves become bigger, and the space fades into the background.
- Take a deep breath and exhale a sigh. Slowly roll your head from side to side. Begin to wiggle your toes and fingers. Let your body stretch and move in any way that helps you to come back.
- Slowly roll to one side and come up to a seated position. Sit quietly for a few breaths before you open your eyes. As you sit, feel your body as both an object in space and the space around you. Take that expanded awareness with you as you transition to your next activity.

Notes

Sankhya

Sankhya darshan has been accepted as an integral part of yoga philosophy. Sankhya views the entire universe as born from two primary elements: purusha and prakriti. Purusha is the eternal and unchanging source. Prakriti is nature, which is constantly changing because of the activity of the three gunas. When pleasure and attraction or pain and aversion arise in the mind of a Sankhya yogi, he believes with a strong conviction, “I am the inactive and liberated purusha. The actions of this body and mind are not my actions, they are owned by nature. I am merely the witness of these actions.” By overcoming mental disturbances in this way, the Sankhya yogi activates discriminative intelligence (buddhi) and attains steadiness of mind. Without such steadiness, depth yoga practice is impossible.

—Swami Kripalu

Sankhya is one of the oldest of India’s spiritual philosophies. Like Vedanta, it arose from the Upanishadic sages’ search for truth. Sankhya is especially important for yoga teachers to understand because it provides the philosophical framework for both yoga and Ayurveda. Sankhya philosophy is founded on the idea that the universe comes into form through an orderly set of quantum steps that descend from causal layers to subtle layers to gross layers. This idea complements the view of contemporary science, which sees energy and matter as interchangeable and existing on a vast vibratory spectrum.

“Sankhya” means “list,” and its view enumerates the 25 tattvas, or fundamental categories of existence. Two tattvas are considered primary: purusha and prakriti. Purusha is the pure consciousness of spirit expressing as countless individual souls. Prakriti is the primordial matter from which the other 23 tattvas unfold in an orderly hierarchy of downward steps to form the manifest universe. In sharp contrast to Vedanta, Sankhya is dualistic and sees both spirit and matter as ultimate reality. This is in accord with the philosophical principle of dvanda (pair or couple), which states that everything comes into form in pairs of opposites.

Sankhya’s dualistic structure enables it to provide a succinct explanation of how an individual soul becomes bound in the material world. Purusha is pure consciousness and entirely immaterial. At its highest level of expression, prakriti exists in a state of perfect balance and its material properties are unmanifest. When purusha and prakriti interact, the equipoise of prakriti is disturbed and the process of manifestation and embodiment begins. As prakriti descends into material form, the three gunas (strands)—sattva, rajas, and tamas—emerge. Like the subatomic neutron-proton-electron of contemporary science, Sankhya describes the three gunas as the substrate of all matter. As the three gunas take form, the soul is encased by the causal body, then the subtle body, and finally the gross body. Once physically embodied, the constant barrage

of stimulation from the senses leads the soul to forget its true identity as purusha/spirit and mistakenly identify itself with the body and mind.

Sankhya likens the gunas to the three strands forming a single rope used for binding. In its macrocosmic form, prakriti is the vast, multidimensional, and dynamic structure of nature created by the interplay of the three gunas. Sattva is pure, luminous, and serene. Rajas is passionate, opaque, and restless. Tamas is impure, dull, and dark. The three-stranded rope of prakriti binds the material universe together, keeping the macrocosmic forces in a state of dynamic homeostasis.

The three-stranded rope of the gunas, a set of primary forces, is further ascribed the power of binding the microcosm of an individual. When sattva is dominant, an individual is inclined toward peace, harmony, and balance. Sattva binds one to happiness and knowledge. When rajas is dominant, an individual is inclined toward energetic actions and activities that satisfy and reinforce cravings. Rajas binds one to passion and activity. When tamas is dominant, an individual is inclined toward inertia and unconscious actions that further increase tamas. Tamas binds one to indolence and illusion. The gunas exist in a constant interplay of alternating forces that cause everyone and everything to cycle through sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic phases.

Practitioners of Ayurveda cultivate sattva by performing self-care techniques to purge excess tamas and rajas. Sattva gives rise to vibrant health and outstanding character traits that foster success in all areas of life. Even after sattva is dominant, Ayurveda is useful to keep the gunas in a state of balance. Yoga practitioners cultivate sattva to activate buddhi, strengthen their power of discrimination, and elevate their consciousness. The ultimate goal of both yoga and Ayurveda is to draw on the power of sattva to realize purusha as the true self.

Some ancient yoga schools found the Sankhya chart too complex to work with in practice. They simplified it into two different models you that you will learn about experientially in your training. The first model is the five koshas (sheaths). The outermost sheath is annamaya kosha, the gross sheath of food that forms the physical body. Next is pranamaya kosha, the sheath of life energy that corresponds to the nervous system. Manomaya kosha is the sheath of the thinking mind. Inside that is vijñanamaya kosha, the sheath of the higher mind and witness. Closest to purusha is anandamaya kosha, the sheath of bliss.

An even simpler model describes three shariras, or bodies: the sthula sharira, or gross body; sukshma sharira, or subtle body; and karana sharira, or causal body. Both models are consistent with the Sankhya chart. Their purpose is to help practitioners shift their awareness from the outer to the inner layers and eventually transcend the layers to experience purusha directly. Indian lore says that the Sankhya system was founded as early as 1000 BCE by the sage Kapila, who is credited with writing the Sankhya Karika. The accuracy of this claim is impossible to verify because the original text was lost. While a version of the Sankhya Karika does exist, scholars know it was written at a much later date. The first record of Sankhya's existence is around 500 BCE.

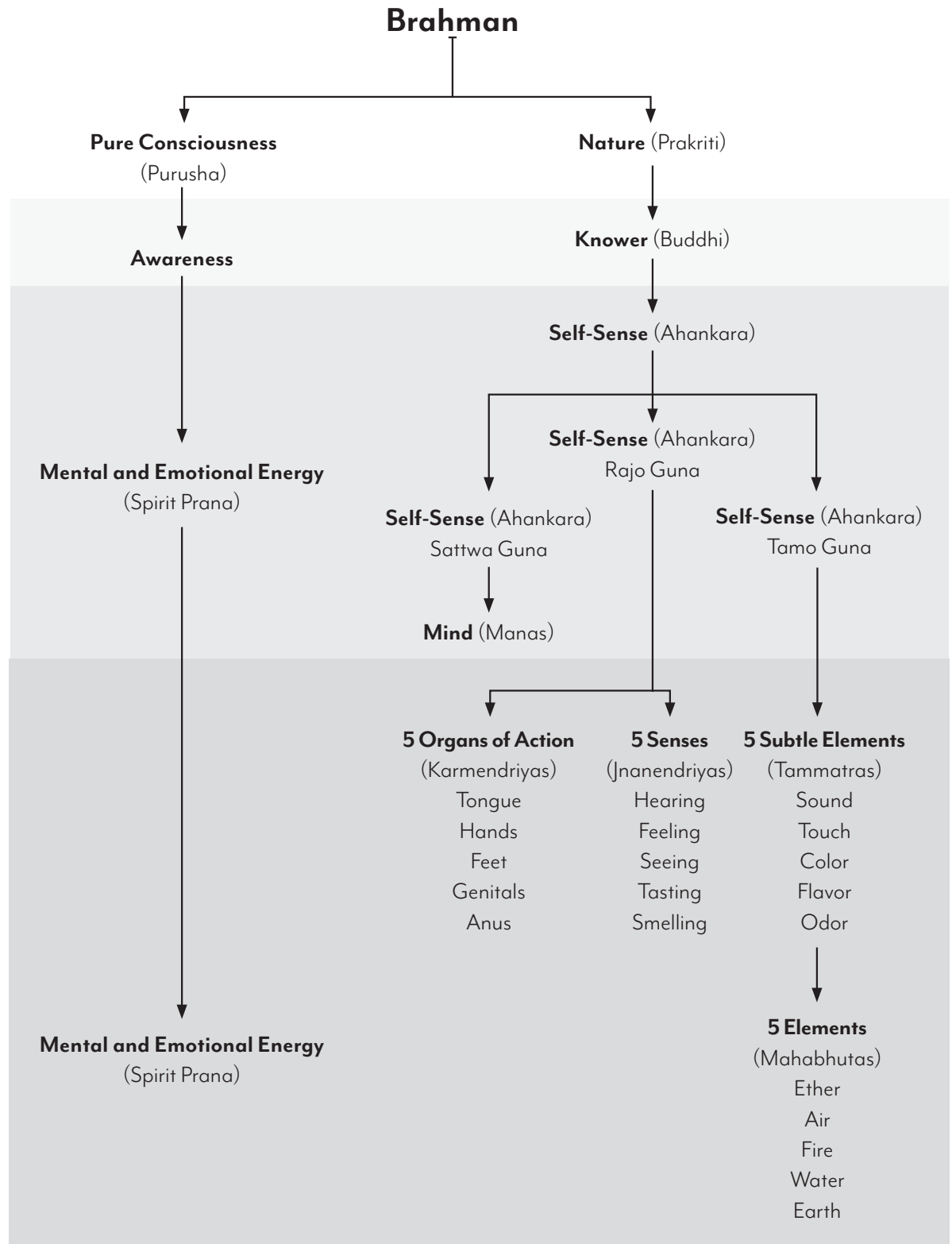
The Hierarchy of the Tattvas

According to Sankhya, everything in the universe comes into form through the hierarchy of the 25 tattvas:

- **Purusha:** spirit as the conscious principle of existence and true self of every individual
- **Prakriti:** insentient nature expressed as primordial matter, which comes into form through the activity of the three gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas
- **Buddhi:** the pure, discriminative intelligence that underlies the intellect
- **Ahankara:** the “I-maker” or ego, which gives rise to the sense of self
- **Manas:** the thinking mind
- **The five jnanendriyas**, or organs of perception: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch
- **The five karmendriyas**, or faculties of action: hands/grasping, feet/moving, tongue/speaking, genitals/reproduction, and anus/elimination
- **The five tanmatras**, or subtle elements, including sound, touch, color, flavor, and odor
- **The five mahabutras**, or great elements that form our bodies and everything in the physical universe: ether, air, fire, water, and earth

Notes

Sankhya Philosophy



Practice and Experience

Sample Sankhya-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. Now practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm.
- Bring your attention to your mouth and lightly tap your teeth together a few times. Feel your teeth connected to your jawbone and skull, and the spine linking your skull to your pelvis. In the hardness of your teeth and bones, find the earth element providing a firm foundation for your body. Feel the earth element manifesting as the stubbornness of our ego mind and the steadiness of our will.
- Bring your attention to your mouth, and swallow. Feel the water element manifesting as the saliva in your mouth. As you swallow again, feel it flowing down your throat to mix with the water in your stomach, flowing to mix with all the other water in the body, the blood, lymph, and interstitial fluids. Feel the water element—shapeless, pulled by gravity as it flows over the bones and seeps through the muscles and organs. The water element imparts fluidity to our movements and flows as the smooth contracting of muscle. Hold the contrast between the rigid earth and flowing water and the range of expressions they allow. Feel it in the smooth flow of awareness.
- Bring your attention to your armpits or groin, and feel the warmth accumulating there. Feel the radiance of heat from the fire element in your body. The fire of metabolism and combustion in the cells that radiates heat from the body. The fire of digestion in the belly that churns food, releasing energy that burns in the mitochondria of the cells. Feel that fire manifesting as the heat of anger and as the laser-beam penetrating focus of intellect fueled by a strong need to know or to succeed.
- Bring your attention to your nostrils and feel the breath flowing in and out. With your awareness, follow the breath down into your lungs and out again. In the breath, find the currents of the air element. Feel the air element, formless and compressible, moving in the lungs and mixing with the liquid blood flowing through the arteries and veins. Feel it blowing on the fires of metabolism in the cells and the fire of digestion in the stomach.
- Experience the air element as the weightless wind-like thoughts flowing smoothly and quickly from one object to another—spiraling around itself to become a storm of emotion. Now bring your attention to the center of your head and find the space element. The space inside the body cavities. The space that contains all the organs and structures. Feel the space occupied by your body containing all the physical structures but unaffected by them. This space has always been, and always will be, regardless of what passes through it or what it contains. Find that space manifesting as your witness, your buddhi, unchanging behind all that changes, the perpetual witness behind all thoughts and feelings.

- Feel your breath rising and falling: The rib bones moved by fluid muscles, pulling and pushing air through space. Feel your whole body around your breath permeated by awareness.
- Begin to deepen your breath, and begin to bring yourself back. Take a deep breath and open your eyes. Sit quietly for a few minutes before moving on.

Sample Sankhya-inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Shavasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that you wish. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dhirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dhirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- Bring your attention to your feet and hold it there for three breaths. If you encounter any tensions, invite them to relax. If they don't release, accept them. Then focus your attention on your hands for three breaths. Repeat for three breaths as you focus on your legs and arms.
- Bring your attention to your spine, chest and belly. Take three breaths at each location, relaxing those body parts.
- Let your attention shift from annamaya kosha to pranamaya kosha by shifting your attention to your breath, and feel your chest and belly expand as you inhale and release as you exhale. Expand your attention to feel all the sensations in your chest, belly and spine. After three breaths, bring your attention to your arms and hands, hold your attention there and feel every sensation. After three breaths, bring your attention to your legs and feet. Hold for three breaths and again, practice feeling every sensation.
- Shift your awareness to the perceiving self. Explore: Who feels my feet and legs? Bring your attention to your arms and hands. Again consider, Who feels my arms and hands? Bring your attention to your chest, belly and spine. Who feels? Who breaths? Who feels the belly move with breath? Who feels the floor beneath me?
- Expand your awareness to take in your whole self, every part and every sensation. Become the transcendent self, the purusha. Beyond time, beyond the eternal flow of sensations, thoughts and feelings. Allow all boundaries to dissolve in that transcendent self.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Feel the oneness. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to take in more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes.
- Slowly stretch yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: The transcendent self, deep inside, looks through the layers to perceive the world. Even as you move through the world, hold the experience or remembrance of that transcendent self. Take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Classical Yoga

Ashtanga Yoga as defined by Maharishi Patanjali in his Yoga Sutra is a great tree. All yogas are included in its eight branches. It is this that has become known as Yoga, a unique method for the development of body and mind and the realization of Brahman.

—Swami Kripalu

Scholars have referred to the yoga system compiled by the sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras as classical yoga. Patanjali's approach is also called ashtanga (eight-limbed) yoga because of the eight stages of practice (see graphic).

Classical yoga builds upon the dualistic view of Sankhya. Where Sankhya describes how a soul descends the ladder of the tattvas to become bound in matter, classical yoga presents the reverse practice through which a soul can ascend the ladder to free itself from material entanglement. When a soul gains release from the bonds of prakriti, it attains moksha (liberation) and a state of being known as tri guna tithe (beyond the sway of the three gunas). This is the shared goal of Sankhya and classical yoga.

Classical yoga accepts all 25 of the tattvas enumerated by Sankhya but adds another—a purusha called Ishvara, or surrender to the Divine. Ishvara is described as the first manifestation of Brahman, a universal soul who brings the cosmos into creation. This introduction of a supreme being into yoga was an attempt by Patanjali to reconcile the competing philosophical views prevalent in his time, which included dualism and nondualism, as well as theism and nontheism. Classical yoga brings these systems together by emphasizing their many points of agreement. This gives yoga practitioners the latitude to choose a philosophical orientation and tailor their practice accordingly.

Classical yoga is a path of concentration and meditation in which asana and pranayama play only minor roles. The essential practice is called samyama, or constraint. In the words of Swami Kripalu:

“Dharana is the seed, dhyana is the tree, and samadhi is the fruit. These three are inseparable and constitute an integral whole. Sage Patanjali has termed this trio samyama (constraint). Having withdrawn the mind from the sense organs, the seeker performs samyama by focusing his attention on an object of contemplation and concentrating his mind so that nothing but that exists in his consciousness. During the practice of samyama, the seeker's mind passes through various states before reaching the state of perfect concentration and finally attains direct knowledge through samadhi or super-consciousness.”

In another attempt to reconcile competing views, Patanjali presents two modes of samyama practice in his Yoga Sutras. The first mode emphasizes the liberating power of discriminating intelligence (viveka), which is sharpened through renunciation and nonattachment (vairagya) and then used to

differentiate between what we truly are (purusha) and what we mistakenly believe ourselves to be (prakriti). The second mode of practice emphasizes Ishvara-pranidhana, or surrender.

Regardless of the mode of practice employed, its goal is to disentangle the soul from its false identification with matter and realize kaivalya, the ecstatic aloneness of the purusha freed from its bondage to matter. This occurs when the power of the yogi's samyama slows and ultimately stops the modifications of the mind. Cultivating this ability to focus, slow, and stop the mind is a critical factor in classical yoga, as it is what enables a practitioner to withdraw consciousness up the steps of the Sankhya chart until purusha "shines in its own glory." (Yoga Sutras 1:3)

A sophisticated psychology underlies Patanjali's yoga, which explains how the relentless activity of the mind can be tamed. The keystone of this psychology is the concept of samskara, subliminal activators that lie hidden in the unconscious mind. When external circumstances activate a samskara, it generates vasana, the motivating force of desire. Desire leads to vritti, a whirlwind of associated thought in the mind. Vasana and vritti give rise to karma, purposeful activity to satisfy the desire, which further reinforces the samskara.

The Yoga Sutras introduce a clear strategy to bring an end to this unconscious pattern of human motivation and behavior. All samskaras are seen as arising from the five kleshas, the afflictions that are the root cause of human suffering: avidya (ignorance of our true identity); asmita (egoism); raga (attraction); dvesha (aversion); and abhinivesha (clinging to life). The Yoga Sutras direct a yogi to engage in the constant practice (abhyasa) of samyama to resist desire and attenuate the activity of samskara. This makes it possible to meditate deeply; gain vidya, or self-knowledge; and uproot the kleshas. This process is sometimes described by Kripalu teachers as "burning the seeds of future karma."

Patanjali distills this psychology into a succinct definition of yoga: Yogash chitta vritti nirodhaha, or "yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind." Implicit in this definition is a belief in the power of samyama to surface and destroy the unconscious network of samskaras and kleshas that bind the soul to matter. Swami Kripalu considered Patanjali's practice as chitta yoga, meaning that it utilized the mechanism of focusing awareness to produce its results.

For those choosing the practice of surrender to Ishvara, Patanjali recommends japa (recitation) of the pranava mantra and the sacred syllable om. Ishvara is described as being entirely free of the five kleshas and recognized as the first guru of the ancient sages. Considered the vibrational name of Ishvara, the repetition of the pranava mantra, along with reflection on its meaning, destroys avidya and leads to omniscience.

Scholars believe that Patanjali lived around 200 CE. The eight-limbed path set out in his Yoga Sutras is not original, as it appears earlier in the Upanishads. Classical yoga was strictly a path for renunciate monks. Sankhya and classical yoga are taught in the Bhagavad Gita in a format suitable for householders.

Eight Limbs of Yoga

1. **Yama:** character-building restraints
2. **Niyama:** character-building observances
3. **Asana:** physical posture
4. **Pranayama:** breath regulation as a means to align with subtle prana
5. **Pratyahara:** a state of introversion based on the flow of prana
6. **Dharana:** initial stage of meditation as one-pointed concentration by a subjective observer on a chosen object
7. **Dhyana:** intermediate stage of meditation as the flow state between subjective observer and a chosen object
8. **Samadhi:** advanced stage of meditation wherein the subjective observer and a chosen object are mediating an experience of Oneness

Notes

Foundation of Classical Yoga

Yamas and Niyamas

The five yamas and five niyamas comprised the traditional maha vratam (great vow) taken by every yoga student and was expected to guide their behavior in order and support character development regardless of time, place, or circumstance.

Yamas, Restraints

1. **Ahimsa:** noninjury
2. **Satya:** truthfulness
3. **Asteya:** non-stealing
4. **Brahmacharya:** practices that lead back to Source
5. **Aparigraha:** nonattachment

Niyamas, Observances

6. **Saucha:** cleanliness of the heart, body, breath, and mind
7. **Santosha:** contentment
8. **Tapas:** uplifting discipline
9. **Svadyaya:** self-study
10. **Ishvara-Pranidhana:** trusting life (Tat and Sat)

Notes

Practice and Experience

According to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Mental pain, despair, nervousness, and hard breathing are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind.

For removing these obstacles, there should be constant practice of one truth or principle.

The mind becomes clarified by cultivating attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness, and indifference respectively toward happiness, misery, virtue and vice. Or by releasing or holding the breath. Also, through serene or luminous states experienced within.

—Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Samadhi Pada*, verses 31–36

When the mind is disturbed by improper thoughts, constant pondering over the opposites is the remedy.

—Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Sadhana Pada*, verse 33

Sample Yoga Sutras inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm.
- Bring your attention to your ears and feel them. Feel the shape of your ears, the lobes and convolutions of the ears. Can you feel your hair against your ears, the weight? Bring your attention to the canals that lead from the outer ear to the inner ear. Can you feel the canal, its shape—round, oblong, rectangular? Can you sense its length?
- See if you can feel your eardrums. Can you feel them vibrating with any sounds? Can you sense the chamber inside the eardrum, inside your skull?
- Shift your attention toward sound and notice all the sounds you are hearing. Can you be aware of all the sounds without selecting one over another and without labeling them?
- Take your attention to the highest-pitched sound you are hearing. Take it to the lowest. Take it to the sound that is farthest away.
- Now bring your attention to the sounds inside your head. Listen to the sounds inside your body and the sound of static in the ears and nerves.
- Shift all your attention to the hearer. Who hears these things? Look for that hearer with all of your capacity.

- Bring your attention to your breath, and after a few moments, guide it to deepen. Let your body sway gently side to side and front to back. Lift your hands to your face and gently massage your face and neck.
- Release your hands to your lap, take a deep breath, and open your eyes. Sit quietly for a few minutes.

Sample Yoga Sutras–inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Shavasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- Let your attention drift inside your body. Let it drift toward the strongest sensation that you feel. It might be a tight place, or it might be the floor beneath you. Perhaps it is a place where you feel the air on your skin or the fabric of your clothing on your body. Hold your attention on that place and feel it deeply. Let go of any descriptive or evaluative words and just observe the sensation. And now, as if looking into a mirror, notice what the presence of that sensation creates in you. Is it attractive or repulsive? Is there a meaning assigned by the mind? A story? Can you watch yourself be affected by the sensation? Can you become the sensation?
- Let your mind drift to another sensation, perhaps one that is more subtle, and repeat the process. Repeat it one more time with an even more subtle sensation. Can you experience yourself as the observer, noticing the experiences dissolving one into the other?
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Feel the oneness and the separateness of the in-breath, the out-breath, and the belly. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to encompass more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Every object that we focus the mind on, both in our body and out in the world, is a doorway to merging with the infinite.

Tantra

Tantra is recent but its principles are ancient and rightly considered a branch of yoga. The special feature of Tantra is that it neither considers worldly enjoyment as something to be shunned nor is final liberation solely accepted. It recognizes both equally. Tantra teaches that knowledge can only dawn in a person with a pure body and mind. A true Tantric adept is a person of perfect self-control.

—Swami Kripalu

A philosophy called Tantra arose around 500 CE to offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between ultimate truth and the material world. Tantra is founded on the view that the world and its pleasures do not have to be renounced for spiritual awakening; enjoyment and human fulfillment can be stepping stones to higher awareness. A Tantric practitioner cultivates a sense of aliveness that brings intimacy and joy to daily life. According to tantric philosophy, it is by experiencing the things of this finite world fully and without guilt or shame that the doors to the infinite swing open most easily.

Tantra's positive view of worldly life was a marked departure from India's earlier philosophies. Vedanta saw the world of the senses as a beguiling perceptual illusion (maya). Sankhya considered embodiment the calamity of a soul (purusha) trapped in matter (prakriti). Consonant with these views, Vedanta and Sankhya drew a clear line of demarcation separating worldly life from spiritual life. In both these systems, ultimate truth can only be sought by a person willing to renounce the world and its pleasures.

Tantra does not see worldly and spiritual life in opposition. It embraces all facets of life and believes that a healthy person can integrate life's polarities and live from a place of naturalness and wholeness. Instead of asceticism, Tantra celebrates embodiment, avoiding the inner splits, inhibitions, and complexes that austere strategies such as self-denial often create.

Tantra is a word with many meanings. When used by weavers, it means "warp" or "woof." The loom was likely a metaphor for the Tantric view, which sees reality as the whole cloth woven from the polarities of spirit and matter, sacred and profane, male and female, space and time, pleasure and pain, light and shadow. Tantra sees enlightenment as the natural flowering of psychological wholeness that comes from the integration and unification of all life's opposites. Tantra also means "that which expands wisdom" (jnana), which speaks to its purpose as a wisdom tradition created to awaken practitioners to the direct experience of reality. Another definition of Tantra is "rite" or "ritual," and most Tantric schools are highly ritualistic systems infused with the idea that wisdom is hidden within us and can be brought into conscious awareness through deepening our ability to experience all aspects of reality.

Tantra conceptualizes spirit and matter as two poles on the vast continuum of creation. It symbolizes these poles as Shiva, the masculine principle of pure consciousness, and Shakti, the feminine principle of creative energy. Shiva represents the unmanifest and formless, which is eternal and never changes. Shakti symbolizes the manifest universe in all its myriad forms, which exists in a dynamic state of evolution and change. Like Sankhya, Tantra considers spirit and matter to be real. Whether changeless (Shiva) or changing (Shakti), both are aspects of the same totality. Within the microcosm of the individual, Shiva is the supreme identity that underlies the ego and illumines the mind, and Shakti is the life force that sustains the body and vivifies its energy centers and functions. In some schools of Tantra, the life force of the body is called by another name, prana.

Tantra depicts Shiva and Shakti as cosmic lovers, drawn together by their opposite qualities. The splendor of the universe is the outpouring of their ecstatic dance and lovemaking. Seeing spirit and matter as connected by a unifying love is what enabled the founders of Tantra to pioneer a life-affirming philosophy that trusts that human life will naturally lead to spiritual awakening if lived joyously and savored. Desire is not considered a barrier to awakening in Tantra, which guides practitioners to neither suppress nor indulge, but rather enjoy the natural satisfaction of the senses with full awareness.

Since Vedic times, Indians have been practicing religious rituals that combine meditative awareness with visualization and the use of mandalas (sacred circles), mantras (recitation of sacred words and sounds), mudras (expressive gestures), yantras (geometric designs to focus consciousness), and deity worship. Usually these rituals were practiced as a form of white magic that could influence the outer world and be used to obtain boons such as the successful reign of a newly crowned king, victory in battle, recovery from serious illness, or the birth of a child.

Tantric teachers created a new repertoire of rituals designed to transform the inner consciousness of their students. Driving this innovation was their conception of reality as a vast continuum vibrating with the energy of Shakti. This omnipresent vibration was also called by another name, spanda (pulsing or throbbing). Rich symbolism was employed, with gods and goddesses representing particular energies and vibrations. Rituals were designed to invoke a specific deity in order to activate primal energy and use it to fuel transformation. Tantra was not a timid approach, and its powerful rituals sought to help practitioners break through the layers of ignorance, lethargy, resistance, and attachment.

The goal of ritual practice was to enable students to quickly overcome any obstacles preventing their entry into deep states of meditation. Tantric meditation practice proceeds along a path of affirmation and inclusion called *asmi asmi* (this too, this too). This path embraces the bodymind as a manifestation of the Divine, dispelling the myth of separateness that divides reality into artificial distinctions like matter and spirit. They distilled this central teaching into a mantra used in meditation: *Shivoham*, which means “I am Shiva.”

The enlightenment sought by Tantra was a marked departure from the traditional view of withdrawing consciousness out of the body, known as *videha mukti* (liberation by leaving the body). Tantra sought a new enlightenment called *jivan mukti* (liberated in the body), and the first

step was to connect the twin poles of energy (pelvis) and awareness (head) within the microcosm of the bodymind. The second step was to dissolve all the thought forms and rigid structures of the mind into primal energy so that that which is beyond thought could be directly experienced. Swami Kripalu considered Tantra a prana yoga, meaning that it utilized the mechanism of activating energy to produce its results.

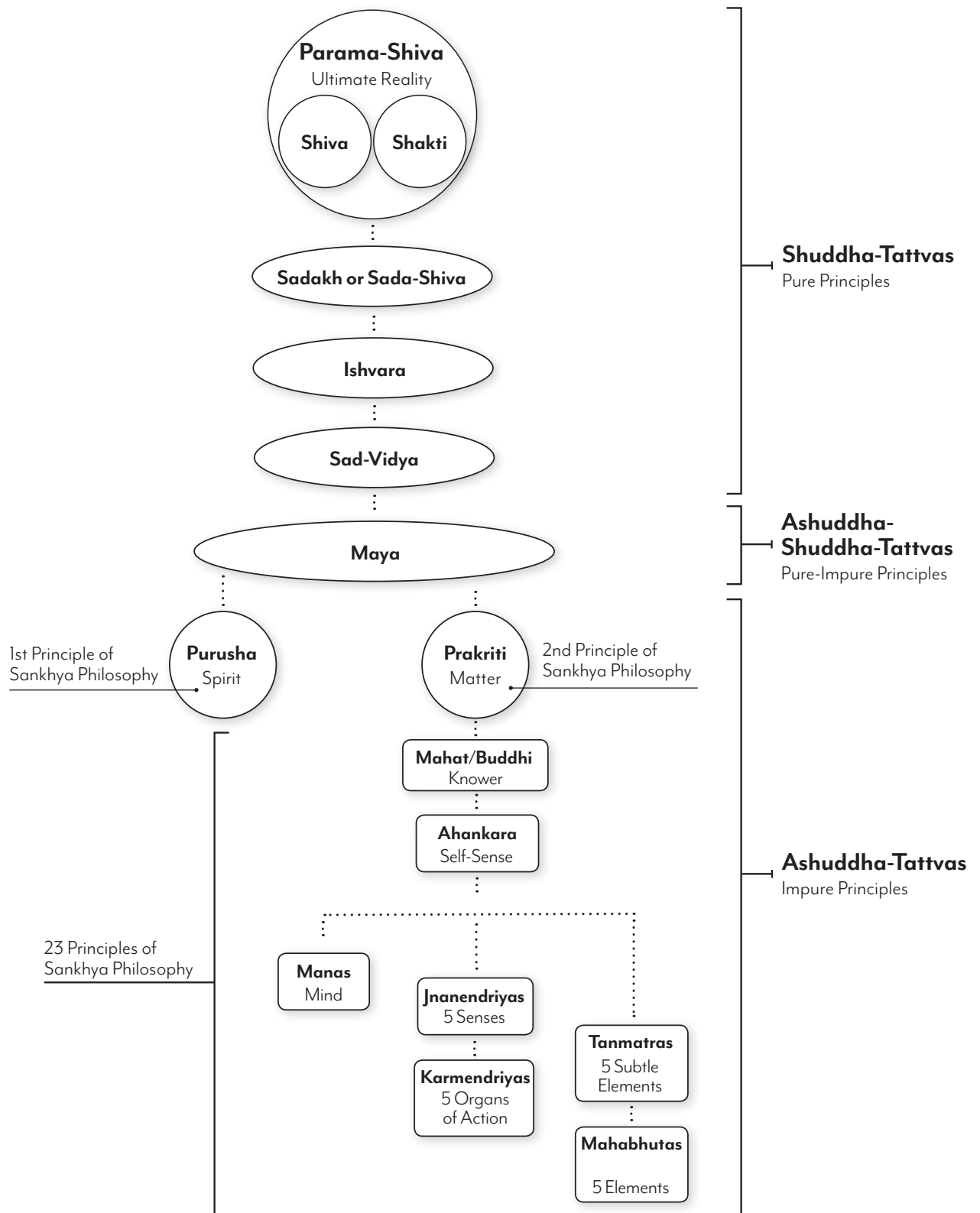
Tantra arose at a time when Indian culture was dominated by its Brahmin elite, positioned at the top of the caste system. A stifling system of religious rules controlled the behavior of the populace through deeming what actions maintained caste purity and what actions were polluting. Tantra rebelled against the caste system and rejected the task of maintaining purity as a sufficient model for anyone wanting to catalyze an authentic spiritual awakening. It held that more radical means were required to break free of the mind and its pervasive conditioning. Some scholars compare Tantra to the psychology of Sigmund Freud, which ran counter to the puritanical norms of the Victorian era. Others describe the cultural context in which Tantra arose as similar to the American 1960s with its counterculture movement. What's important to understand is that the early Tantric teachers directly challenged the politically powerful Brahmin orthodoxy and pointed out its obsession with restraint and purity.

A subset of Tantric rituals involved engaging in actions that were expressly deemed polluting. This included drinking alcohol, eating cow meat, being near or touching corpses, and ritualized sex. Participating in such rituals was guaranteed to bring up powerful emotions like fear, shame, guilt, vulnerability, anger, aggression, and lust. A skillful Tantric teacher could use the energy underlying these emotions to awaken a student to high states of consciousness. While radical techniques such as these might temporarily upset and disturb, Tantra held that they do so only to cleanse the mind and enable reality to shine forth without filters and distortion. Orthodox Brahmins condemned Tantra and declared its practices heretical and corrupt.

Early Tantra had a practical orientation that emphasized action and saw little value in theory. That view is expressed in the tradition of the mahasiddhas (great adepts), which tells the life stories of 84 Buddhist and Hindu masters, many of whom rejected their high caste and intellectual past to walk the path of Tantra. Later schools developed lofty and sublime philosophies. One school that draws the attention of Western academics is Kashmir Shaivism, started by a sage and prolific author Abhinavagupta (950–1020 CE), which expands upon the 25 tattvas of Sankhya to arrive at 36 principles of existence. Like most schools of Tantra, it describes ultimate reality as the union of male and female (see chart).

Tantra produced a cultural renaissance that flourished for a time and eventually fell into disrepute. Current research attributes the downfall of Tantra to scandalous teachers and a ritual system that grew overly complex and expensive. Authentic Tantra is qualitatively different from the sexual practices often called neo-Tantra, which use yogic techniques to prolong orgasm and increase sexual pleasure. The goal of Tantra is nothing less than wholeness through the process of enlightenment, which according to the systematic approach requires an expert teacher, preliminary disciplines that strengthen the witness, personal integrity, and all the other elements necessary for the alchemical development and transmission of spiritual education.

Tantric Cosmology



Notes

Practice and Experience

Sample Tantra-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm. Affirm that you are doing deep and meaningful work, and that you want to experience the wholeness that comes from knowing yourself fully. If appropriate for you, offer a prayer for insight and the strength to see what may be difficult to see.
- Release the pranayama and visualize yourself in a place where you feel safe, perhaps a place you frequented in your childhood. It could be a room in a house, the beach, the shade of a large tree. Visualize yourself seated in that place and hold that visualization as you settle in.
- As you sit in peace, imagine that you feel a presence coming near the space where you are sitting. This presence does not cause any disturbance. As it draws closer, you feel the peace growing stronger. The presence moves close. It passes on your left side and moves to sit in front of you. You sense that someone is looking at you, but they are not judging. You feel waves of acceptance and compassion radiating from their eyes.
- You let this acceptance in, and your heart begins to soften. You feel a stream of love and peace flowing from and to the presence seated before you. For a few breaths, simply bask in that peace and love, acceptance and compassion.
- As you sit, feel that you are being seen, that everything about you is visible to this observer, but you are not judged. Your deepest darkest secrets, shames, and fears are exposed, and still no judgment. Again, rest in this feeling.
- For the next few moments, be as conscious as you can that you are being seen and accepted. Let this increase your own acceptance of yourself.
- The presence before you begins to rise. Feel it as it stands up and walks past you again on your left side. Stay aware of it as it drifts away. When it is gone, begin to deepen your breath. Let your body move in any ways that bring you into a smooth transition to end your meditation. Bring your hands to your face and gently massage your face and neck.
- Let your hands fall to your lap. Take a few deep breaths and again affirm that you are doing meaningful work, and that you want to experience the wholeness that comes from knowing yourself fully. For a few more moments, remember what it felt like to be accepted so fully by the presence in your meditation. Take a deep breath, and as you exhale, open your eyes and slowly transition to your next activity.

Sample Tantra-inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Shavasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- For a few breaths simply take in the feeling of your body. Feel the flow of your breath. As your trunk expands and contracts with the waves of breath, feel that the boundaries of your body are dissolving.
- Bring your attention down to your feet and notice every sensation there. Can you distinguish your individual toes? Your heels? The arches of your feet? The bones of your ankles? Let memories and images of your feet arise in your mind. Don't create stories, but let the images and stories form a collage in your mind. Affirm that your feet are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your hands. Feel your fingertips. Feel the webbing between your fingers. Feel the hollows of your palms. Let memories and images of your hands arise in your mind. Don't link the images together, but allow them to drift through your mind. Affirm that your hands are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your belly. Feel the space of your belly and every sensation in that space. As best as you can, visualize the organs inside and see if you can feel them. Let memories and images of your belly arise in your mind. Release any judgment or fear, and allow them to drift through your mind. Affirm that your belly is healthy and that it can deeply relax.
- Guide your attention to your chest and feel your lungs expanding and contracting. Then feel your heart behind your lungs. Can you feel it beating? Affirm that your heart and lungs are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Let your attention spread evenly through your whole body. Affirm that your body is healthy and that every process is happening exactly as it should. Affirm that your body is safe to deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your body. Feel the oneness, the freedom from boundaries. Gradually deepen your breath and notice your awareness expanding to distinguish what is you from the rest of the universe. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes.
- Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Every object that we focus the mind on, both in our body and out in the world, is a doorway to merging with the infinite.

Notes

Hatha Yoga

The scriptures of yoga are composed of terse sutras. Tantra has diagrams of various energy centers and energy channels that offer a similar form of condensed instruction. A focus of energy channels is called an energy center. Each energy center has a definite location in the body and is tied to particular organs of perception and action. Each energy center has a special shape, color, and is said to be inhabited by specific gods and goddesses. Energy centers are also called lotuses because they close and open. An impure energy center is closed until the life force becomes active and causes it to rotate like a powerful whirlpool and eventually blossom open. An aspirant who knows the secret of the diagram can do systematic practice correctly.

—Swami Kripalu

Hatha yoga is an offshoot of Tantra that can be traced to the sage Matsyendra and his successor, Goraksha, who lived around 1000 CE. By this time, Tantra and its system of transformative rituals had grown stagnant and fallen into disfavor. Matsyendra and Goraksha recast Tantra in yogic terms. The hatha yoga they developed had three primary rituals: asana (postures), pranayama (breath regulation), and dhyana (meditation). A student could learn how to practice these rituals again and again to catalyze their growth and awakening. The Tantric word conveying this orientation to sustained practice is sadhana, which means “the systematic practice of spiritual disciplines for self-transformation.”

Drawing on the work of earlier schools, the adepts of hatha yoga refined the model of the subtle body and its energetic anatomy that are known to contemporary practitioners today. This model includes an intricate network of nadis, or energy pathways, that branch off into ever smaller channels, much like the circulatory system. The sushumna nadi (central channel) is the chief of three principal pathways. It runs from the perineum to the crown of the head along the spinal column and is marked by seven chakras (wheels or energy centers).

The pingala nadi (solar or heating pathway) parallels the spine on the right side. The ida nadi (lunar or cooling pathway) parallels the spine on the left side. The Kripalu tradition describes the solar and lunar pathways as connecting the nostrils to the kanda, or bulb, the egg-shaped origin point of all the energy pathways located slightly below the navel. Other traditions depict the solar and lunar pathways as winding up from the base of the spine to join at the point between the eyebrows. (For more on the structure and function of the subtle body, see *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat*, pp 231–243.)

An intriguing component of the subtle body is the Kundalini Shakti (serpent power), a reservoir of primal energy symbolized as a coiled snake that lies sleeping at the base of the spine. Although the word kundalini (she who is coiled) is referenced in the Vedas, it was hatha yoga that developed the system currently known as Kundalini Yoga. In theory, the goal of Kundalini Yoga is to awaken and then raise the primal energy (Shakti) up the central channel from root to crown, piercing each chakra and causing it to blossom into vivid aliveness. When the primal energy reaches the upper centers in the head, Shakti merges with Shiva (consciousness), and the yogi experiences samadhi (union). Kundalini Yoga is a path of transformation in which practitioners are confronted by all the issues and obstacles that stand in the way of their highest expression.

Hatha yoga also developed a new and simplified model of life force animating the subtle body that differs from Sankhya and its expression in Ayurveda. Hatha yoga emphasizes two energies called prana and apana. Prana is the life force flowing inward toward the deeper self and up to spirit. When prana is strong, we are introverted and the inner world is felt to be real and primary. As introversion is sustained, the landscape of the inner world grows clear, and the confines of the outer world fade into the background. Apana is the life force flowing down and out through the senses. When apana is strong, we are extroverted and the outside world commands our attention.

A consistent theme of Indian philosophy is the struggle for spiritual awakening. In the epic stories of the Mahabharat and Ramayana, this struggle is depicted as a battle of opposing armies. This theme is evident in Vedanta, which encourages practitioners to use renunciation to strengthen their identification with Atman/Brahman and weaken the illusory power of maya. It also appears in Sankhya, which encourages practitioners to use self-restraint and discriminative intelligence to make sattva dominant over tamas and rajas and ultimately vanquish prakriti.

This theme appears in hatha yoga, which encourages practitioners to use asana, pranayama, and dhyana to make prana strong enough to overcome the outward pull of apana. When practiced with an internal focus and strong flow of prana, the rituals of hatha yoga are potent tools for transformation. As the subtle body is cleared of blocks and obstructions, hatha yogis gain sensitivity and inner clarity, which empowers them today. During the 1900s, hatha yoga techniques were combined with elements drawn from Western systems of physical culture and esotericism. (For interested readers, Mark Singleton's book, *Yoga Body*, sheds considerable light on this important period in yoga's evolution.)

Notes

Practice and Experience

Sample hatha yoga-inspired meditation script

- Gather all the props you will need to practice Baddha Konasana and Child's pose. Sit on a cushion on your mat with your props nearby. Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice this until your mind becomes calm. Feel how strongly your attention focuses on your body, and also notice any distractions that pull your attention away from your body. Do this without judgment. Observe the pulls on your attention as simply the tug-of-war of prana and apana.
- Keeping your eyes closed and your attention focused inward, guide your body into Baddha Konasana. Hold your feet, press your knees down, and round your torso to bring your solar plexus over your feet. Scan your body to make sure this posture feels safe and that you aren't experiencing any strain. Take slow, deep breaths as your body settles into the posture.
- Let your attention flow to the strongest sensation. Take it in fully, without commentary or reaction. Explore the sensation deeply. Notice other layers, sensations inside other sensations, that are different from the layers above. Can you find a line beyond which the sensations are no longer physical? Are there layers that are emotional? Are there layers that are pure energy?
- Be with the posture until your body gives you a clear message that it is time to release. Rise back up to seated and cross your ankles. Observe what arises as you come out of the posture.
- Notice again how strongly your attention focuses on your body, and also notice any distractions that pull your attention away from your body. Has the prana become stronger and the apana weaker?
- Lift your hips and come into Child's pose. Use any props that you need. Take a few slow, deep breaths as your body settles into the posture. Let your attention flow to the strongest sensation. Take it in fully. Look deeply into the sensation and notice its shape. Does it have a color? A sound? At what point are the sensations no longer physical? Are there layers that are emotional? Are there layers that are pure energy?
- Remain in this posture for five more deep breaths. Slowly rise back up to a seated position and cross your ankles. Again, notice if the prana is stronger now.
- Gradually deepen your breath. When it feels appropriate to do so, begin to sway your body side to side or front to back. Notice if this action strengthens the apana. When you're ready, open your eyes. Observe the prana and apana as you transition to your next activity.

Sample hatha yoga–inspired relaxation script

- Lead yourself through a pranayama and asana practice that is appropriate for you. Then prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Shavasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath. For a few breaths, simply take in the feeling of your body.
- In your mind, go back to the first posture that you did. Remember it as best as you can—how you entered it, what you felt as you held it, how you felt when you released. Can you still feel the imprint of the posture? Can you still feel the effect? Has tension come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- In your memory, go back to a posture in your sequence where some part of your body exerted effort. Remember entering the posture and how it felt as you held it. Was there frustration? Was there energy moving? What did you experience as you released? Take your attention to that body part now. What do you feel there? Can you connect what you felt then to what you are feeling now? Can you fully accept what you are feeling now? Has tension or tightness come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- In your memory, go back to a posture in your sequence where some part of your body stretched. Remember coming into the posture and what you felt as you held it. Recall the sensations and look deeply into them. What was happening on all the different layers? How absorbed did you become? What do you feel there? Can you connect what you felt then to what you are feeling now? Can you fully accept what you are feeling now? Has tension or tightness come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- Let your attention drift through your body from one sensation to another. Can you find all the past events that have contributed to what you are feeling now?
- Feel yourself here in this moment, a moment created by all the moments that have gone before. Affirm that by what you are experiencing now, you are creating your future. Experience yourself in this one moment in the infinite flow of time.
- As you rest here in this moment, what can you do to influence the next moment, the rest of this day? Is there any area of tension you can release from your body or your mind? An affirmation you can express? Is there something you can open to in your body, mind, or heart that will add to the quality of this day?
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to take in more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Your experience of your body has been changed by your practice. Because you have practiced today, the rest of your day will be different.

Because you have practiced today, you will sleep differently tonight, and because of that, tomorrow will be a different day. Through your practice, you have changed the trajectory of your life. Take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Notes

[illegible]

The Sadhana of Swami Kripalu

Yoga includes special techniques meant to awaken the life force of the body. Their appropriate practice will grant the benediction of pranotthana (prana awakening). As prana awakens, the body begins to perform postures, breathing exercises, and other disciplines spontaneously. These spontaneous actions are yogic kriyas that purify the body and mind.

—Swami Kripalu

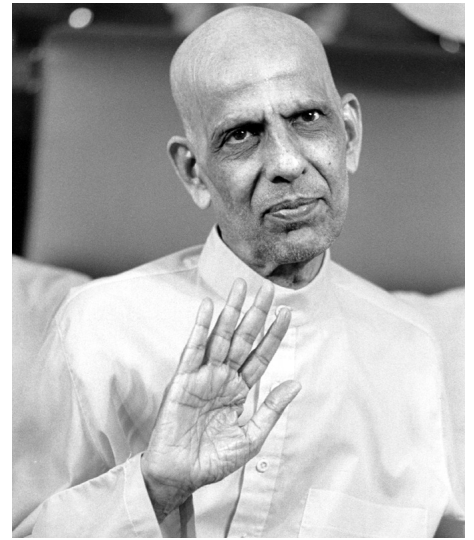
Kripalu Yoga is a branch of the Pashupat sect revived by the sage Lakulish about 200 CE. Lakulish was born in the west-central state of Gujarat and was venerated during his lifetime—his followers believed him to be the 28th incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva. The Pashupat sect he started was a renunciate religious community. While revived by Lakulish, who was a contemporary of Patanjali, the roots of the Pashupat tradition reach further back in time. Scholars consider it one of the earliest yoga schools.

Little is known about Lakulish except for legends relating to his birth and death. Obscuring matters further, the Pashupat Sutra attributed to him is encoded in a symbolic language impossible to decipher. The text was likely written in this manner to prevent the disclosure of esoteric teachings to non-initiates. Scholars do know that the Pashupats were an early school of Tantra that gained considerable popularity and prominence. A network of temples was started in Gujarat and expanded to cover all of India by 600 CE, when the tradition began to decline.

A degree of controversy surrounded the Pashupats because of their extreme asceticism and rejection of conventional societal norms such as ignoring Hindu customs regarding appropriate food and religious rites. It was long thought that the sect had simply disappeared, but new academic research suggests that the Pashupats were one of several sects that merged into the hatha yoga school of Matsyendra and Goraksha. It is almost certain that Pashupat yoga would have been entirely lost except for the role played by Swami Kripalu, a modern yoga master who breathed new life into the tradition.

Swami Kripalu was born in 1913 into a devout Brahmin family in the small Gujarat town of Dabhoi. His father died when Swami Kripalu was seven years old, plunging the large family of two sons and seven daughters into financial hardship. As a high caste woman, Swami Kripalu's mother was unable to work, and the family sank into debt. Eventually their home was taken and their possessions put out in the street. A promising student and musician, Swami Kripalu was forced to leave school after seventh grade in order to work.

Upon turning 18, Swami Kripalu traveled to the city of Mumbai to find a job that would enable him to support himself and his mother. It was there he met Swami Pranavananda, a guru who recognized the young Swami Kripalu as his foremost disciple and treated him like a beloved son. For a year and a quarter, Swami Kripalu lived in his guru's ashram and enjoyed a close relationship with his teacher. Swami Pranavananda taught Swami Kripalu yoga philosophy and explained the techniques through which the deeper truths of yoga can be realized. Wanting Swami Kripalu to have the best possible foundation to support his future yoga practice, Swami Pranavananda arranged for Swami Kripalu to study Ayurveda, Western naturopathy, and even the budding science of Western psychology.



After a year of instruction, Swami Pranavananda announced that he would initiate Swami Kripalu into yoga. As preparation, Swami Kripalu was led through a dietary regimen to purify his body and mind. For a week, he reduced his food intake to one meal a day. For two months, he drank only milk. For the next 41 days, he fasted on water while living in seclusion, keeping silence, and practicing mantra meditation.

At the end of this 108 day ordeal, the 19-year-old Swami Kripalu was initiated into yoga. Swami Pranavananda called the initiation shaktipat diksha (descent of the power). After teaching him Padmasana (Lotus pose), Swami Pranavananda said, "This is the seed of all postures. You will accomplish countless postures through it." Swami Kripalu was also taught Anuloma Viloma (Alternate-Nostril Breathing) and told, "This pranayama is the key to yoga. By practicing it properly, you shall know all the yogas and tantras."

Acknowledging his completion of the initiation, Swami Pranavananda instructed Swami Kripalu to begin an intensive practice of yoga later in life. Then Swami Pranavananda announced to the ashram community that he was leaving to take Swami Kripalu on a walking pilgrimage of holy sites. When the pilgrimage was over, Swami Kripalu awoke to find his teacher gone. After waiting at the spot for several days, he had no alternative but to resume his life. Eventually Swami Kripalu found meaningful work as a music teacher and playwright, which enabled him to support his mother.

The spirit of renunciation arose in Swami Kripalu after he narrowly escaped an attempt of well-meaning relatives to find him a wife. In 1942 at age 29, he was ordained as a swami and began traveling on foot from village to village throughout western India. The spiritual discourses he gave were peppered with captivating stories, and his inspired singing stirred deep feelings within the

hearts of listeners. The shopkeepers would all close their stores, creating a holiday atmosphere that enabled the entire village to attend Swami Kripalu's talks.

During his nine years as a wandering monk, Swami Kripalu's renown grew steadily. Wealthy devotees saw the purity of his service and gave him large donations. Always using the money to help those in need, Swami Kripalu established numerous secondary schools, health clinics, vocational schools, and temples. More than eloquence, talent, or good works, it was Swami Kripalu's genuine love for people that set him apart. He was held dear by countless villagers, esteemed by people of influence, and widely considered a humanitarian.

Swami Kripalu was not satisfied with scriptural knowledge or status. In 1950 at age 38, he began the yoga practice that would define the rest of his life. He started with three one-hour sittings of Anuloma Viloma pranayama a day and gradually increased the duration. Experimenting with lifestyle practices, he found that a moderate diet and silence best supported him. For the next 28 years, Swami Kripalu spent 10 hours a day in focused spiritual practice, eating one midday meal and seldom leaving his meditation room. Twelve of these years were spent in complete silence during which he communicated by writing on a chalkboard. It was during this period that Swami Kripalu realized the potential glimpsed by his boyhood teacher and became a spiritual adept.

The type of yoga that Swami Kripalu practiced was unusual. After several months of dedicated pranayama, Swami Kripalu experienced pranotthana (the awakening of prana) and was amazed to watch his body spontaneously perform countless postures, dance-like movements, and other exercises. At this point, Swami Kripalu was largely unschooled in hatha yoga. Purchasing several books, he was astounded to find many of the techniques he'd done spontaneously clearly described in the texts. Encouraged by this discovery, Swami Kripalu gradually increased his practice of spontaneous yoga to six and, finally, 10 hours a day.

Swami Kripalu was mystified by how he could practice advanced yogic techniques without first learning them from a teacher. He studied the texts intensively and reflected on the time he shared with his guru to understand the transformative process he was undergoing. Eventually, Swami Kripalu concluded that his experience resulted from the specific form of yoga initiation and pranayama instruction he'd received from his guru. In his words:

In ancient times, yoga vidya (knowledge of yoga) was given only to the most rare and deserving disciple. By his grace, the guru would bestow shaktipat diksha upon such a disciple. Through shaktipat, the prana in the disciple's body would be released. This is called pranotthana. After pranotthana, the disciple would start yoga sadhana automatically and nothing remained to be taught. The practice of yoga would itself lead to the knowledge of yoga. It is also true that one's prana can be released even without having a guru, provided one practices asana, pranayama, japa, meditation, etc., using the correct technique.

For the first several years of his spontaneous yoga practice, Swami Kripalu endured a rigorous purification process. In meditation, Swami Kripalu's awakened energy would descend into his lower centers and engage in a vigorous battle to purify his instinctual self. The word "Pashupat" means "master of the animal/beast," a term graphically descriptive of this experience. Swami Kripalu began to suspect that he was practicing the ancient Pashupat yoga revived by Lakulish and transmitted to him by Pranavanada.

Swami Kripalu's activated prana aroused the more potent kundalini shakti, which he often called the evolutionary power. As this energy ascended and pierced the chakras, he experienced pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and the lower levels of samadhi (oneness). Having successfully passed through an initial purification, it now appeared that all the later stages of yoga described by Patanjali were emerging naturally in a format that corresponded to hatha yoga and, most notably, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. This experience led Swami Kripalu to conclude that a period of intensive hatha yoga was an essential prerequisite for depth meditation and the practice of raja yoga (royal or contemplative yoga).

One day, Swami Kripalu was shown an unusual stone statue of a yogi sitting in meditation found in a nearby farmer's field. The yogi's spine was merged with a Shiva lingam (symbol of Shiva). Swami Kripalu immediately recognized this as a statue of Lakulish artfully depicting practices he'd experienced that led him to depth meditation. Swami Kripalu's belief that he had been initiated into the Pashupat lineage was solidified. His response was to raise the funds and oversee the construction of the Kayavarohan temple that now houses the ancient statue. Completed in 1974, this was Swami Kripalu's crowning act of public service in India.

Swami Kripalu had several disciples living in the West, all of whom repeatedly invited him to come to Europe or America. He always refused, choosing not to interrupt his cloistered lifestyle. In 1977 at age 66, Swami Kripalu delighted his Western students by traveling to the United States. Intending to stay four months, he extended his visit to just over four years. Most of his time was spent in residence at the original Kripalu Center in Sumneytown, Pennsylvania, where he resumed his life of yoga practice, study, writing, and music. Swami Kripalu returned to India in late 1981, where he died a few months later on December 29.

Despite his dedicated practice, Swami Kripalu never lost sight of yoga's universality. He believed that a diversity of approaches was healthy and necessary, as people vary in temperament and need different teachings and techniques to attain physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Swami Kripalu taught that the ultimate goal of all schools of yoga is one and the same: Sanatana Dharma, the direct realization of eternal truth.

(For those wanting to know more about Swami Kripalu's life and teachings, the book *Sunrise of Joy: The Lost Darshans of Swami Kripalu* by John Mundahl is recommended.)

Kripalu Yoga

The practice of yoga with the kriya of chitta and prana is a special type of sadhana. It is called Kripalu Yoga. This kriya is a divine grace bestowed on this lineage through the intensive practice of its great masters.

—Swami Kripalu

Swami Kripalu was an ardent yogi with an inquisitive mind. Born in the 20th century, he was able to study the texts of all the major schools of yoga and examine how the tradition had evolved over time. Swami Kripalu saw yoga as an integrated system of self-development and spiritual awakening. While the tradition as a whole offered a unified vision of humankind's highest potential, that vision was greatly enriched by each school's unique perspective and distinctive set of insights.

Contemporary yoga students face a different challenge than those of earlier times. Past students were likely to be trained in a single school and strive over many years to practice to assimilate its philosophical view. Today's students find themselves in a situation akin to the story of the five blind men and the elephant. One blind man grabs the tail and says the elephant is like a rope. A second holds a leg and says the elephant is like a pillar. A third touches the ear and says the elephant is like a fan. A fourth pushes against its side and says the elephant is like a wall.

The fifth grasps the writhing trunk and exclaims, "You're all wrong, the elephant is like a large and powerful snake." In much the same way, contemporary yoga students encounter a multiplicity of views and practices. Their task is to skillfully use one or more of them to experience the larger truth.

Kripalu Yoga is grounded in the teachings of Swami Kripalu, who held that the first step on the path of every yogi is to learn to honor the relative truth of society (dharma). You might recall that the first two limbs of Patanjali's classical yoga are yama (the five restraints) and niyama (the five observances). Swami Kripalu praised the transformative power of the yamas and niyamas and called the slow process of weaving these 10 virtues into the fabric of one's being character building. The values of the yamas and niyamas are foundational to Kripalu Yoga.

Swami Kripalu taught yoga in alignment with a doctrine known as the Four Noble Aims of Life. According to this doctrine, human beings are born with four primary drives: artha (the drive to obtain necessary material resources), kama (the drive for comfort and pleasure), dharma (the drive for self-esteem, genuine virtue, and status), and moksha (the drive to awaken spiritually and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death).

It is important to understand that Kripalu Yoga is not the renunciate form of the Pashupat kundalini yoga practiced by Swami Kripalu, who was focused exclusively on attaining moksha. Kripalu Yoga is an adaptation of this yoga designed to help students obtain the balance of all four aims, which Swami Kripalu liked to call "success in life." Swami Kripalu was clear in drawing this distinction:

Yamas, Character Building Restraints:

- Ahimsa, Noninjury
- Satya, Truthfulness
- Asteya, Non-stealing
- Brahmacharya, Practices that lead back to Source
- Aparigraha, Nonattachment

Niyamas, Character Building Observances:

- Saucha, Cleanliness of heart, body, breath and mind
- Santosha, Contentment
- Tapas, Uplifting discipline
- Svadhyaya, Self-study
- Ishvara-Pranidhana, Trusting life

Kripalu Yoga is the most advantageous practice for a person living an active life in society. Success in life requires both mind power (chitta) and life force (prana). Chitta and prana usually work independently. While waking, chitta is dominant and controls the body. While sleeping, prana is dominant and controls the body. While practicing Kripalu Yoga, a smooth flow of attention is maintained on the body while gracefully passing from posture to posture. Through regular practice, chitta and prana become friends of equal strength who cooperate closely with one another.

In both kundalini yoga and Kripalu Yoga, it is necessary to awaken the evolutionary power. Without this, it is not possible to develop spiritually. In Kripalu Yoga, the evolutionary power is awakened in its partial and tolerable form. Because chitta and prana are kept at equal strength, kundalini does not manifest in a furious form. This is the way for aspirants to progress spiritually while living a family life in society.

Through Kripalu Yoga, one develops good character and the following worldly powers: personal strength, determination, clear and logical thinking, good memory, creativity, and decisiveness. By directing the life energy with the mind, one can act skillfully and ethically to fulfill his or her noble desires and achieve wealth, pleasure, status, and true virtue.

Unless an aspirant succeeds at willful yoga, embarking on the path of surrender yoga is like trying to jump from the earth to reach the feet of Almighty God. Only through willful yoga does an aspirant come to qualify for the path of surrender.

Swami Kripalu used a technical term to differentiate Kripalu Yoga from other forms of yoga: the kriya of chitta and prana. Its meaning lies at the heart of Kripalu Yoga in all its myriad expressions.

The kriya of chitta and prana is a form of samyama, a term used in the Yoga Sutras and introduced in the discussion of classical yoga. Samyama means “tying together,” and refers to the process of bringing different aspects of your being into a single and powerful focus. Swami Kripalu taught that anyone who intently brings together their mental awareness, the energy of the breath, and the area of strongest sensation in the bodymind into a single point of focus will generate a spontaneous yogic kriya. A kriya is a purifying or healing action.

A kriya has an outer form, typically the asana and pranayama used to stimulate a strong flow of sensation. A kriya also has an inner form, as prana releases deep-seated tensions, uncovers intuitive wisdom, and fosters healing. As practice deepens, kriyas progress from fostering healing to catalyzing evolutionary shifts to the next level of growth and transformation. Advanced kriyas are called by a different name, mudras.

Kripalu Yoga was created and named by Amrit Desai, a close householder disciple who brought Swami Kripalu’s teachings to North America in the 1960s. Desai adapted Swami Kripalu’s teachings on Pashupat kundalini yoga to make them accessible to contemporary practitioners. Up until that point, these teachings had historically been reserved for reclusive monks seeking moksha and not practiced by householders looking to satisfy all four aims of life.

Starting in 1974, Desai began collaborating in this endeavor with the Kripalu ashram community. Over the next 20 years, Desai worked with a large body of Western practitioners, including hundreds of yoga teachers, to develop Kripalu Yoga into a three-stage system for prana awakening, complimented by a holistic off-the-mat lifestyle. A full exposition of the curriculum created during this time period can be found in *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat*.

Designed for Western students, this curriculum did not use Swami Kripalu’s term the kriya of chitta and prana. It used a different term, prana awakening, which was more accessible. A Kripalu Yoga practitioner learns to activate prana through a variety of techniques, including holding postures with proper alignment, breathing deeply, allowing micromovements to occur, and releasing sounds. Any posture held with sufficient duration and intensity will become an energy experience. As prana energy awakens, it naturally guides the practitioner into intuitive actions (kriyas) that remove energy blocks and purify the bodymind.

As energy flow intensifies, this process builds momentum and spontaneous actions (mudras), freeing the practitioner of unnecessary emotional armoring, psychological defenses, and layers of false identification. Over time, all the bodily energies and levels of psychological awareness integrate in the experience of meditation. This integration process, driven by the power of prana, is the core of Kripalu Yoga philosophy and its direct link with the yoga of Swami Kripalu and the Pashupats.

When the kriya of prana and chitta is understood, it can be seen mirrored in all three stages of Kripalu Yoga:

1. Stage One begins with the practice of being present: Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, and Allow. This instruction brings together all the elements of samyama. Stage One practice continues as you learn classic yoga postures and basic pranayama and cultivate compassion and self-acceptance.
2. Stage Two begins as you intensify the willful practice of asana and pranayama. Holding postures with deep breathing amplifies sensation and activates energy. Stage Two includes a set of teachings that help you sustain focus as sensation grows strong and energy builds. These teachings include finding your edge, how to safely move beyond your comfort zone with awareness, micromovements, riding the wave of sensation, and witness consciousness. As all aspects of your being come into the single-pointed focus of samyama, you learn to initiate the process of kriya.
3. Stage Three is about letting go of will, opening to surrender, and allowing the process of kriya to come to completion. The wave of energy driving the kriya has been generated by the power of your willful practice. Intuitive wisdom will emerge if you can allow this wave of energy to crest and a state of flow to arise in the mind.

What distinguishes Kripalu Yoga from Pashupat kundalini yoga is the emphasis on maintaining a balance between energy (prana) and mental awareness (chitta). Using the terminology of Swami Kripalu, Kripalu Yoga is neither a chitta nor a prana yoga. It is a yoga that strengthens awareness (chitta) and raises energy (prana) in a balanced fashion. Where the Pashupats used powerful kriyas and mudras to overwhelm the mind and attain moksha, Kripalu Yoga emphasizes a less intensive level of practice to revitalize the body, clear the mind, and live with greater aliveness and purpose. The goal of Kripalu Yoga is to enable practitioners to forge a direct link to pure awareness and primordial energy, empowering them to attain success in all four domains of life.

The three stages of Kripalu Yoga are not linear. Instead of a progression whose purpose is to get you to Stage Three, the goal is to learn how to use all three stages to ride the wave of energy within the primary kriya of prana and citta. A mature practice integrates all three stages into a dynamic blend of will and surrender that awakens energy, strengthens awareness, and empowers you to transform your life. For practitioners who progress to high levels, the teachings of Kripalu Yoga offer a bridge to the liberation path of hatha yoga.

Conclusion

If you want to learn a particular subject, you should study the most trustworthy literature in that field. If that subject is yoga, you must also strike a balance in your study and practice. The secrets of yoga are revealed only through a combination of continual study and practice. At the holy moment when your experience matches that of the scriptures, your joy will be boundless.

—Swami Kripalu

Swami Kripalu displayed a progressive spirit and held the scientific method in high esteem. Along with studying yoga's classic texts, he encouraged his students to read the inspirational works of contemporary authors and keep abreast of new discoveries in yoga research.

Based on his study of the traditional yoga philosophies, Swami Kripalu came to believe there was a natural progression for practitioners to follow. Practice begins with the dualistic approach of Sankhya, which recognizes the reality of the world and draws a sharp distinction between spirit (purusha) and matter (prakriti). The principles of Sankhya provide a firm foundation for self-care and disciplined practice, both of which are needed to steady the mind and complete the initial purification and strengthening process of hatha yoga.

As practice deepens, the philosophy of Tantra enables a practitioner to leave rigid distinctions behind and explore the interconnectedness of spirit and matter. Instead of purification, Tantra seeks wholeness by integrating the opposites in the powerful process of energy awakening. Tantra philosophy also provides an inspiring framework for integrating spiritual principles into daily life.

As practice enters the domain of raja yoga and the drive for self-realization becomes strong, the nondual teachings of Advaita Vedanta provide guidance on how to make the critical shift from the many to the One. It is interesting that Swami Kripalu's suggested progression is mirrored in the teachings of Vedanta, which are often summarized in the pithy statement "The world is illusion. Brahman alone is real. The world is Brahman."

Swami Kripalu held this progression lightly. His primary guidance was to simply choose one or more classic yoga philosophies to inform practice based on the practitioner's interest and preferences.

Another way the four philosophical schools are integrated into Kripalu Yoga is through the model of chitta and prana. Chitta essentially is the thinking self. In Sankhya, it is the combination of manas (mind), ahankara (ego), and buddhi (witnessing self). Chitta is our rational thinking part.

Prana is usually translated as "life force" and is the prime mover of all actions. It can be seen as the energy behind desire and fear. As a later expression of the concept of maya that occurs in

Vedanta, the updated notion of prana emerges in Sankhya, as the primary force that causes the three gunas to function and influence the five elements.

Vedanta and Sankhya are often called chitta paths. They teach that prana causes disturbances that lead to pain. They encourage the development of strong chitta to cut through desire and fear with penetrating insight. One cultivates strong chitta by practicing disciplines, which in modern psychological terms we might call practicing delay of gratification or impulse control. Both Vedanta and Sankhya teach that when chitta is stronger than prana, one can make clearer decisions and act with integrity.

Tantra and hatha yoga are often called prana paths. They teach that even though prana may cause trouble, when we cut ourselves off from prana we increase a sense of separation and alienation from our own knowing. We might feel peace, but it is the peace of isolation. We have separated ourselves from our passion and from the world. On a prana path, practitioners would create a safe, contained environment. They would practice alone in locked rooms. They practiced pranayama and postures with long holding times to raise the prana. When the prana was strong, they allowed it to move freely through their body, mind, and heart. The strong prana generated spontaneous movement and an uncensored flow of emotion. By dissolving the ego and mind in the prana, the practitioners experienced a profound sense of oneness with the universe.

While the various systems of philosophy employ the respective terms to narrate subtle dynamics, this core experience of dissolving to realize yoga, or union of consciousness between the microcosm and macrocosm, was consistently sanctified and cultivated. In that state, all memories melted away, as did all fear and any awareness of separation. The practitioners had transcended the world and merged with spirit. By experiencing this merging daily, their attachments to worldly activities faded and they came to “live in spirit” as *jivan muktis*—living, liberated beings. Swami Kripalu believed that raising prana generated dissolving experiences characterized by profound oneness. The strengthened prana also magnified inner experiences. Subliminal desires and suppressed emotions would rise and could be felt.

If the prana alone were strengthened, the mind could become disturbed and the practitioner would be driven in ways that could be self-destructive. If the chitta were also strengthened and made a little stronger than the prana, it could observe the strong prana while staying detached from action. The strong prana would reveal hidden desires and fears that would normally be suppressed. If the chitta were to act on these desires and fears, one could be hurt or hurt others. But, if the strong chitta could stay in the observing role, the practitioner could see themselves from a very unique perspective. By taking responsibility for what one observed, transformation could occur.

By raising the prana while keeping chitta strong, a churning happens in the body, emotions and mind. To guide that churning skillfully is the heart of Kripalu Yoga.

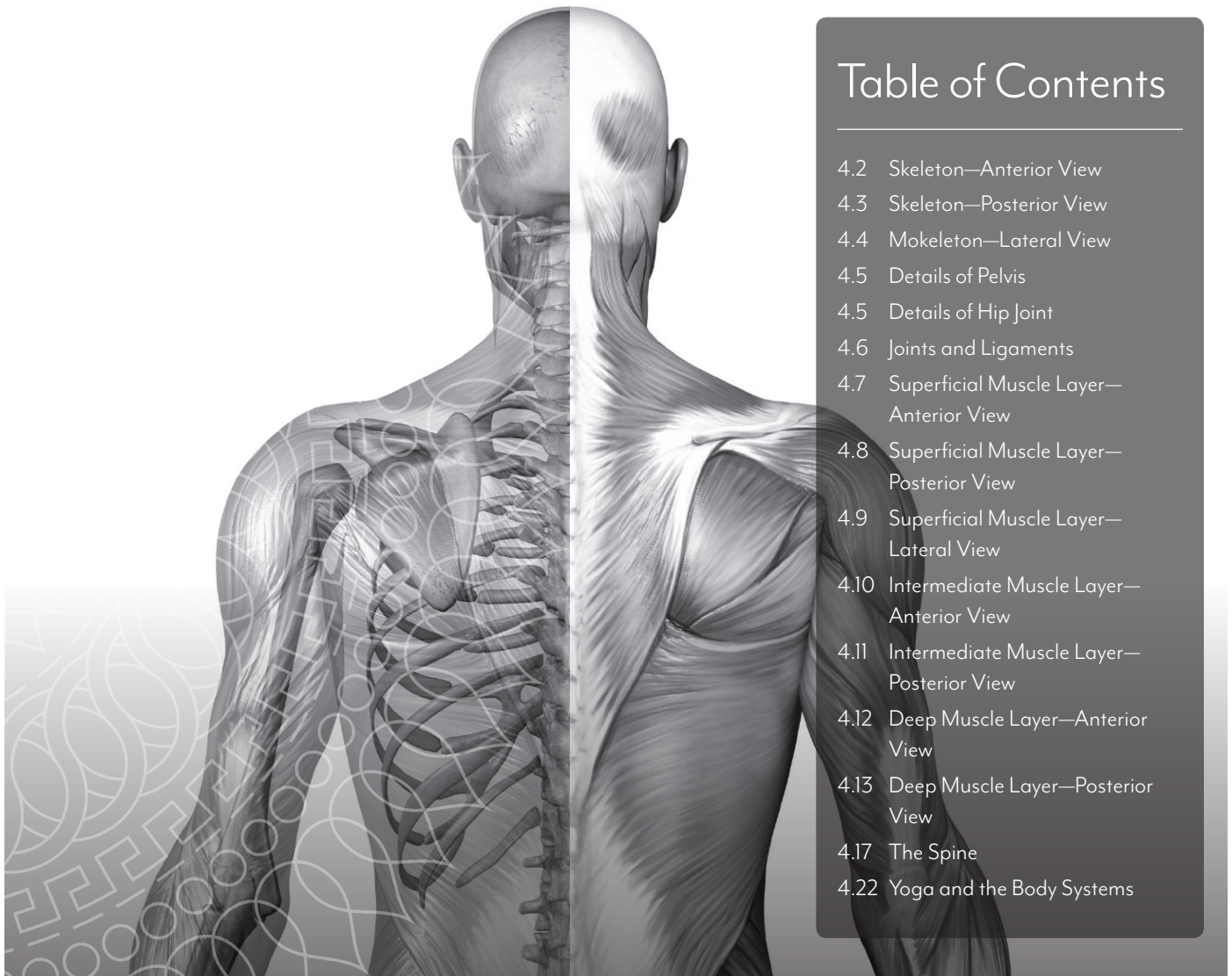
This section was written to introduce you to the primary schools of yoga philosophy and how they relate to the Kripalu Yoga curriculum in which you are training. The following references and resources are recommended for your ongoing education:

- Swami Rajarshi Muni, *Yoga, the Ultimate Spiritual Path*
- Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*
- John Mundahl, *Sunrise of Joy: The Lost Darshans of Swami Kripalu*
- Richard Faulds, *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat*
- Richard Faulds, *Sayings of Swami Kripalu*
- Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Kundalini Tantra*

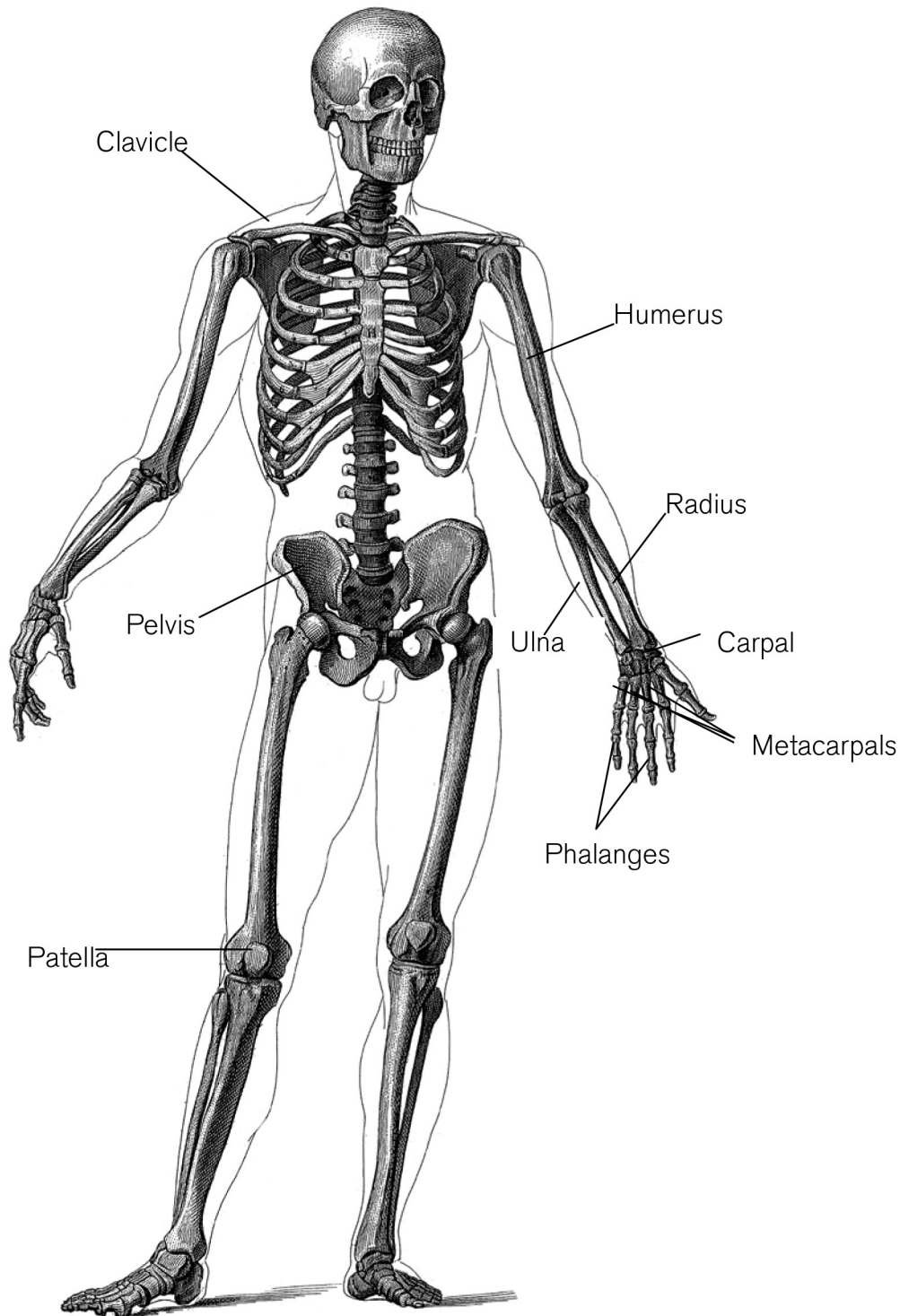
Notes

Anatomy, Physiology, and Kinesiology

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

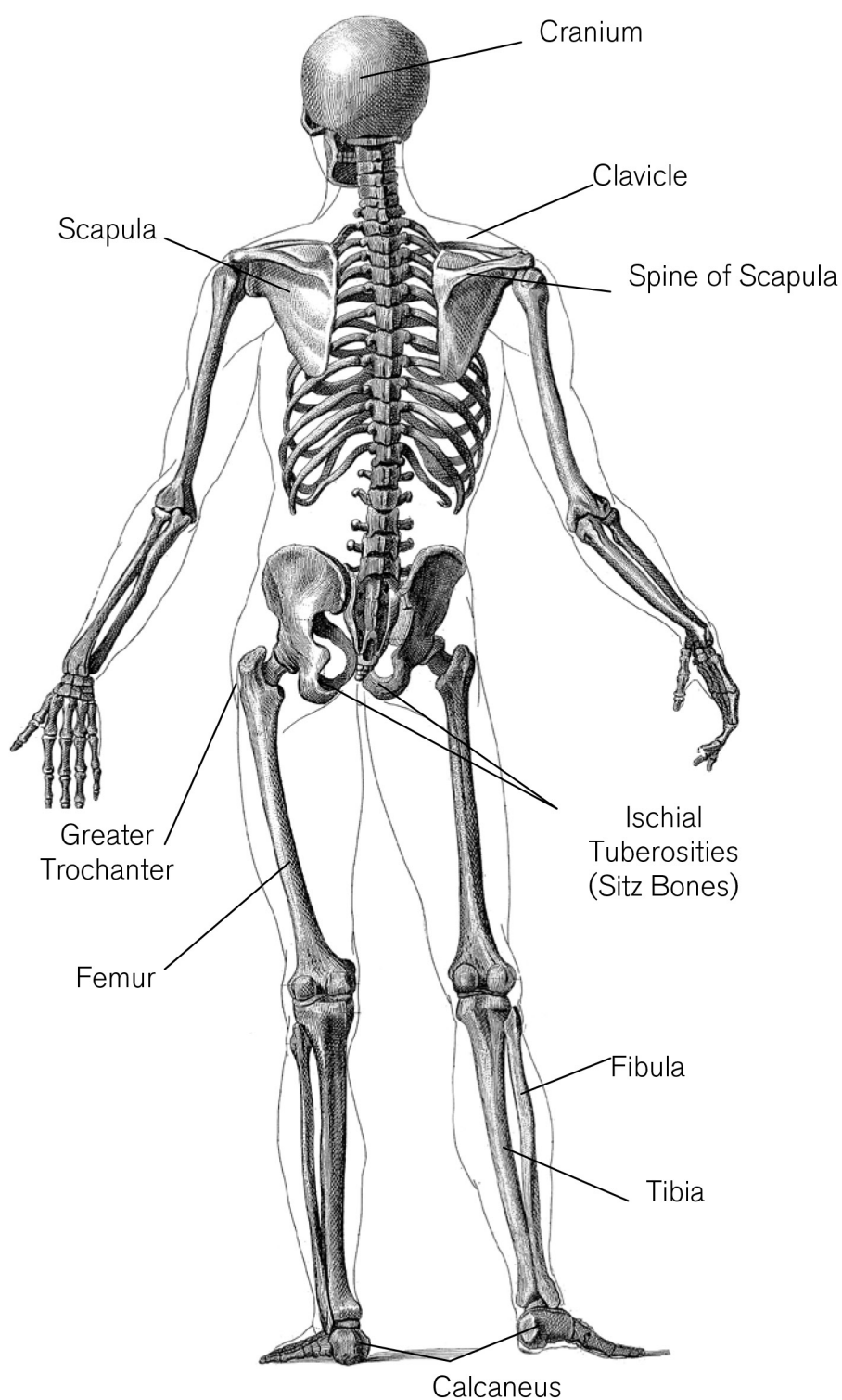


Skeleton—Anterior View



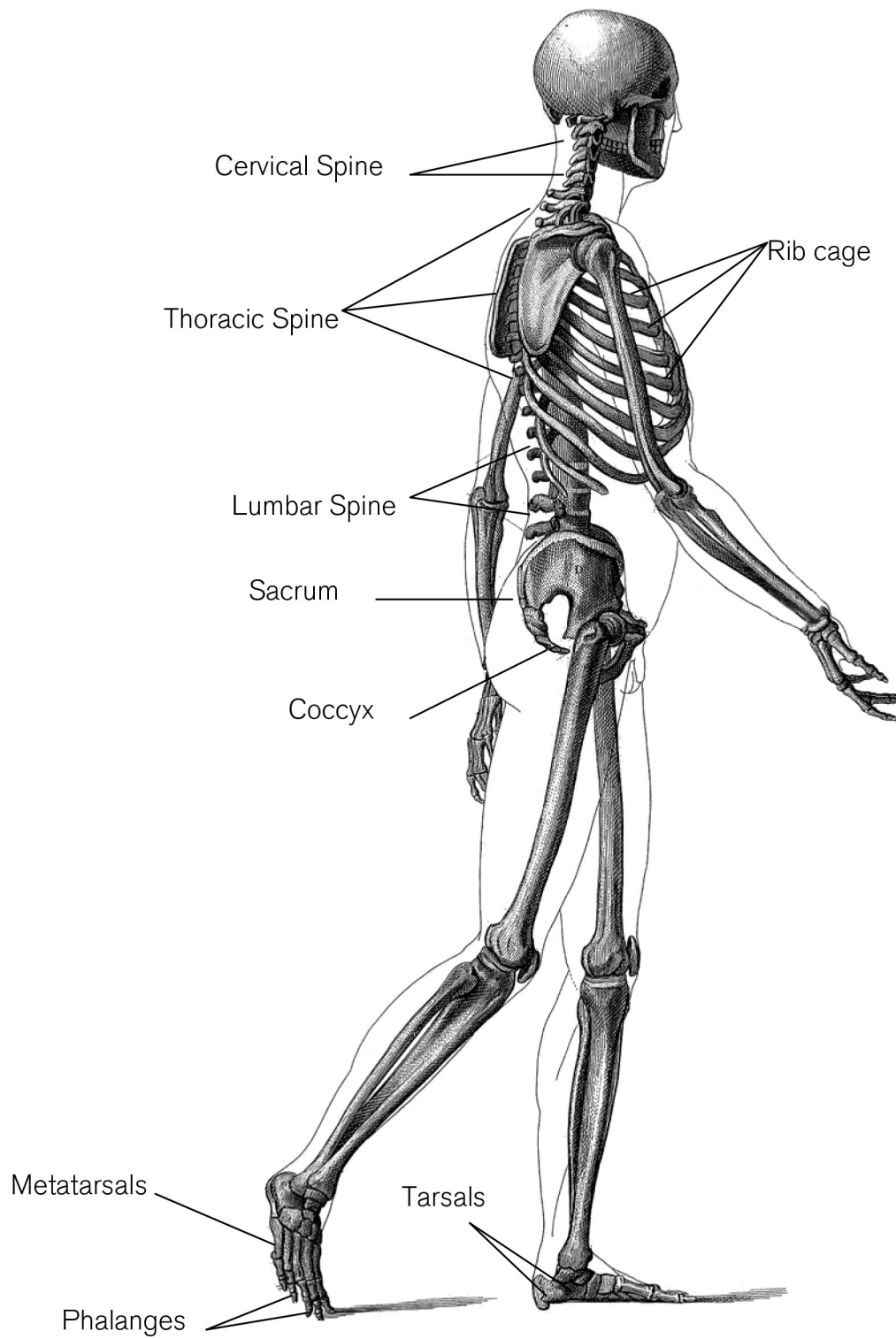
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Skeleton—Posterior View



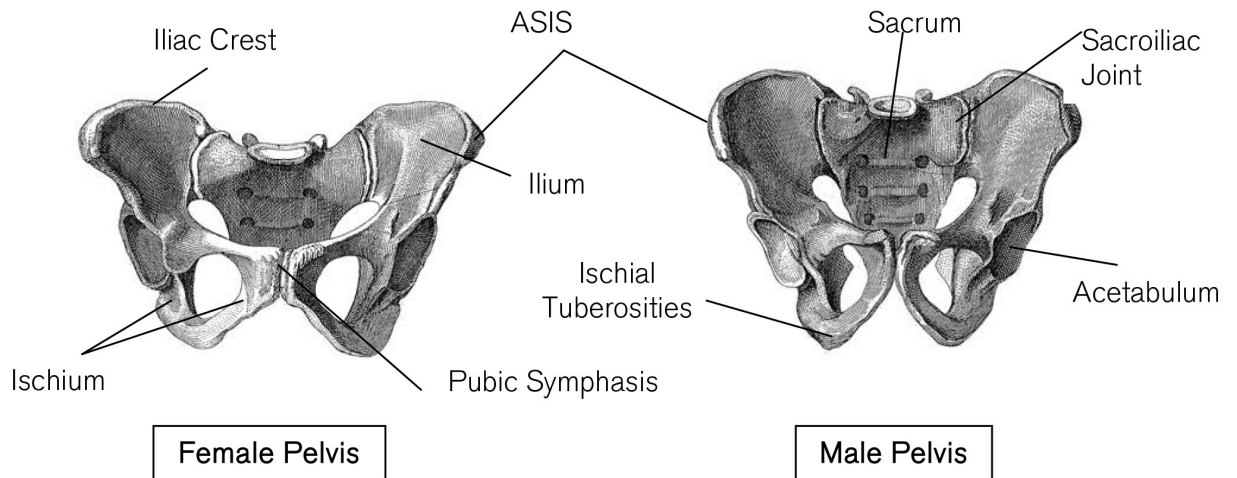
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Skeleton—Lateral View



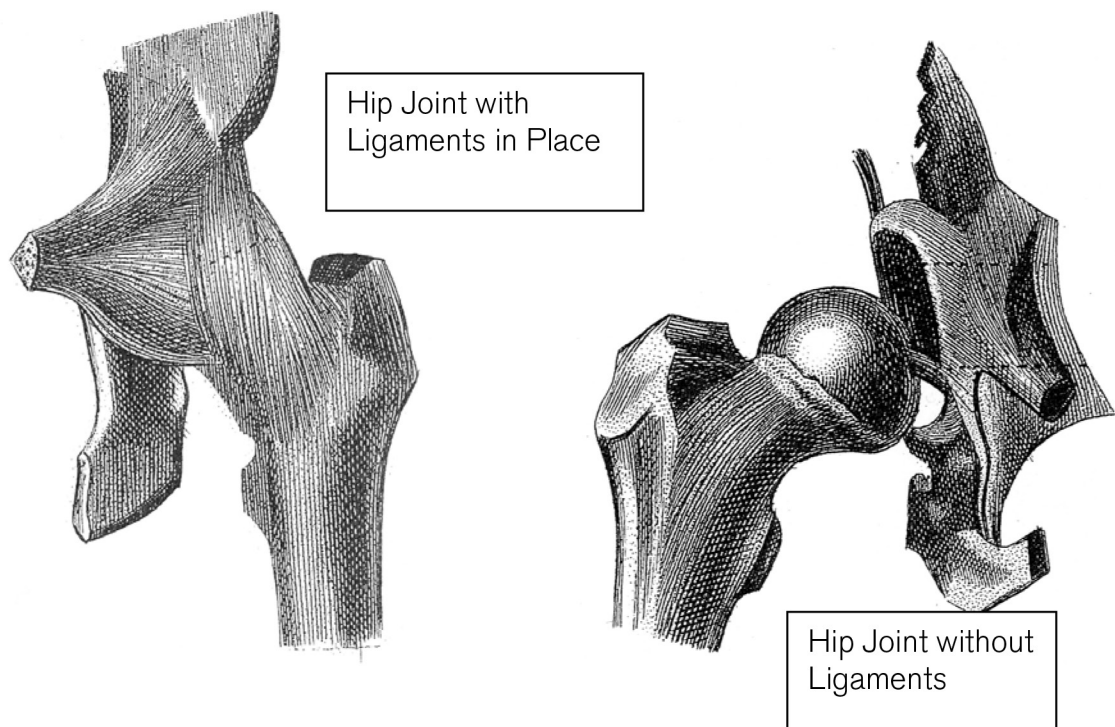
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Details of Pelvis



The female pelvis is proportionally wider than the male pelvis from both front to back and side to side. The aperture at the bottom of the pelvis is wider as well, to facilitate childbirth.

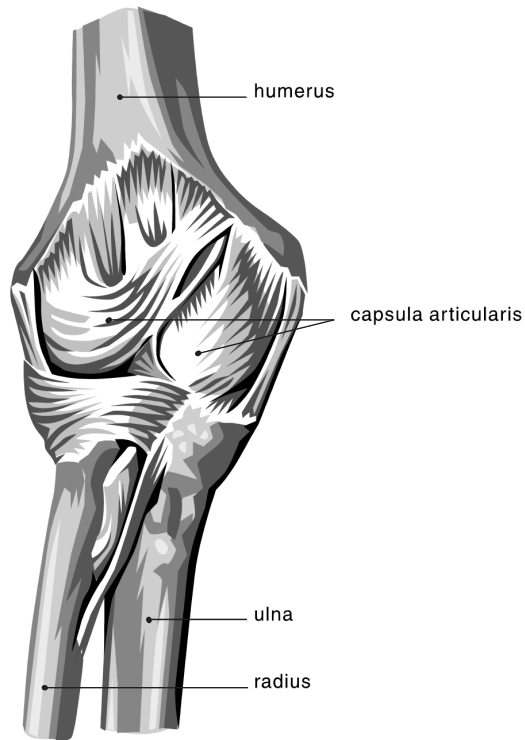
Details of Hip Joint



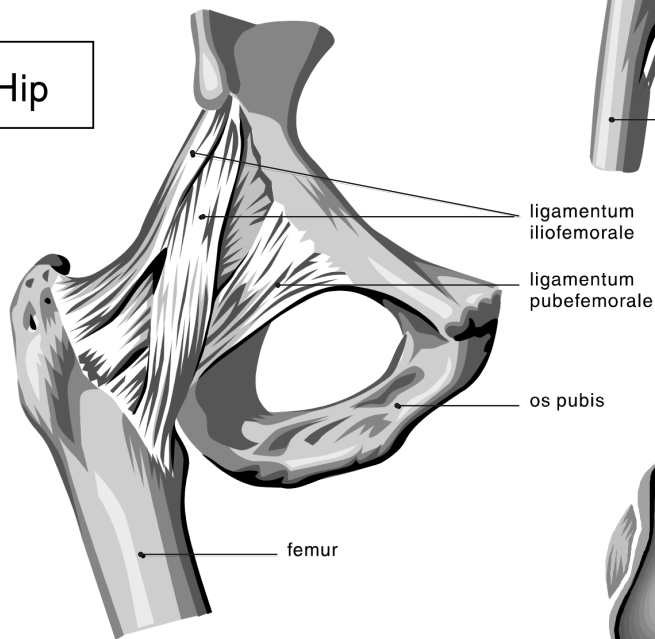
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Joints and Ligaments

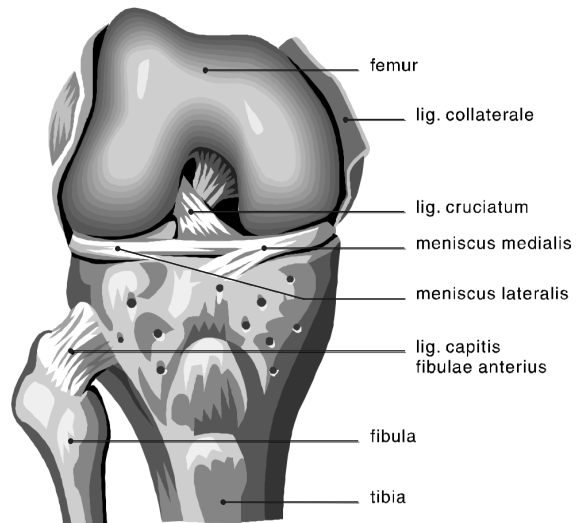
Elbow



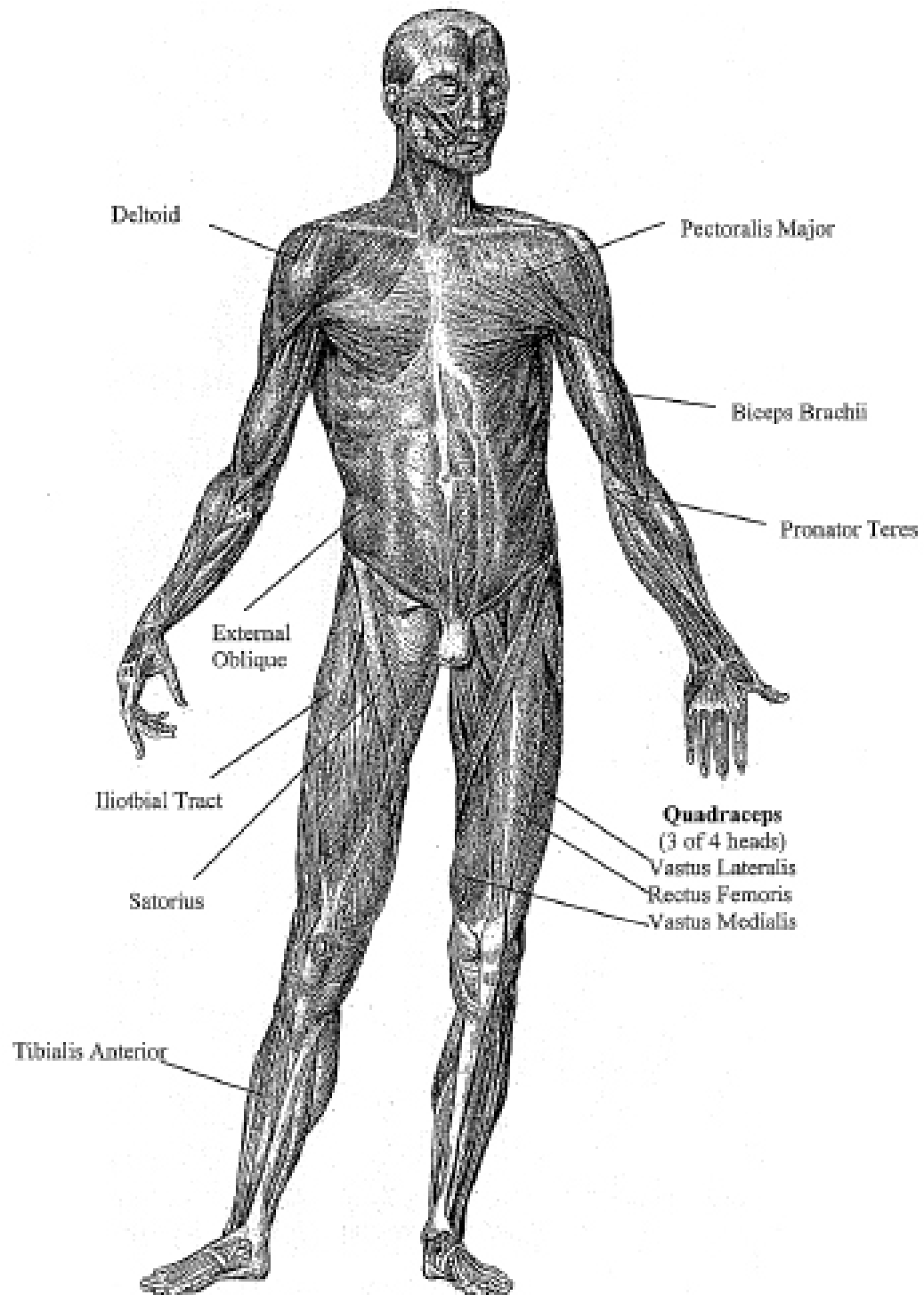
Hip



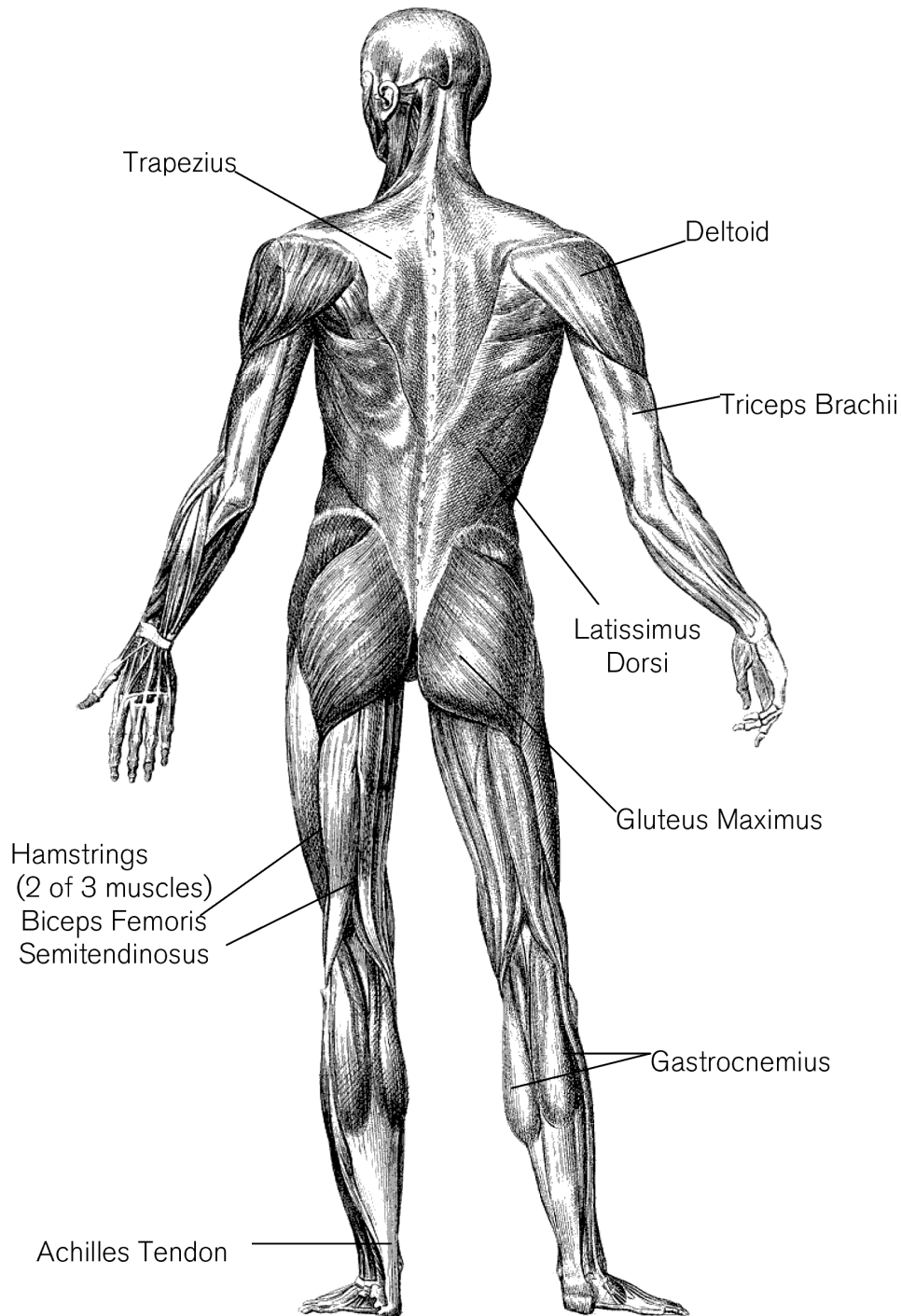
Knee



Superficial Muscle Layer— Anterior View

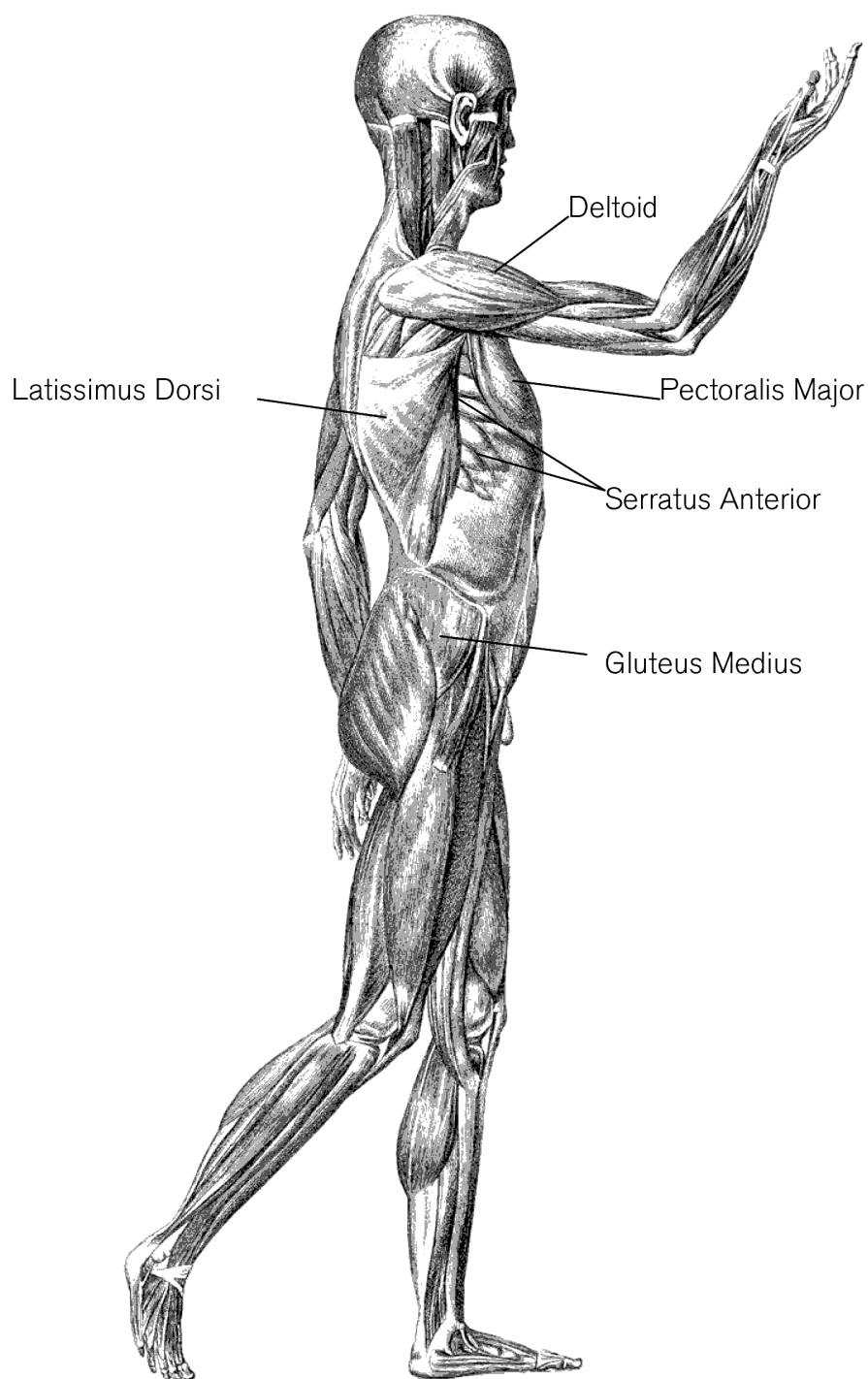


Superficial Muscle Layer— Posterior View



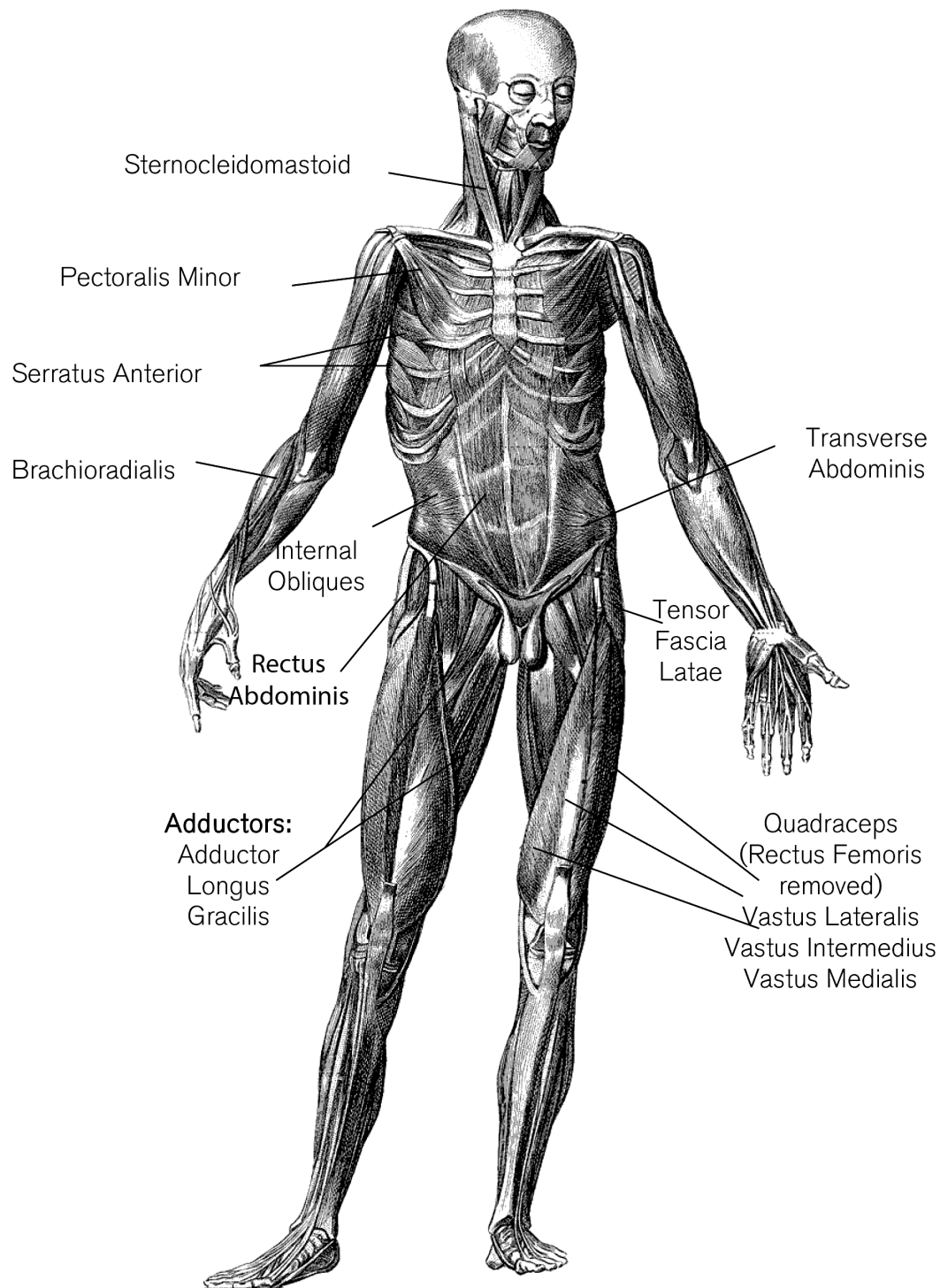
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Superficial Muscle Layer— Lateral View



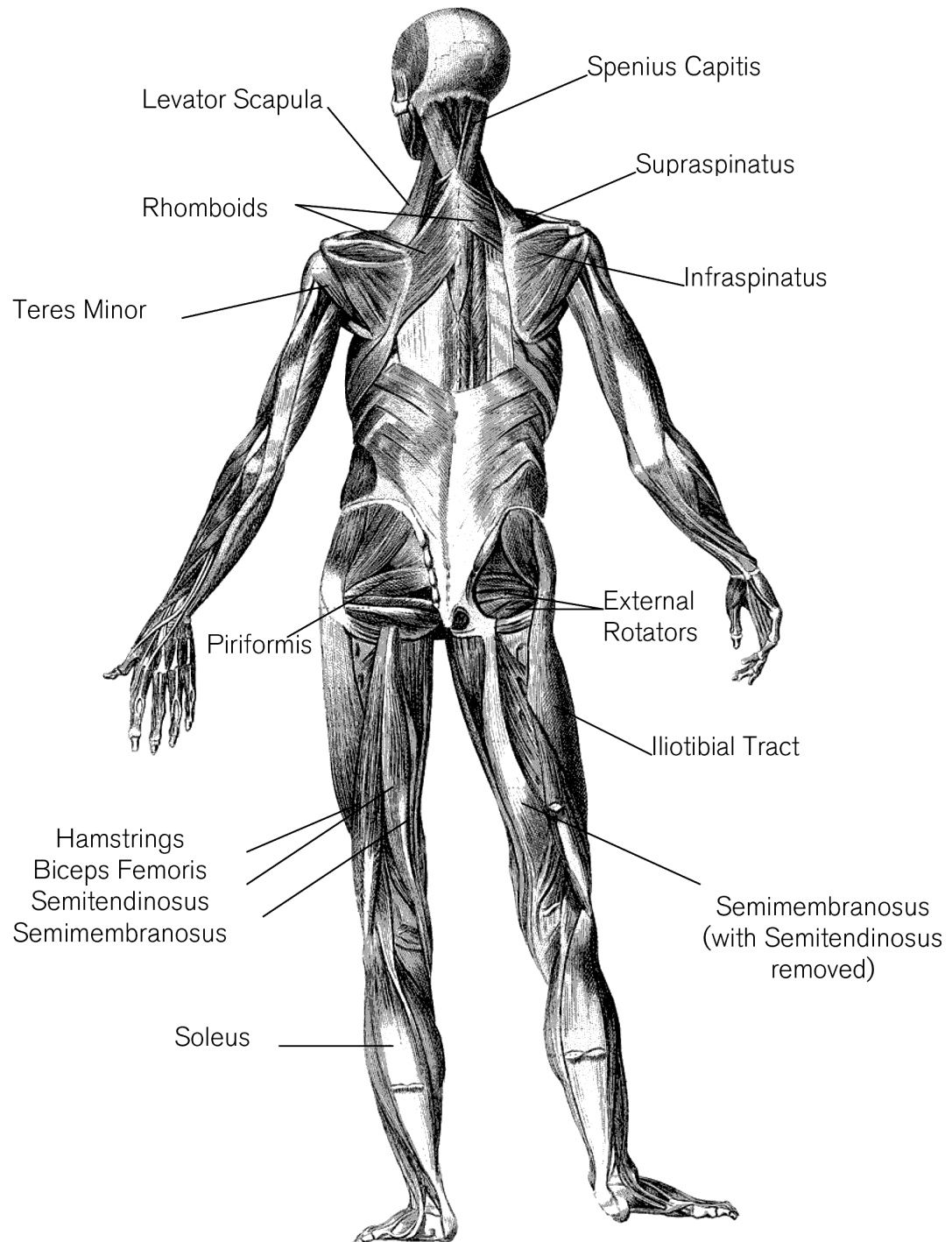
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Intermediate Muscle Layer— Anterior View



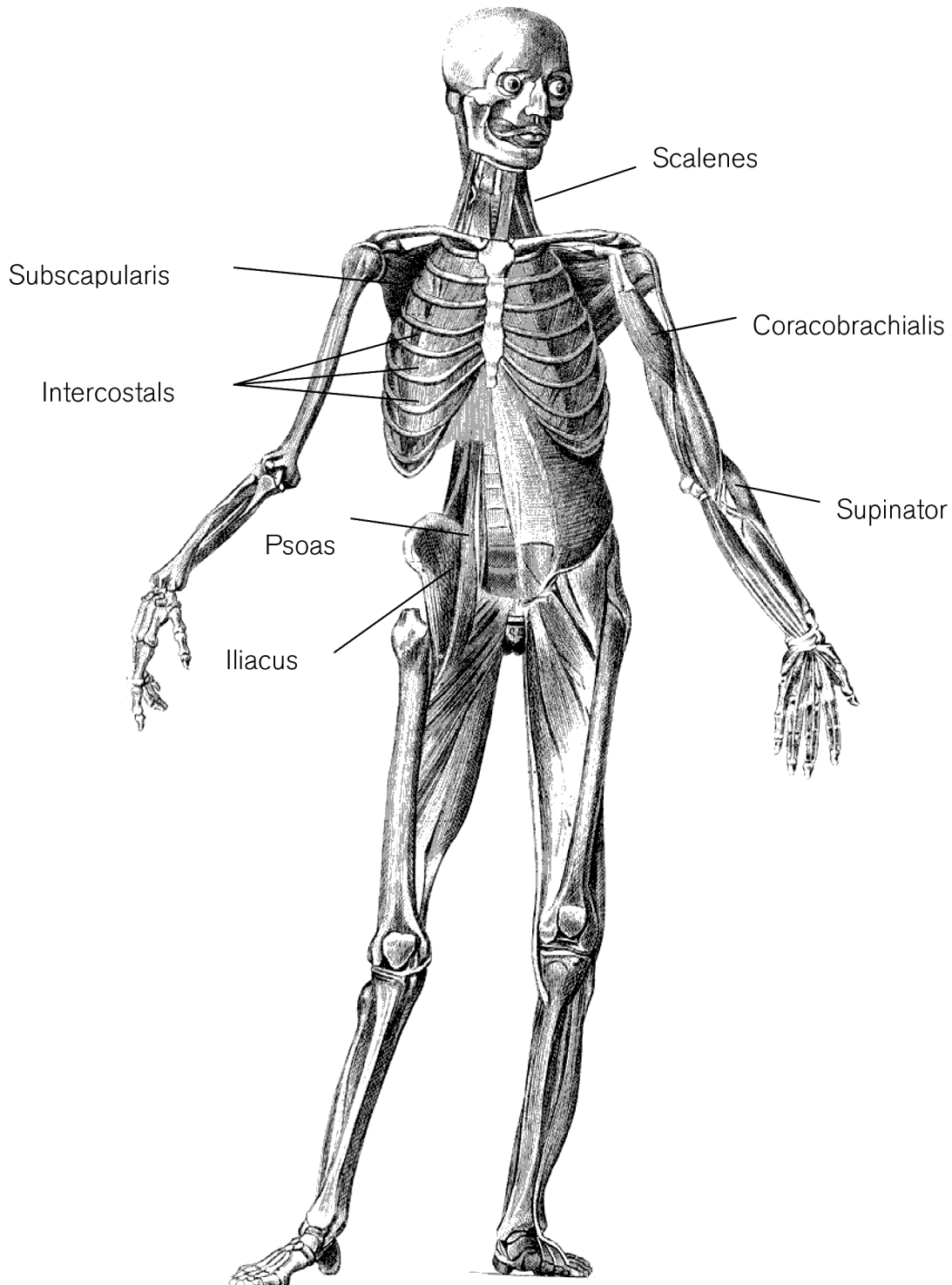
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Intermediate Muscle Layer— Posterior View



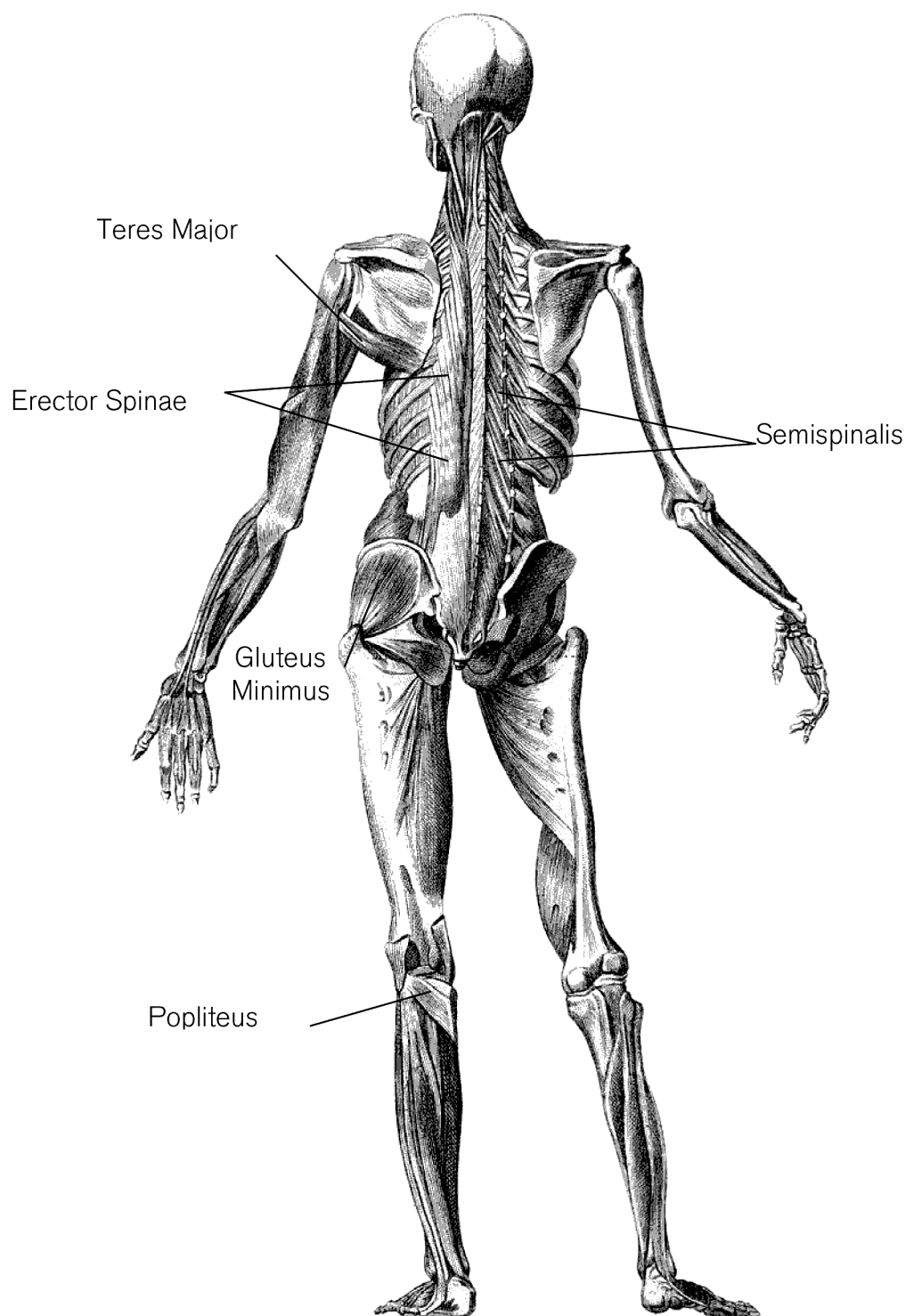
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Deep Muscle Layer—Anterior View



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Deep Muscle Layer—Posterior View



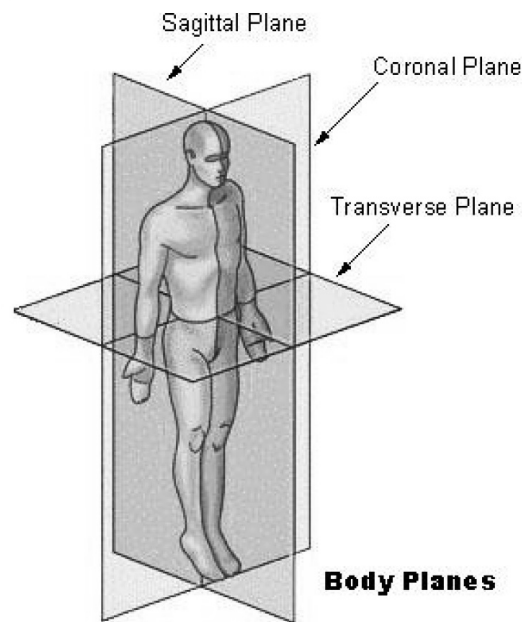
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Basic Anatomical Terminology

- *Anatomical position* is when most of the joints of the body are in neutral position and the muscles are relaxed, hands facing forward, feet slightly turned out. It looks like Corpse pose as opposed to Mountain pose.
- *Axial skeleton* is the part of the body that makes up the torso and head. It includes the ribs, spine, and cranium, but does not include the shoulder and pelvic girdles.
- *Appendicular skeleton* is comprised of the shoulder and pelvic girdles; the arms, forearms, and hands; and the thighs, legs, and feet.

Planes of Movement

- *Sagittal plane*: Divides the body into sides.
 - > Medial means closer to the center of the body.
 - > Lateral means closer to the outside of the body.
- *Coronal plane*: Divides the body into front and back.
 - > Anterior refers to the front of the body.
 - > Posterior refers to the back of the body.
- *Transverse plane*: Divides the body from top to bottom.
 - > Superior is closer to the head.
 - > Inferior is closer to the feet.
- *Proximal and distal* only apply to the appendicular skeleton.
 - > Proximal means closer to the axial skeleton.
 - > Distal means further away from the axial skeleton.



Types of Joints

- *Fibrous joints*: Immoveable joints such as the skull sutures, or partly moveable joints such as the radioulnar joint (the joint between the two bones of the forearm).
- *Cartilaginous joints*: Immoveable or partly moveable joints connected by fibrocartilage. Some of these joints permit limited movement, such as the discs between the vertebrae and the costal cartilage connecting the ribs to the sternum. The pubic symphysis is only moveable during childbirth. Fibrocartilage has the consistency of rubber or soft plastic. It enhances resistance to tensile and impact forces. It is avascular (does not have its own blood supply) and receives nutrition through diffusion. Because of this, it does not repair easily after injury.

- *Synovial joints:* Synovial joints are freely moveable within the limits of the bony architecture. They connect two or more bones within a joint capsule. The ends of the bones, which lie within the joint capsule, are covered with hyaline cartilage, a harder substance than fibrocartilage. The joint capsule itself arises from the periosteum, which covers the rest of the bone. The joint capsule is thickest where movement is limited and thinner where movement is allowed. The joint capsule is lined with a synovial membrane that secretes synovial fluid to lubricate the joint. Gentle movement enhances the secretion of synovial fluid from the membrane and also warms the fluid so that it becomes thinner, making it better able to flow over and penetrate the hyaline cartilage. This provides more cushioning for the joint and allows the ends of the bones to glide more smoothly past each other.

Types of Synovial Joints

- *Hinge:* Convex surface of one bone fits against the concave side of another bone. Hinge joints permit movement in only one plane. Examples are the elbow and interphalangeal joints. At the elbow, the ulna has a cup-shaped depression that keeps the joint from extending past 180 degrees.
- *Ball-and-socket:* One surface, is basically spherical and the other is cup-shaped. Examples are the hip and shoulder. Ball-and-socket joints permit movement in all directions.
- *Gliding:* Consists of generally flat surfaces such as the facet joints of the vertebrae and the intercarpal and intertarsal joints.
- *Ellipsoid:* A reduced ball-and-socket configuration in which movement in one plane is largely excluded, such as at the wrist and knee joints.
- *Pivot:* A ring of bone rotating around an axle of bone, such as the atlas/axis of the cervical spine.
- *Saddle:* Two concave surfaces articulating with each other, as seen in the carpal/metacarpal joint of the thumb. Permits all movements except rotation.

Joint Movements

- *Flexion:* A movement on the sagittal plane that reduces the angle of the joint is called flexion. An exception is the shoulder joint, in which flexion lifts the arm overhead, increasing the angle of the joint. Flexion at the ankle joint is called dorsiflexion because it involves more than one joint.
 - > An example of flexion is Standing Squat, where the ankles, knees, hips, and shoulder joints are all in flexion.
- *Extension:* A movement in the sagittal plane that increases the angle of the joint is called extension. Extension usually straightens a joint. At the shoulder joint, it would be bringing the arm to resting or backward behind the body. Abnormal extension is called hyperextension. Extension at the ankle is called plantar flexion because it involves not just the ankle but movement in the tarsals as well.
 - > An example of extension is Boat, where the ankles, knees, hips, spine, and shoulders are all in extension.

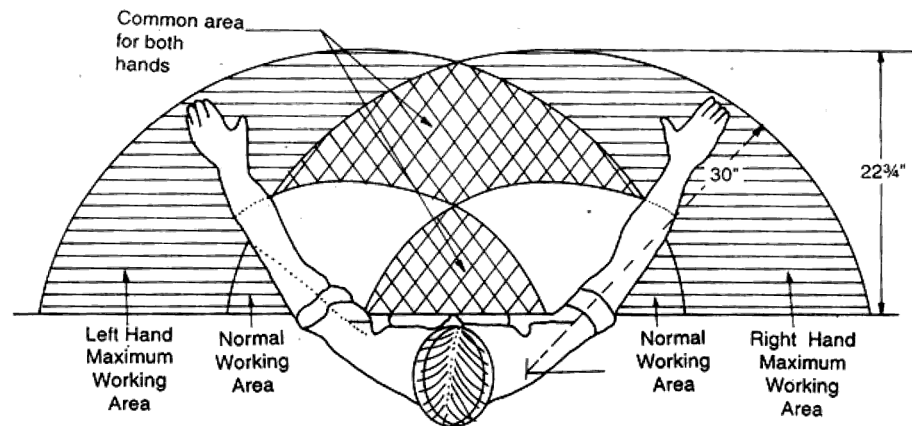
- *Adduction*: A movement on the coronal plane that takes a part of the body toward the middle is called adduction.
 - > An example of adduction is Eagle, where the arms and legs are both adducted.
- *Abduction*: A movement on the coronal plane taking a part of the body away from the torso is called abduction.
 - > An example of abduction is Five-Pointed Star, in which the arms and legs are both abducted.
- *Lateral flexion*: In the torso, a movement on the coronal plane is called lateral flexion.
 - > An example of lateral flexion is Half Moon.
- *Lateral rotation*: A movement on the transverse plane that takes a part of the body outward is called lateral rotation. Rotation only occurs at ball-and-socket, gliding, and pivot joints. In the neck rotation, is called left and right rotation. Often we think that when we circle the arm or the leg, we are rotating that appendage, but the actual term for that movement—which is a combination of flexion, adduction, extension, and adduction—is circumduction.
 - > When we turn our front toes out in Triangle and Side Warrior, we are laterally rotating the femur in the hip socket.
- *Medial rotation*: A movement on the transverse plane that takes a part of the body inward is called medial rotation.
 - > When we turn our back toes in during Triangle and Side Warrior, we are medially rotating the femur in the hip socket.
- *Supination/pronation*: A movement at the radial/ulnar joint, which turns the palm up and down from the elbow. Supination is palm up, and pronation is palm down.
- *Inversion/eversion*: Movements at the tarsal joints that turn the soles in (inversion) and out away from each other (eversion).
- *Anteversion* means tilting the pelvis forward (as in Dog Tilt).
- *Retroversion* means tilting the pelvis backward (as in Cat Tilt).

The Shoulders

The shoulder girdle is a complex joint and special terminology is used for its movements. If not for the mobility of the shoulder girdle, there would be significantly more restriction on the movements we make with our arms.

- *Elevation/depression*: Lifting the shoulder blades, or scapula, is referred to as elevation, and lowering the scapula is referred to as depression.

- *Protraction/retraction:* Movement of the scapula away from the spine is called protraction, and movement of the scapula back in toward the spine is called retraction.
- *Upward/downward rotation:* When the scapula slides up and out at the same time, that is upward rotation; when it slides in and down at the same time, that is downward rotation.

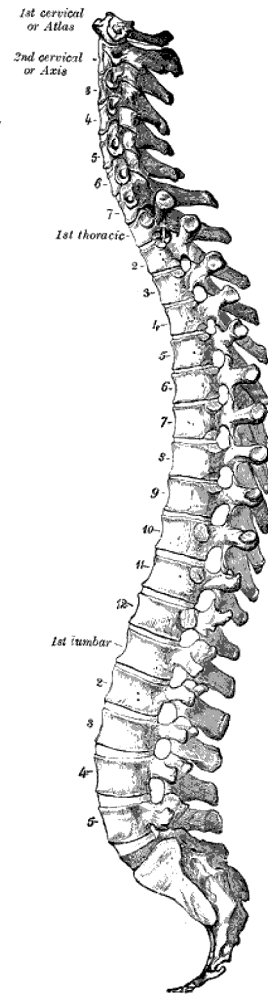


The Spine

The spine can move in many directions: flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation on its own axis. Movement at each joint segment is small, but the combined movement of the entire spine is large. This allows the spine to be mobile and also be protective of the spinal cord. Other than the atlas and axis, each vertebra is made up of a body and a vertebral arch. Each vertebra also has several surfaces that articulate (fit together) with the adjacent vertebrae. The way in which these surfaces are oriented and interact determines the range of motion in that segment of the spine. These surfaces are called articular facets (adjoining surfaces that face each other on the vertebral arch), spinous processes (which project from the back of the vertebral arch), and transverse processes (which project from the sides of the vertebral arch).

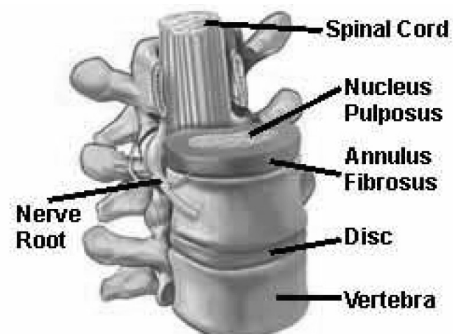
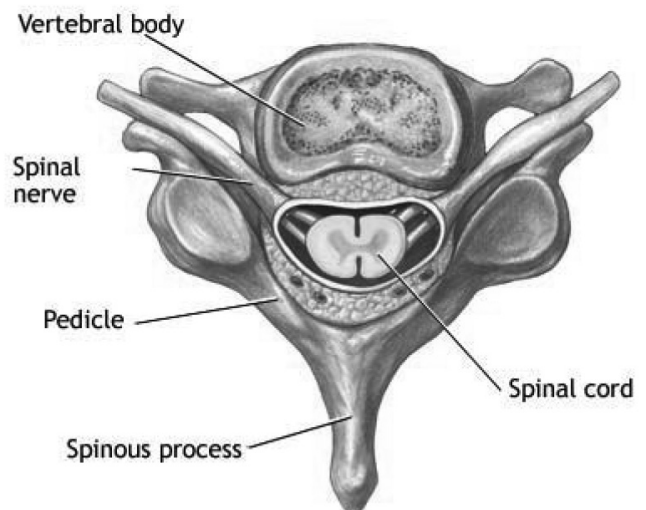
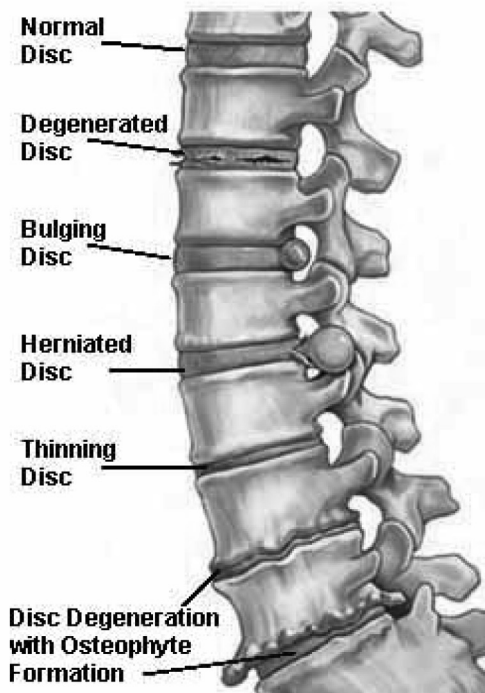
- *Cervical:* seven vertebrae in all.
 - > The atlas and the axis are the first and second vertebrae of the cervical spine and together form a pivot joint. Most of the rotation in the cervical spine occurs at this joint. In the rest of the cervical spine, the bodies of the vertebrae are small and curved.
 - > Articular facets are shallow (45-degree angle), and lateral flexion is always accompanied by a slight amount of rotation caused by this angle.

- Spinous processes are shorter than in the thoracic spine, but are relatively long, to provide support for the head and neck. They point straight out rather than at a downward angle, but when the head is dropped back, they overlap each other and provide a bony restraint.
- C7 has the longest spinous process and can be easily palpitated. The transverse processes are short and broad and limit side bending.
- Normal position of the cervical spine is lordosis (curving toward the front).
- The cervical spine is the most mobile in all directions.
- *Thoracic:* twelve vertebrae in all, with larger bodies and discs.
 - These vertebrae have long spinous processes to help prevent hyperextension. The transverse processes articulate with the ribs. All movements are possible, but most movements are limited by the rib cage, especially flexion.
 - Articular facets are almost flat and are located on the circumference of a circle. This facilitates rotation, which is the easiest movement of the thoracic spine.
 - Normal position of the thoracic spine is kyphosis (curving toward the back).
- *Lumbar:* five vertebrae in all, with massive bodies and thick discs.
 - Short spinous processes, which allow lots of extension. Transverse processes are broad.
 - Articular surfaces are straight forward and back (up and down), which limits rotation.
 - Normal position of the lumbar spine is lordosis, giving the lumbar spine a tendency toward extension.
- *Sacrum:* five fused vertebrae.
 - Kyphosis is severe.
 - L5 wants to slide forward off the first sacral vertebra, but is not allowed to by the placement of the articular surfaces.
 - The sacrum forms a cartilaginous joint with the innominate bones (ilium). There is almost no movement at the sacroiliac joint.



- *Points of hypermobility:* There are certain areas of the spine that can easily be overused due to the way they are constructed. These tend to be areas where transitions occur from one type of vertebra to another:
 - C1/Occiput—Flexion and extension
 - C1/C2—Rotation
 - C7/T1—Flexion
 - T11/T12—Rotation (due to floating ribs, as opposed to fixed ribs)
 - T12/L1—Flexion and lateral flexion
 - L5/S1—Extension
 - Because of these natural tendencies, it is important to strengthen the spinal muscles before making them more flexible. Working on flexibility before ensuring proper support may lead to injury.
- *Movements of shoulder and effects on spine.* Flexion of the arms is associated with extension of the spine. Extension of the arms behind the back causes flexion of the spine. Adduction causes lateral bending to that side, and abduction causes lateral bending to the opposite side.

Examples Of Disc Problems



Muscles

- Muscle makes up between 70–85 percent of the body's weight.
- There are three types of muscles in the body:
 - Skeletal muscles, which move the skeleton.
 - Cardiac muscles, which compress the heart cavity.
 - Smooth muscles, which are the involuntary muscles of the other systems, such as digestion and elimination.

How Skeletal Muscles Work

- Two main types of contraction:
 - An isometric contraction is a contraction in which the muscle engages but the length of the muscle does not change.
 - An isotonic contraction refers to a muscle being engaged when its length changes. This can be either a concentric contraction or an eccentric contraction.

A concentric contraction happens when a muscle is stimulated and shortens as it pulls the two sides of the joint closer together.

An eccentric contraction happens when a muscle increases in length under tension while resisting gravity.

Usually concentric and eccentric contractions happen on opposite sides of a joint. For instance, when the biceps brachii concentrically contracts to flex the elbow, the triceps brachii eccentrically contracts to allow the elbow to flex. The opposite happens when the elbow is extended. If the elbow is held in flexion, it becomes an isometric contraction.

The muscle that concentrically contracts to cause movement is called the agonist (prime mover), and the muscle that eccentrically contracts to oppose that movement is called the antagonist. This system of mutual opposition works to create stabilization in the bones and joints.

When two or more muscles work together to do the same thing, they are called synergists. An example would be the adductor muscles, which work as a group. Anything other than the opposing muscle that opposes a movement is called resistance (such as a weight or gravity).

Fixator muscles stabilize proximal joints during weight-bearing functions of more distal joints. For example, the serratus anterior stabilizes the scapula when the arms are lifting weight.

- It is important to remember that muscles do not work in a vacuum. Any movement produces movement in other parts of the body, either to facilitate the movement or to compensate for the movement. Allow the body to stay in balance.

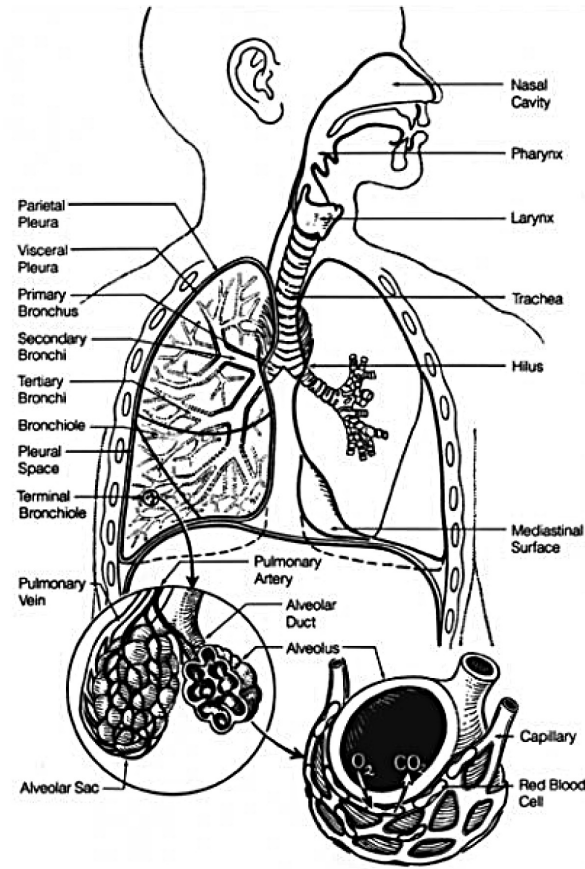
Stretch Reflexes

- The myotatic stretch reflex, or knee-jerk reflex:
 - a. This reflex acts to help us absorb shocks by quickly contracting the muscle to keep us from collapsing (such as when we get up off a chair). It is known as the “knee-jerk reflex” because it is especially sensitive in the large antigravity muscles, such as the quadriceps, and can be activated when the nervous system gets a message for the muscle to contract, such as when the doctor taps your quadriceps tendon with a reflex hammer and your foot kicks forward.
 - b. Stimulating the muscle fibers repetitively in this way serves to shorten the muscle involved and diminish flexibility. This can be seen in runners whose hamstrings become short over time. In hatha yoga, we want to minimize the stimulation of this reflex because it serves to limit stretch. Therefore, doing things in a bouncy way, such as jumping in and out of standing postures will reduce the ability to stretch.
 - c. What we refer to in this program as the “stretch reflex” is actually the overriding of the myotatic reflex through extended gentle holding, which invites the muscle to lengthen.
- *The clasp knife reflex:* This reflex acts to resist the relaxation of a muscle up to a certain point and then to suddenly release. It can be demonstrated by the action that occurs in an arm-wrestling match, when the two sides appear evenly matched for a while and then suddenly one collapses. It can work in hatha yoga, as in the following example: Fold forward at the hips with the legs straight, to get a frame of reference. Then bend the knees until you can bring your torso against your thighs. Clasp your arms behind your legs, and then press up strongly into your sitz bones. Hold for 30 seconds, then release. Fold forward again with straight legs and see how far forward you can come.

Yoga and the Body Systems

Respiratory

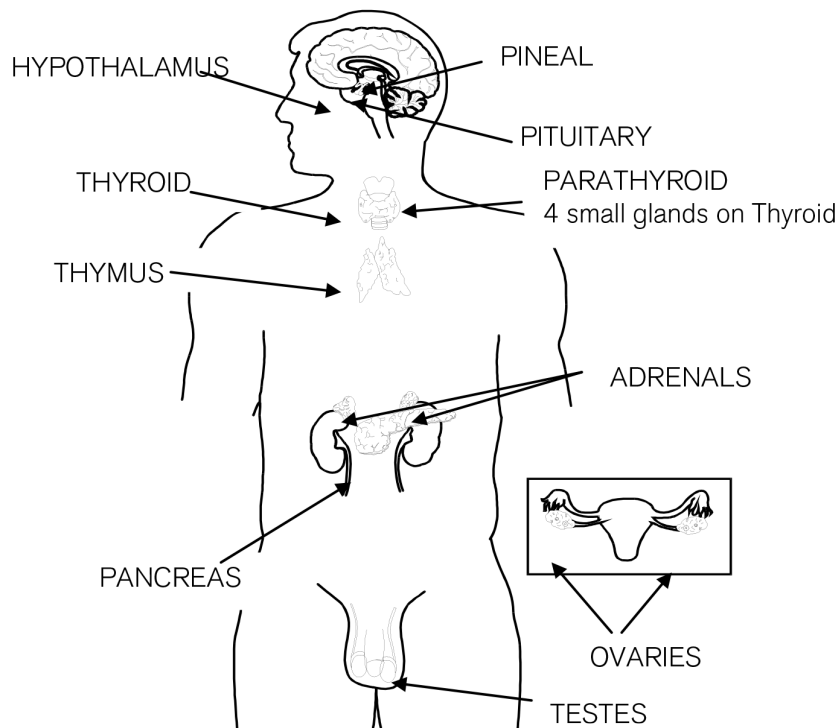
- *What is it?* A group of conducting passages that include the nasal cavity (air is warmed and humidified, cilia filter), pharynx (two openings of airway where the mouth and nose meet), larynx (voice box, vocal cords) in the upper tract and trachea (windpipe), bronchi (tree-like structures that connect to the lungs; house alveoli; where exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide takes place), and lungs in the lower tract.
- *What does it do?* Takes in oxygen to fuel the cells and removes carbon dioxide (waste) from the body.
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - Strengthens and expands the lungs through continual deep breathing and specific postures (Cobra, Bridge, Half Moon, Bow/Wheel, Camel, and Fish).
 - Provides more room/vitality for the breath once deep breathing has ceased.



Endocrine

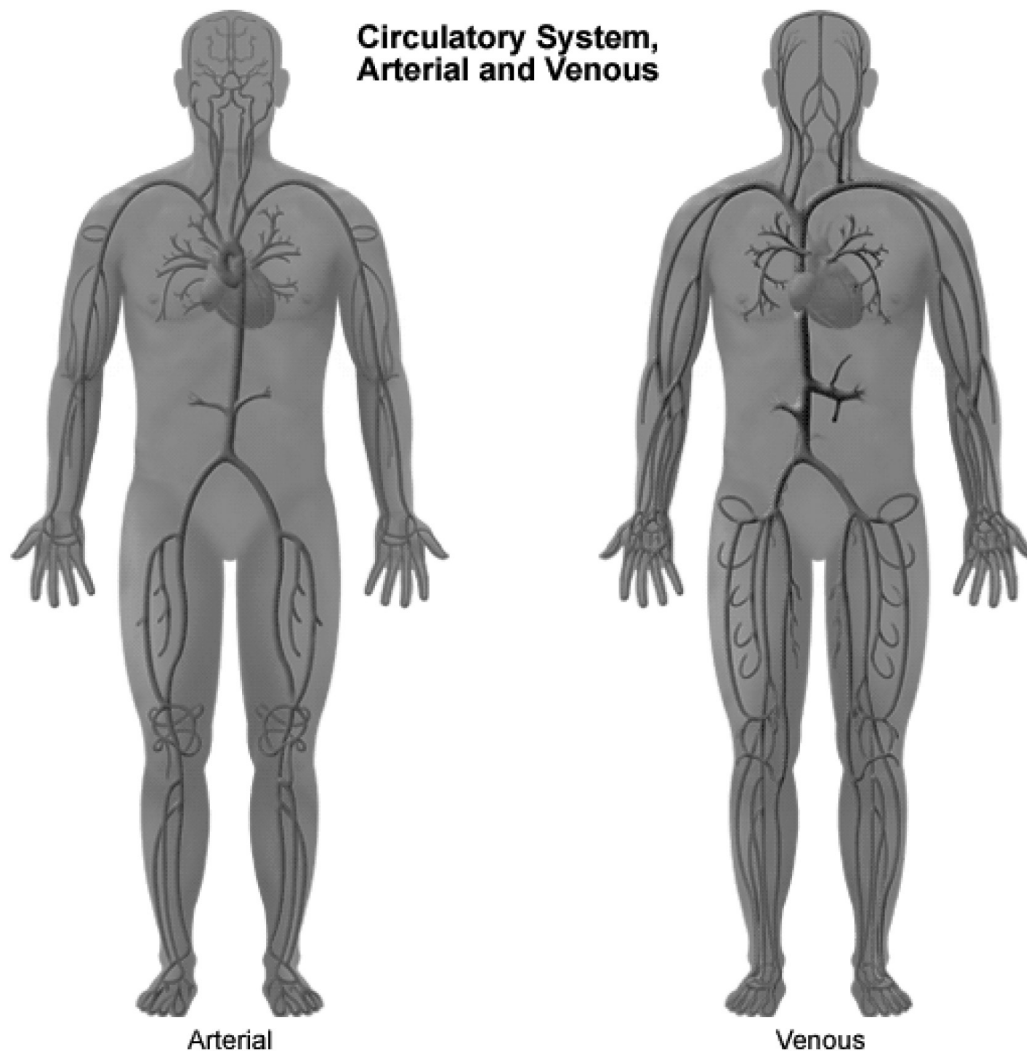
- *What is it?* Series of glands that secrete hormones, or chemical messengers, into the bloodstream.
- *What does it do?* Glands regulate the body's mood, growth, and development; tissue function; metabolism; sexual function; and reproductive processes.
- *The glands* (group of cells)
 - Pineal: melatonin hormone related to sleep.
 - Pituitary: master gland, instructs other glands.

- > Hypothalamus: heart rate, body temperature, blood pressure, memory, senses, and emotional experience.
 - > Thyroid: metabolism, body thermostat.
 - > Parathyroid: calcium and phosphorus in the blood.
 - > Thymus: T-cells (white blood cells), for healthy function of immune system.
 - > Adrenal: produce adrenaline (for fight-or-flight), steroids for inflammation, sugar, water, minerals, and sexual hormones.
 - > Pancreas: digestive juices, blood sugar, and insulin/glycogen.
 - > Ovaries: eggs, estrogen, and progesterone; testes: small sacs, testosterone.
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - > Supports the glands in optimal functioning, which results in less depression, stress, sluggishness, or excess weight gain.
 - > Allows hormone production and release to remain balanced and well-tuned.
 - > Aids the body in better dealing with such disorders as diabetes, hypoglycemia, hypothyroid, and hyperthyroid.
 - > Activates thymus in heart-opening postures, such as Pigeon, Fish, and Bow.



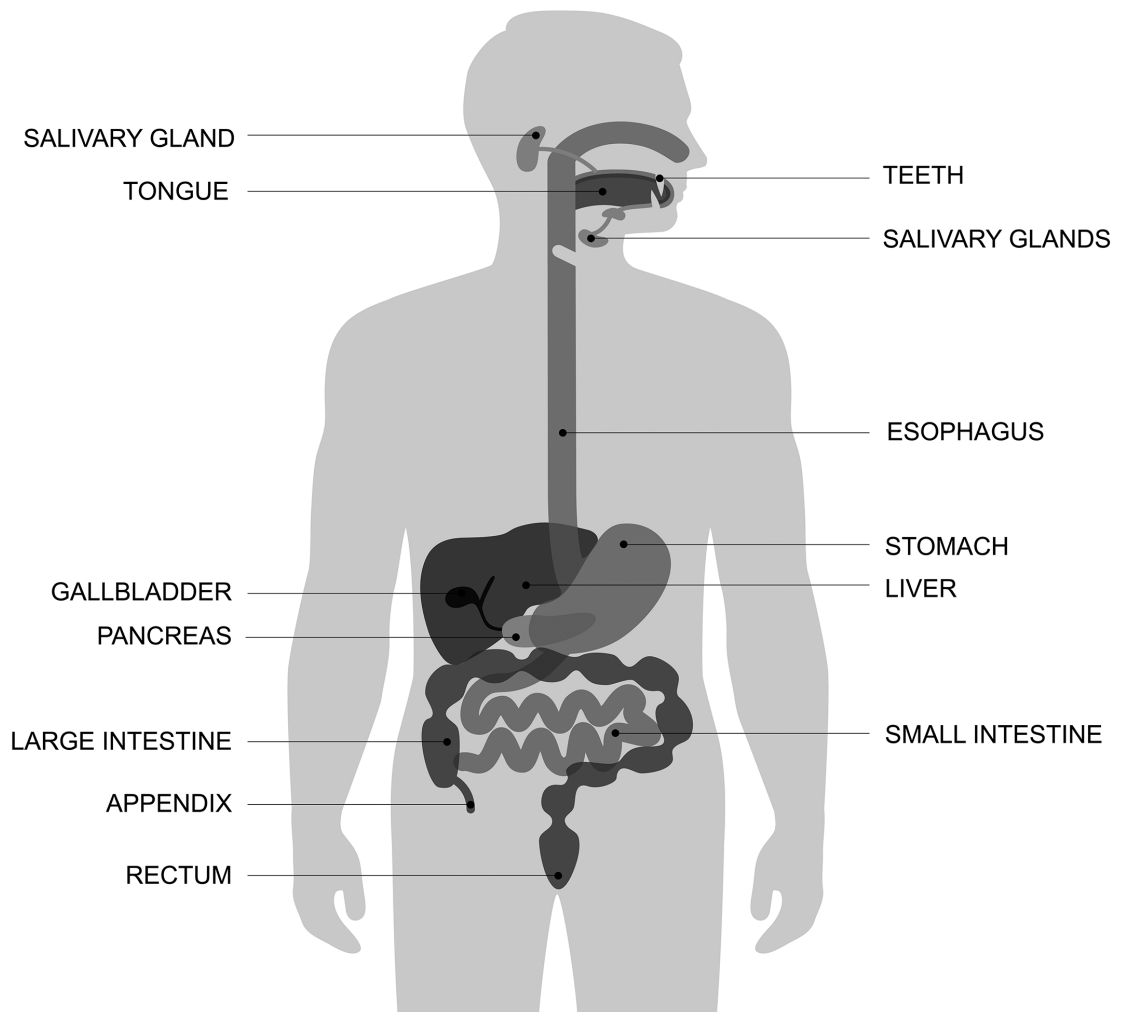
Circulatory

- *What is it?* The heart, arteries (away from heart), veins (to heart), and capillaries (connect arteries and veins).
- *What does it do?* The heart pumps blood into the body's tissues, providing them with oxygen and nutrients while removing metabolic waste. It works with the respiratory system to transport oxygen and with the endocrine system to transport hormones through the blood. Sends out white blood cells to defend the body against foreign organisms (leukocytes).
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - Deep breathing results in lower blood pressure and less stress in the body.
 - Increases the heart's effectiveness by allowing veins to bring more blood to the heart and by allowing the heart to slow down and pump more blood into the system. Circulation opens up by stretching muscles.



Digestive

- *What is it?* A group of organs that, together, move, secrete acid, break down, digest, absorb, and eliminate our food.
- *What does it do?* Transfers nutrients and water from food to supply cells with energy to perform body functions and create new cells.
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - > Most yoga postures compress and release the abdomen, which massages and squeezes the organs.
 - > Old blood, bile, and lymph fluid go out, and fresh blood and nutrients come in.
 - > Deep breathing moves the abdomen, and also aids in the massaging of organs.

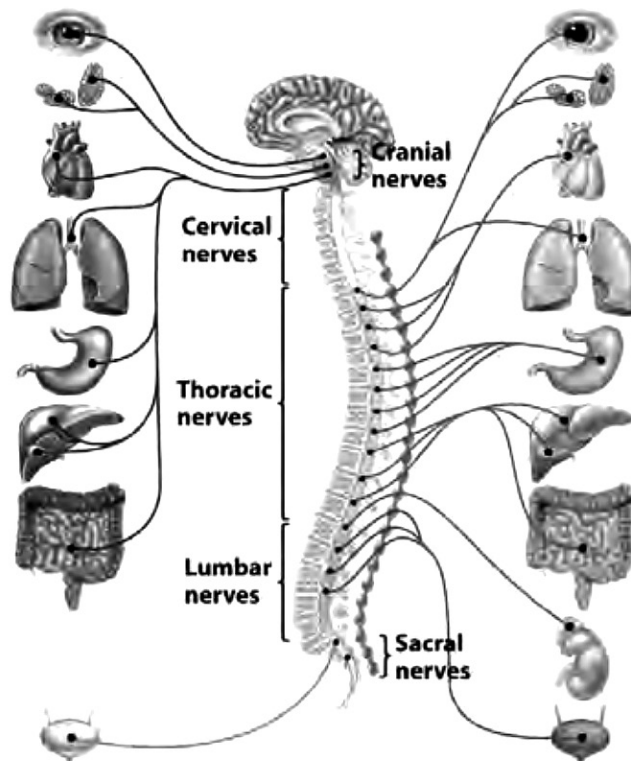


Nervous

- *What is it?* The brain, spinal cord, and threadlike nerves that connect to each organ and body part.
- *What does it do?*
 - Relays messages and instructions from the brain to the organs and body parts and from the body parts and organs to the brain in order to regulate and communicate.
 - Tiny cells called neurons help the nervous system function. There are two types of neurons—sensory (to brain) and motor (from brain).
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - Helps stretch the spine, which allows the nervous system to communicate better with the rest of the body.
 - Activates the parasympathetic nervous system and aids the body in a quicker transition from fight-or-flight.
 - Supports the nerves in functioning at equilibrium.

PARASYMPATHETIC NERVES

Constrict pupils
Stimulate saliva
Slow heartbeat
Constrict airways
Stimulate activity of stomach
Inhibit release of glucose; stimulate gallbladder
Stimulate activity of intestines
Contract bladder

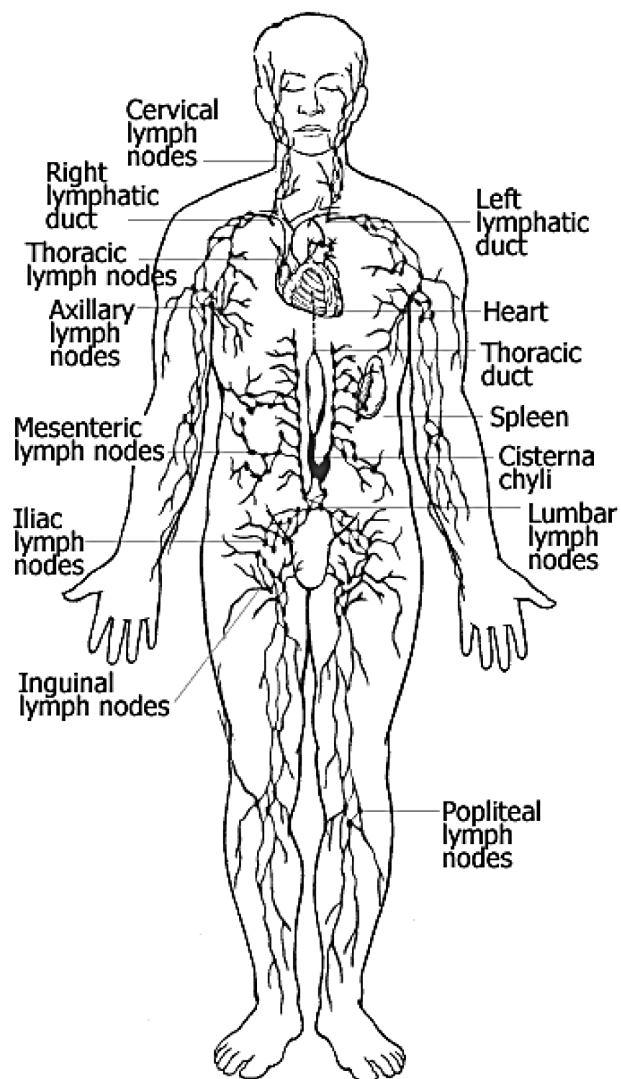


SYMPATHETIC NERVES

Dilate pupils
Inhibit salivation
Increase heartbeat
Relax airways
Inhibit activity of stomach
Stimulate release of glucose; inhibit gallbladder
Inhibit activity of intestines
Secrete epinephrine and norepinephrine
Relax bladder

Lymphatic

- *What is it?* Extensive drainage network that helps keep bodily fluids level and defends against infection.
- *What does it do?* Collects extra lymph fluid and returns it to the blood to avoid tissue swelling. Defends the body against germs, bacteria, viruses, and fungi. These invaders are filtered out by the lymph nodes, which house white blood cells that produce antibodies to fight disease. The spleen is a part of the lymphatic system and also aids in the fight against invaders by producing its own white blood cells.
- *How does yoga affect it?*
 - > Postures improve the flow of fluid in the system, aiding in the removal of toxins and increasing immunity.
 - > In inversions, lymph fluid that might have been building up in the feet and ankles is more easily released back toward the heart.



Kripalu Yoga

The Yoga of Self-Discovery

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Kripalu Yoga is an integrated system of self-transformation that empowers you to realize your full potential. The journey begins as you revitalize the body through postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques. It deepens as you learn to focus awareness, enabling you to enter meditative states that awaken compassion and clear the mind. Through the practice of Kripalu Yoga, you discover how to nurture the roots of health, catalyze personal growth, live with greater skillfulness and joy, and transform your sense of what it means to be alive.

Kripalu Yoga is practiced both on and off the yoga mat. As we practice and teach yoga, our lives inevitably begin to change. As we practice Kripalu Yoga on the mat, we may begin to notice changes in our physical body, a growing tolerance for the sensations that are generated in each asana, and an increase in flexibility, strength, and health. In addition, noticeable shifts may occur emotionally and spiritually. The practice of being present begins to suffuse each moment as we explore asana, pranayama, and meditation. Samskaras, or energy blocks, are activated and opened, literally loosened, by on-the-mat practice. Prana, the life force, opens resistance in our body and mind as we become ready. Consequently, we are supplied just the right situations to draw these resistances to the surface for greater inquiry. Whether we like the sensations that arise in yoga or not, we are encouraged to examine, feel, and integrate them over time. As we continue to practice, we can become more skillful in listening to the inner wisdom that guides us in the flow of our lives.

The Kripalu Approach:

- Awakes nonjudgmental self-awareness.
- Yoga as a safe and disciplined practice for integration.
- Combines Western science with Eastern philosophy to promote vitality.

The Elements of a Kripalu Yoga Class:

- Welcoming and setting a context.
- Opening centering.
- Pranayama to cleanse the body and build a more connected relationship to the life force.
- Warm-ups (hara or core engagements) that synchronizes breath with movement and concentration, preparing the body for more challenging asana.
- Asana sequences designed to strengthen, stretch, and balance the body, including standing and balancing, forward bending and backbending, spinal twists, lateral bends and inversions. A class can range from gentle, intermediate to vigorous, and includes tools from the three stages.
- Relaxation to allow integration of the practice on a physical, energetic, and mental level.
- Closing centering.

Kripalu Yoga Stages

Stage One: Will

Purpose: To increase awareness of bodily sensations.

- Practice of Stage One creates purification, resulting in increased physical awareness. This produces strength, flexibility, and stamina.
- Attention focuses on physical sensations.
- Witness consciousness begins through physical inquiries: You do yoga.
- Alignment principles are based on anatomical architecture and references.

Stage Two: Will and Surrender

Purpose: To increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

- Practice of Stage Two strengthens the will and removes blocks/habitual patterns. This produces personal clarity and honesty.
- Relaxed attention on thoughts, feelings, emotions, and breath.
- Witness consciousness develops through posture inquiry: You do yoga, and yoga does you.
- Alignment principles are based on prana/energy.

Stage Three: Surrender

Purpose: To increase awareness of instinct and intuition.

- Practice of Stage Three results in increased ability to experience situations without judgment, and to be present in body, mind, and spirit simultaneously. This produces joy, power, and wisdom.
- Passive attention on instinctual, intuitive movement.
- Witness consciousness surrenders to experiences of meditation in motion: Yoga does you.
- Alignment principles come from natural intuition.

Kripalu Yoga Stages

By learning the foundational yoga poses, developing your will, listening to your body's wisdom, quieting the mind, and awakening nonjudgmental awareness, your yoga is revealed.

	STAGE ONE Will	STAGE TWO Will/Surrender	STAGE THREE Surrender
Purpose	Increased awareness of bodily sensations.	Increased awareness of thoughts, feelings, and emotions.	Increased awareness of instincts and intuition.
Practice	Creates purification, resulting in increased physical awareness. This produces strength, flexibility, and stamina.	Strengthens the will and removes blocks/habitual patterns. This produces personal clarity and honesty.	Results in increased ability to experience situations without judgment and to be present in body, mind, and spirit simultaneously. This produces joy, power and wisdom.
Attention	Focused on physical sensations.	Relaxed... thoughts, feelings, emotions, and breath.	Passive on instinctual, intuitive movement.
Witness Consciousness	Begins through physical inquiries. You do yoga.	Develops through posture inquiry. You do yoga, and yoga does you.	Surrenders to experiences of meditation in motion. Yoga does you.
Alignment	Principles are based on anatomical architecture and references.	Principles are based on prana/energy.	Principles come from natural intuition.

Kripalu Yoga Tool Bag



The following are methodologies for teaching Kripalu Yoga. As a yoga teacher, you will find it essential to have tools to create powerful learning experiences. A Kripalu Yoga teacher teaches yoga postures, but also provides an experience that resonates. This requires that you create safety, cultivate body awareness, and build an attunement using clear language and sensitivity to the needs of your individual students.

We have grouped the tools below into those that seem to apply to a particular stage and those that are practiced in all three stages. There are times when it's useful to distinguish which stage a tool fits in, and times when it's impossible to do so. For the purposes of systematic learning, it can be helpful to break down experiences into manageable components. These Kripalu Yoga methodologies first transform your life on the mat, and then extend into your life off the mat.

Stage One Tools: *Build gross body awareness and focus the mind.*

- Coordinating breath with movement.
- Building a posture from the ground up.
- Instructional demonstration.
- Posture options.
- Comparisons.
- Assisting and props.
- Finding your edge.
- Knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology.
- Benefits and contraindications.

Stage Two Tools: *Develop subtle body awareness and awaken prana.*

- BRFWA (Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow).
- Guided breathing.
- Exploring the edge.
- Sustaining a pose.
- Functional Imagery.

Stage Three Tools: *Surrender to prana and connect to Source.*

- Silent demonstration.
- Slow-motion prana exercise.
- Prana responses.
- Meditation in motion.

Stage One Tools

Coordinating Breath with Movement

Instructing students in coordinating breath with movement begins to awaken awareness and reduces the possibility of injury. It is a clear way to instruct movement while inviting students to stay connected to the breath. For example, “Inhale your arms overhead. Exhale and release arms down. Inhale, bend your right knee, and lift your right foot off the ground. Exhale, set your right foot back on the ground.”

Building a Posture from the Ground Up

Each asana has an anatomical and energetic architecture. Building the posture from the ground up is a way to ensure a strong foundation and clear alignment detail. When guiding students in standing poses, start with the feet; in other poses, start with the areas that are in contact with the ground, such as the hands or the legs.

Instructional Demonstration

Taking the time to demonstrate a posture, building from the ground up, highlighting common misalignments, and showcasing the use of props and posture options can deepen students’ knowledge and experience.

Posture Options

Every posture has options (variations, modifications, and adaptations) for students at all levels. Being aware of how to adjust a position or movement to meet individual needs is an intuitive talent that takes knowledge, time to develop, and practice.

Comparisons

Having students observe how they feel before a specific movement, watch how they feel during the movement, and observe how they feel after completing the movement gives them an opportunity to observe the effect of each part of their experience. Some comparisons include before/after, between two sides of the body, or between effort and ease. Comparisons are a wonderful way to cultivate witness consciousness and create increased body awareness.

Stage One Tools (continued)

Assists and Props

Assisting students in postures can guide them into a way of doing the posture that they may not have otherwise experienced. Conscious, confident, and caring assists (verbal, press-point, energetic, feel-good, and hands-on) are one of the benefits of being in a class rather than practicing with a video or alone. Introducing props (chairs, walls, straps, blankets, blocks, mats, bolsters, and mirrors) can also help students grow in their practice.

Finding Your Edge

No matter how skilled you or your students are at doing an asana, there is always an edge. Finding your edge (of strength, flexibility, attention, or endurance) and entering it with the appropriate balance of effort and compassion is a skill worth honing. Do you resist bringing yourself to your edge, rarely pressing up against limitation? Or do you push into your edge, in competition or judgment, sometimes causing injury? Finding the place that is just right helps the body to open and strengthen.

Knowledge of Anatomy, Physiology, and Kinesiology

Offering information about the muscles, bones, glands, and organs and how they work provides visual images, a sense of comfort, and reference points for alignment principles and benefits and contraindications.

Benefits

Possessing the skill and knowledge to describe and inspire students to notice and feel the benefits of a posture is invaluable. Speaking about benefits helps create body awareness, provides support as students maintain a pose, and educates them about the functions of their body.

Contraindications

An important role of the yoga teacher is to provide safety for students when guiding asanas. Being able to recognize potentially harmful situations and communicating reasons why students should modify or avoid a posture/breath is vital. It's best to communicate contraindications by instructing students in what *to* do rather than what *not* to do. Consider checking in with your students at the beginning of class by asking, "Is there anything I should know about your body or health?"

Stage Two Tools

BRFWA: Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow

BRFWA is a Kripalu model for allowing experience to move, integrate, and release.

- **Breathe:** Reconnect with the sensations in the body through attention to inhalation and exhalation.
- **Relax:** Soften muscles, reduce any effort around mental activity, open to energy moving through resistance in the bodymind.
- **Feel:** Focus awareness on the sensations, feelings, memories, and thoughts flowing through the bodymind.
- **Watch:** Observe your experience with compassion and acceptance.
- **Allow:** Let your experience be just as it is, without any need to understand, judge, or change it.

Guided Breathing

Guided breathing contributes to strong witness consciousness, reduces the risk of injury, strengthens awareness of prana, brings a person into the present moment, and helps to purify the body, mind, and emotions. For example, “Apply kapalabhati as you sustain Warrior” or “Take a moment to breathe and notice how you feel.”

Exploring the Edge

In Stage One, you find the edge. In Stage Two, you explore the edge through movement inquiry, sustaining the pose and riding the waves of sensation. As you sustain a pose, you may notice that the edge shifts as you place attention on it.

Sustaining a Pose

Staying in postures for an extended period of time increases physical and energetic awareness.

Functional Imagery

This technique gives students mental pictures on which to focus and can create a somatic ability to perform a new movement. For example, in Half Moon, have students picture themselves leaning up and over a giant beach ball.

Stage Three Tools

Silent Demonstration

Silent demonstrations of preparing for, moving into, sustaining, and moving out of an asana or asana sequence can provide students an energetic and evocative experience.

Slow-Motion Prana

Guiding students to feel and play with subtle prana in slow motion is an introductory experience for sensing, directing, and opening/surrendering to the life force.

Prana Responses

Guiding students to respond to prana gives them permission to listen to and follow the wisdom of their body. Most bodies, after doing a forward bend, intuitively respond with some kind of backbending movement. When you provide permission, guidance, and time to respond to postures, unique and creative sequences may begin to emerge. Giving students small amounts of time to respond to prana after individual postures or sequences primes them for meditation in motion.

Meditation in Motion

Meditation in motion is when yoga/prana moves you. You become the creator of yoga. The Bhagavad Gita states that there are as many yoga poses as there are infinite manifestations of God. The ancient yogic text known as the *Gheranda Samhita* says, “There are 84 hundreds of thousands of asanas described by Shiva. The asanas are as many in number as there are species of living creatures in this universe.” All movement done with awareness is yoga.

As a yoga teacher, you will rarely lead a 90-minute meditation-in-motion class. Meditation in motion is usually a personal, intimate experience most often done in one’s personal practice. During your practice of meditation in motion, you may discover unique, creative sequences you may wish to lead in class. Meditation-in-motion experiences are naturally appropriate for one’s body, age, limitations, and strengths.

Tools for All Three Stages

Alignment

- *Stage One:* Principles are based on anatomical architecture and references, generally building a pose from the ground up, stacking the major bones on top of each other.
- *Stage Two:* Principles are based on prana and lines of energy. Awareness is brought to areas of sensation.
- *Stage Three:* Principles come from intuition. The body's wisdom is expressed and released. There are no rules or limits; the body follows what feels appropriate.

Creative Sequencing

Creative sequences, including vinyasa flows, are a hallmark of Kripalu Yoga. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, you are not limited to classical postures, and there are no prescribed sequences to follow. With the three stages of Kripalu Yoga, yoga becomes a living inquiry.

- *Stage One:* Engage students' attention, prepare their body for holding postures.
- *Stage Two:* Help students explore, open, strengthen, and sustain poses on deeper levels, empowering them to uncover their own imagination and creativity.
- *Stage Three:* The practice is inherently one of creative sequences, as prana guides the flow, and students tune into their natural energies. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, the creative sequences that you bring to your classes often emerge from your personal Stage Three experiences.

Tools for All Three Stages

(continued)

Language

Voice quality and use of language are two of the most influential tools for guiding students. Learning to speak in ways that do not distract students from their experience, but instead guide them deeper, is an art. Different types of language is used in each of the three stages.

- *Stage One:* Clear, precise directions provided in progressive, logical steps help guide students into asana. In general, build poses from the ground up, coordinate breath with movement, bring awareness to details, and offer benefits and contraindications.
- *Stage Two:* Explorational language and guidance is provided to encourage micromovements, prana response, and creative inquiry. Functional imagery (giving students mental pictures on which to focus) can create a somatic ability to perform a new movement. For example, “In Standing Forward Fold, picture your whole body draped like a towel over a towel rack.” Another Stage Two technique is the use of affirmations to focus attention and provide support while sustaining poses. For example, have students repeat “I am strong and powerful” and encourage them to notice their internal dialogue while holding Warrior pose.
- *Stage Three:* Language comes from deep intuition and connection to Source, allowing students to listen to the direction of prana. It is an acquired skill to allow your voice to “disappear” into the background so that the experience of the student becomes the guide. Use language that encourages listening to and following prana, and is affirming of uninhibited expression of self.

Meditation

- *Stage One:* Chitta meditation—The intention is to deliberately focus your attention on an object (breath, mantra, mandala, chant, asana, candle), and when your attention wanders, simply bring it back.
- *Stage Two:* Chitta/prana meditation brings focused attention to prana, breath, movement, and witness consciousness simultaneously.
- *Stage Three:* Prana meditation involves focusing on primal and subtle energy, biological drives, emotion, images, and feelings. When witness consciousness is developed to the point where you can identify with and experience prana fully without judgment, you can maintain an inner posture of meditation during prana experiences. Meditation in motion is a prana meditation that is unique to Kripalu Yoga.

Tools for All Three Stages

(continued)

Movement Inquiry

Movement inquiry is the exploration that happens when you pulse, stretch, wiggle, circle, turn, rock, and relax within a posture. By playing with movement, you and your students can find different ways of being in a posture, or create new postures altogether. Micromovements focus attention on smaller, subtler movements.

- *Stage One:* Explore alignment—placement of body parts—and limits of strength, flexibility, and balance. As a teacher, you can create movement explorations to help your students find their expression of each posture.
- *Stage Two:* Explore and respond to prana. Guiding students in movement inquiry while sustaining a pose helps awaken subtle prana/energy, coax open dormant areas, and increase the ability to sustain the pose.
- *Stage Three:* Prana guides movement. Meditation in motion takes you beyond the mind and connects you to primal rhythms within the body. These rhythmic movements can unleash healing, insight, and connection to Source.

Music

Music can be a helpful tool in assisting your student's exploration. The use of music is a personal choice for you as a teacher. Music may encourage flow, openness, breath coordinated with movement, and sound. It can also be a distraction.

Experiment, and make deliberate choices regarding the use of music in your classes. Remember that music does not have to be all or nothing. Consider weaving music only into particular segments of the practice, such as during warm-up or at the end of class into Shavasana.

Tools for All Three Stages

(continued)

Nonjudgmental awareness/witness consciousness

Acquiring nonjudgmental awareness/witness consciousness is essential to Kripalu Yoga.

- *Stage One:* The mind is given details of alignment, benefits and contraindications, the names of poses, and the “how, why, when, and where” of yoga. You are encouraged to watch the inner dialogue that takes place on the mat and how that may affect you off the mat. You do yoga. Will is required.
- *Stage Two:* Purification and transformation happen by holding poses for greater lengths of time, increasing strength, stamina, and flexibility in all areas. Witness consciousness is solidified by finding your edge, working with breath retention and release, and riding waves of emotion. You do yoga and yoga does you. Will and surrender are required.
- *Stage Three:* Witness consciousness/nonjudgmental awareness is established. The ability to simultaneously surrender and be directed by prana, the wisdom of the body, intuition, and inner guidance are experienced. Witness consciousness allows free expression without the control of the mind, and opens you to bliss. Nonjudgmental awareness allows you to be in the present moment. Experiencing life as it is, without any need to change it, judge it, label it, or resist it, opens us to our personal power. Yoga does you. Surrender is required.

Pranayama

Pranayama, or breathing techniques, are a foundational tool for developing witness consciousness (Stage One), building and retaining energy (Stage Two), and surrendering to prana (Stage Three). Each pranayama has unique benefits. All breathing techniques oxygenate the body, stimulate the immune system, focus the attention, strengthen the diaphragm, increase the metabolism, and help purify the system.

- *Stage One:* Primarily learn and practice Ujjayi, Dirgha, Nadi Shodhana, hara breathing, and breath coordinated with movement.
- *Stage Two:* Includes Kapalabhati, Bastrika, Anuloma Viloma, and breath retention (kumbhaks).
- *Stage Three:* Breath is free to express itself under the direction of prana.

Tools for All Three Stages

(continued)

Repetition

Repeating alignment details and repeating postures by moving in and out of the same pose several times helps to increase awareness in the postures.

- *Stage One:* Repeating the posture cues of building from the ground up moves the attention throughout the body in a specific posture. For example, in Dandasana, Staff pose, you might say, “Press the sitting bones into the floor. Press the backs of the knees away from you. Draw the toes toward the belly button and the belly button toward the toes. Lift through the crown and lengthen the spine. Breathe.” Then repeat.
- *Stage Two:* Repeating the same posture cues several times can assist students in sustaining poses, a beneficial tool for increasing strength and awareness in a posture. For example, when guiding students into Warrior, use ground-up posture cues the first time, then use Stage Two tools the second time to have them explore micromovements and/or pranayama while sustaining Warrior.
- *Stage Three:* The third time in Warrior, inviting students to explore prana responses during or after holding the posture is a way of providing deep experiences, new awareness, and inquiry into the posture.

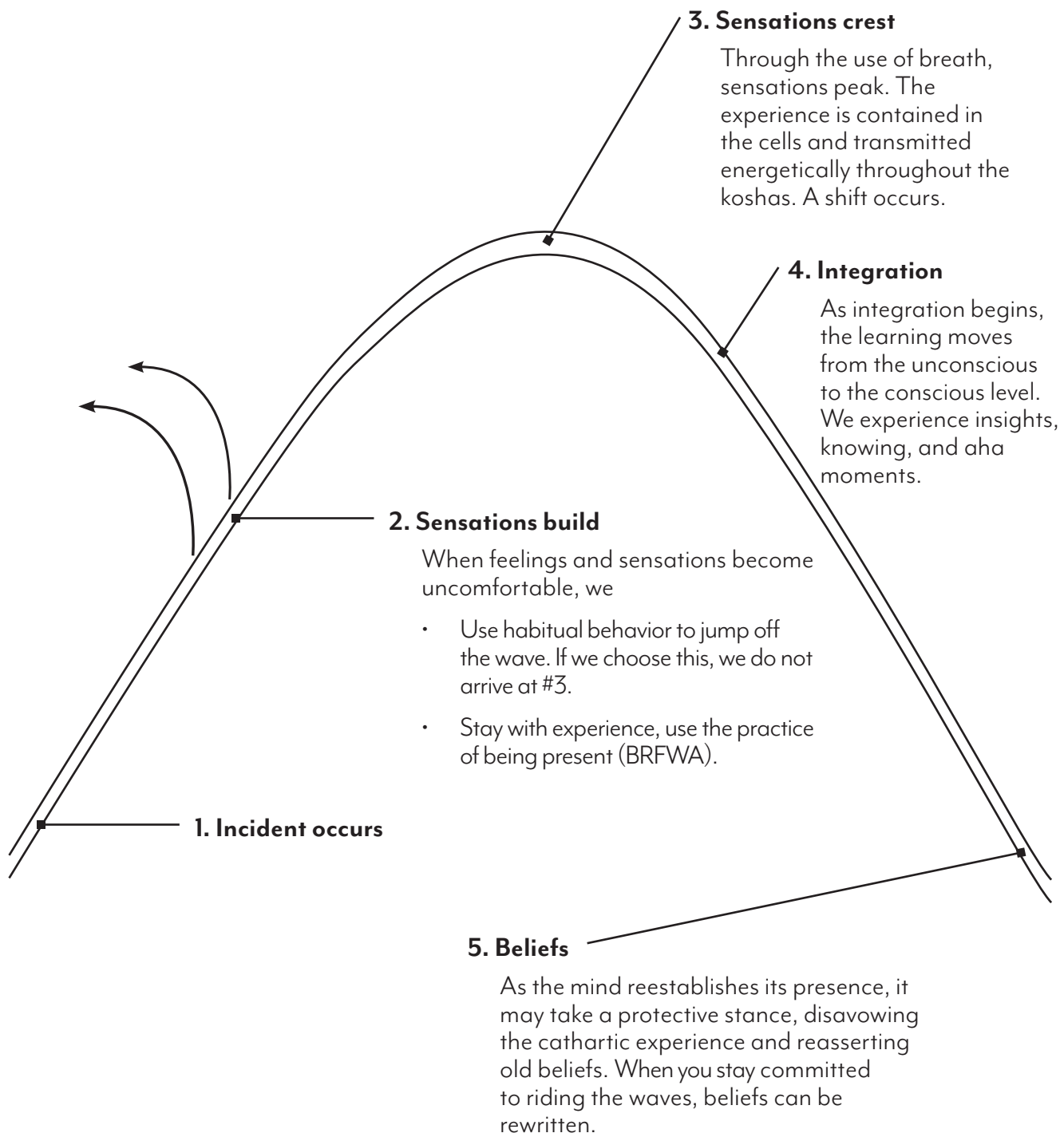
Silence

Silence allows students to turn inward. Balance speaking with times of personal experience.

- *Stage One:* Less silence and more verbal direction. Moments of silence usually occur when you are modeling postures for your students and allow them to experience the benefits of the pose.
- *Stage Two:* Periods of silence provide opportunities for students to access their inner dialogue and make it conscious. They also allow students to find their edge and their expression of the posture. Periods of silence may include the practice of pranayama (i.e., Ujjayi and Kapalabhati) during the holding of postures, warm-ups, micromovements, pulsing, and hara breathing.
- *Stage Three:* Silence provides the space within which students can attune to prana.

BRFWA

Breathe | Relax | Feel | Watch | Allow



Kripalu Yoga

Teaching Methodology

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Teaching Methodology

We all know that feeling we experience at the end of a Kripalu Yoga class, an inner balance that is difficult to capture in words. Perhaps we begin to wonder how the teacher was able to guide us toward such harmony. “What did he/she say that allowed me to have this feeling inside? How did it happen that as soon as I walked into the room I felt relaxed? And as the class progressed, I felt as though I was finally home inside myself.” These are some of the appropriate questions an aspiring Kripalu Yoga teacher may ask. This section addresses how to create a Kripalu Yoga experience. Being the teacher and guiding students to connect to their inner wisdom is the balance at the heart of teaching Kripalu Yoga.

The purpose of this section is to

- Reveal the methods behind the structure of a Kripalu Yoga class so that you are able to see how the experience is created.
- Help you move toward becoming less judgmental of yourself and others so that you may learn from everyone around you.

Being a yoga teacher carries with it joy, as well as responsibility. In the role of a student or teacher, we can take responsibility for the inner and outer journey. The journey includes

- Learning to be with yourself in a deep way, as the springboard for sharing that depth with others.
- Helping each person to experience their body as they open inner doorways of transformation and health.

Teaching is an art that encompasses many aspects, including

- Knowledge of the techniques and material.
- The ability to communicate.
- Being objective, with a nonjudgmental attitude.
- Willingness to grow and remain a student. Permission to be a learner.
- Tuning into your needs and the students’ needs.
- Teaching from personal experience.
- Sharing with gratitude what you have received from your own yoga teachers and practice.

Teaching Methodology

The Kripalu Yoga teaching methodology includes:

- How to design and sequence a complete class.
- Creating sacred space, psychological safety, and a context for learning.
- How to teach and lead postures, pranayama, relaxation, and meditation.
- Fostering body awareness.
- Honing assisting skills.
- Ways to take students beyond the postures into a deeper knowledge of themselves.

Notes

Creating the Context for Learning

Each of the following methodologies can help us as teachers to become increasingly more sensitive in creating a context in which real learning can take place.

Establishing Safety

The yoga class begins the moment the students enter the room. Every detail of the environment is a part of the yoga experience. If the intention of yoga is to create harmony between the body, mind, and spirit, then it is equally important to create harmony between individuals and their environment. It is worth every effort on the part of the teacher to make all preparations to ensure a comfortable, relaxed classroom environment.

Greeting

What you feel emotionally in relation to your students affects them. Your body language, dress, and attitude tell them a great deal about you. Consider how you want to welcome your students as they enter the yoga space.

Environment

The care and attention you put into structuring the ambience of class is a large part of your task as instructor. The following details can greatly enhance the experience you wish to create: music, lighting, temperature, air quality, your appearance, and your initial contact with individuals in the group.

- Is the lighting comfortable and inviting? When a particular room has only fluorescent or harsh overhead lighting, it's a good idea to bring a lamp or candles to soften the ambience.
- Is the air fresh and clean-smelling? Arrive with enough time to air out the room and adjust the temperature to ensure everyone's comfort.
- Is the music soft and soothing? Music is one of the most potent ways to create an environment that is conducive to relaxation. Choose your audio with regard to the mood you want to create: slow, deep, and relaxing; active, stimulating, and energizing; mellow, carefree, and lighthearted; or pensive, calming, and meditative.

- Is all excess furniture in the room neatly organized and either out of sight or arranged in an unused part of the room? Clear the visual space so the external environment is not distracting.
- Is the floor surface clean and comfortable? One of the most important criteria is that the floor be clean. Bring extra mats for new students or those who do not have their own. As the instructor, you'll want to have a mat for yourself. Arrange to have the floor cleaned before each class, or arrive early enough to do it yourself.
- Are there other activities happening around your classroom? If so, make any possible prior arrangements so that your class time is free from loud, distracting noises.

Space use

Explore different space-use options before deciding which to incorporate into your design:

- You: Teaching from the center, up front, on a mat, on a platform, moving, staying still, sitting, standing, or a combination.
- The group: Sitting on cushions, BackJacks®, chairs, or yoga mats; in rows, arcs, big circle, small circles, close together, or spread out.
- If you have handouts, sale items, or registration materials that need completion, set up a hospitality table somewhere near the entrance so that all transactions are accessible and easy to complete.

Creating psychological safety

Every time we ask our students to learn something new, we are asking them to enter into the unknown. By anticipating the physical and psychological discomforts that arise during the learning process, we are better able to create safety, support, and encouragement for relaxed learning to happen.

For each new movement or posture we are about to teach, it is important to take care of the part of our minds that needs security. Brain research has revealed that it is the job of the limbic system (associated with the “old brain,” located at the base of the brain stem) to safeguard our experience. It does so by constantly monitoring the environment for changes in temperature, light, proximity of other objects or beings, duration of events, and the rhythm and speed of elemental forces around us. This part of our brain is also called the “reptilian” brain, and its job is to create security.

In other words, to be able to let go and relax into any kind of new experience, the reptilian brain must be assured that survival of the organism is not endangered. On a practical level, this is essential information for the yoga teacher, who wants to create a mood in which the mind can let go of its usual problem-solving, critical-awareness functions.

Here are some examples of questions the reptilian brain will want answered

- How long will this class last?
- Are we going to begin and end on time?
- Is the room temperature comfortable?
- Where are the restroom and water fountain?
- Is the floor surface clean and comfortable?
- Do I have enough personal space around me?
- Can I hear and see the instructor?
- Where can I store my shoes, clothes, and other belongings without needing to stay aware of them?
- Does the instructor look competent, reliable, and approachable?
- Is there enough fresh air?

Do I feel safe and that I belong here? From these questions, you can get a sense of the fundamental level of safety that we require in order to learn. Knowing and honoring that each of us asks these questions in one form or another, and that it is natural and expected that these questions be answered, will help you provide a truly safe environment at the most basic level. Many of these questions can be answered by the way you organize the classroom space.

Another way of saying this is that we need a certain level of creature comfort in order to be willing to enter another realm of experience. The extent to which our bodies are externally uncomfortable or our minds are agitated and insecure directly affects our state of relaxation.

Your interaction with individuals

How you interact with individuals in the group impacts their experience. Practice loving-kindness. Find out what your students' needs are, and do your best to meet them. Let your students be a vehicle for you to practice sensitivity to others. Walk your talk.

Your interaction with a group

Be aware of:

- Your ability to listen.
- The energy and mood of the group (i.e., tired, wired, playful, rebellious).
- Respecting/being sensitive to various differences in the group (female/male, old/young, introverts/extroverts).

- Dialoguing versus trying to fix.
- Creating space for questions and reactions.
- Staying open to your own learning process.
- Reinforcing empowerment through interactions versus having your students become dependent on you.
- Letting go of your “correct” answers.
- Keeping agreements (such as starting and ending class on time).

Here are some examples of questions students may ask

- What is yoga?
- What is prana?
- What are the benefits of yoga?
- Is yoga a religion?
- What is the difference between yoga and other types of exercise?
- Can yoga cure disease?
- What are your qualifications?
- What do you mean by meditation? By energy? By spirit?
- What is Kripalu and Kripalu Yoga?
- Is yoga for me if I have scoliosis, a spinal fusion, a neck injury, or am pregnant?
- When should I practice yoga and for how long at a time?
- How long does it take for yoga to work?
- Can I hurt myself doing yoga?
- What is a guru?
- Will I lose weight?
- Must I change my diet? My lifestyle?
- How is Kripalu Yoga different from other types of yoga?
- What is hara?

Developing Awareness

Awareness of the body

Kripalu Yoga facilitates a deep contact with and awareness of the physical, emotional, energetic, mental, and spiritual aspects of our lives. The following methodologies all aim to focus the awareness on the experience of being present.

Details for the mind

Our minds serve us in so many ways throughout the day, yet our attention is often focused on what is happening outside of us. To become aware of the body requires that we give the mind specific details as internal points of focus. In the first stage of Kripalu Yoga, we harness the power of observation to enhance body awareness. The mind loves detail. The more detail we provide, the deeper the learning process and the deeper the effects of yoga.

Alignment

To protect the body from injury in the postures and to avoid reinforcing imbalances that have already developed within the body, it is necessary to provide a basic map of alignment for each posture. For example, in Mountain pose (Tadasana), if you have the students close their eyes and bring their feet parallel to each other without looking, many people will not come close to actual parallel alignment. They may feel as if their feet are aligned, but the habitual imbalances have become so “normal” that actual balance feels awkward.

Isolation of body parts

When they are lying on the floor, many students are unaware that one foot and leg is often more turned out than the other, that one shoulder is heavier on the ground than the other, or that the head is turned more to one direction than the other. By drawing attention throughout the class to various body parts, the teacher helps students begin to train their own awareness and watch for the subtleties that happen throughout the body.

Before-after comparisons

Having students observe how they feel before doing a specific movement, watch how they feel during the movement, and then observe the difference in how they feel after completing the movement gives them an opportunity to observe the effect and benefit of each part of their experience.

Right-left comparisons

Performing a posture on one side and then pausing to observe the different sensations between the two sides of the body allows the effects to register deeply within the observing mind.

Sensations

It is helpful to suggest various possible sensations that students might feel during the movements and postures. For example, after they stretch the left arm above the head and slowly lower it back down to the side, ask them to notice what is happening in the entire length of the arm, from the tips of the fingers to the crest of the shoulder. Do they notice any tingling or pulsing sensations? Does this arm feel warmer or cooler than the other arm? Does this arm feel longer, or heavier, or lighter than before they began? Do they feel energy streaming through the arm?

Exaggerating the extremes

The more vivid the sensation you emphasize, the easier it is for the mind to observe the effect. Performing several movements on one side of the body before going to the opposite side increases the effect by exaggerating the difference between the two sides. Or use an image to emphasize the direction or intention behind a movement. For example, “Stretch your left arm above your head. Look up in the direction of the stretch and imagine yourself reaching through the ceiling.”

Moving in non-habitual ways

We all have ways in which we move that are habitual. One of the most dramatic ways this shows up is in how we interlace our fingers. Typically, one way of doing it will feel “right” and the other “wrong,” or unnatural. Encouraging your students to perform the opposite of what they do automatically or habitually creates an opportunity for more awareness. Another way this may manifest is in the order in which we do things—for instance, always doing a posture on the right side first. Again, use a shift from autopilot to bring greater awareness to the present.

Assists

Using verbal or press point assists gives students more awareness in their postures.

Pause/allow

Taking a moment to stop and observe the effects of a posture or series of postures creates space for awareness and integration to occur. When we’re constantly moving, we’re less likely to notice subtle changes in how we feel.

Micromovements

Moving in small ways after entering a posture creates sensation and can allow for greater learning. For instance, in passive forward folds, let your torso sway gently from side to side.

Repetitive movement

Repeating a movement several times can progressively deepen the movement.

Functional imagery

Giving students a mental picture on which to focus can sometimes enhance the ability to perform a new movement. An example would be to picture yourself leaning over a giant beach ball when doing Half Moon.

Sustaining the pose

Sustaining a pose creates sensation in the body, and helps you notice how these sensations are constantly changing.

Awareness of Support

Creating variety in the learning experience keeps students' awareness fresh and involved. Introducing any of the following elements can increase impact by stirring up the flow of a class.

Props

It's important to be familiar with the use of props—mats, blocks, yoga ties, blankets, cushions, chairs, and walls—which can be used by students in poses. While the rest of the class is performing the guided movement, some individuals may need to support a knee by doubling up their mat, place their elbows on a folded blanket instead of the floor, use a chair to maintain their balance, or use any other prop that would be helpful. Teaching our students to use props and to create ways of supporting themselves communicates how important it is to be aware of the body's needs.

Awareness of the self

The ultimate intention of everything we do in a Kripalu Yoga class is for students to make deep contact with their inner self. The real yoga is what happens inside each person. The language you use is important. Also, the silent space you allow between postures creates an opening for students to register the effects of what they're doing. By leading people in yogic inquiries and explorations, you create the possibility for each student to go within.

Encourage sounds

Encourage students to make sounds at appropriate points in the class. Hearing the sound of one's own voice, expressing feelings, or making primal sounds can be very liberating.

Acknowledging pleasure and pain

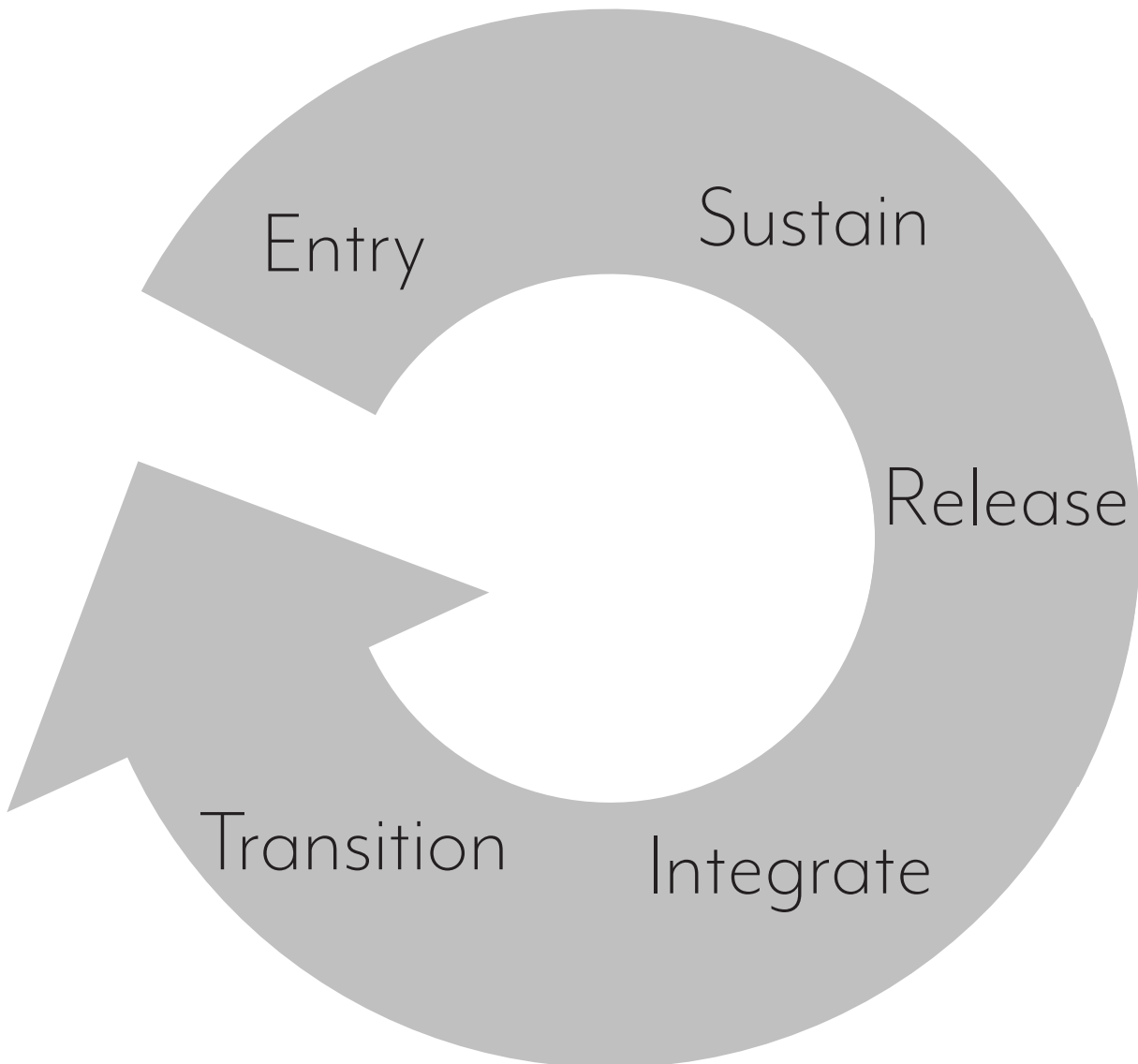
Many of us have the unconscious belief that it's not okay to feel good. To really do something good for our body, we think, must necessarily create stress, tension, and perhaps even pain. Ergo, "No pain, no gain." The Kripalu Approach to creating body awareness emphasizes acknowledging the pleasurable sensations that arise from doing the simplest, most effortless movements. By encouraging students to make sounds in order to enjoy each stretch and to expand into their bodies, you guide them into what can be the most enlightening part of the learning experience: that having a body and being in a body feels wonderful. Along the way, what is not open, loose, flexible, or expansive often reveals itself as pain. Acknowledging that there is pain along the path of discovering pleasurable sensation is also important.

We encourage our students to proceed slowly, to breathe into each sensation, to use proper alignment when it makes a difference in how the movement is done, and, above all, to remain aware and in contact with the messages their bodies are sending them along the way. Kripalu Yoga is a learning process, an inquiry, an exploration. Part of the inquiry is about discriminating between the discomfort that comes from opening and the pain that comes from straining.

Another form of inquiry your students may experience is emotional or psychological. Our bodies are a walking repository of our past experiences. Kripalu Yoga acknowledges that tension in the body is sometimes the result of undigested experiences. Past experiences that we have not fully integrated, be they pleasurable or painful, may be stored in the body's muscle memory. As we start using areas of the body that are not accustomed to moving, past experiences often become activated as laughter, tears, and sensitivity.

ESRIT

Entry | Sustain | Release | Integrate | Transition



ESRIT

Phases of a Yoga Posture

ESRIT is an acronym for a set of phases of posture instruction that divide a complex—and sometimes intimidating—process into a series of simple, attainable steps: Entry, Sustain, Release, Integrate, and Transition.

Before beginning ESRIT, the body must be ready for movement. In other words, it must already be in alignment and appropriately warmed up before entering a posture. Proper ground-up cueing (cues that address the body from the ground up) can help ensure that the body is ready for ESRIT.

Ground-Up Cues:

	region 3	sternum	shoulders	arms	hands
	region 2	tailbone	sitz bones	neck	crown
start here	region 1	feet	knees	pelvis	spine

Phase 1: Entry

Entry includes whatever movement is required to come into the posture. To safely and successfully guide your students through the Entry phase, use the **Movement Formula**:

Breath Cue + Action Verb + Body Part + Direction/Location.

Movement Formula:

Basic Formula	Breath	Action verb	Body part	Direction/Location
Example	inhale	reach	fingers	toward the sky

While teaching, these components might sound like this: “On an inhale, reach the fingers toward the sky.”

Phase 2: Sustain

The Sustain phase offers students the space to explore the pose, which can take a gentler or a more vigorous form depending on factors such as class theme, desired challenge, or even the time of day. The longer you hold a pose, the more vigorous it will feel. The length of the hold is measured in breath cycles. For beginners, it's not unusual to sustain a pose for only a few breaths at a time. How do you know how many breaths to suggest for each pose? The answer lies in the class level, student ability, and experimentation. For most beginner and intermediate classes, it is best to start by offering short holdings, which require only a few rounds of breath. This provides the greatest benefit with the least amount of risk. Try presenting inhale and exhale cues to support a student's exploration and posture hold using phrases such as "Take smooth, easy breaths," "Deepen the breath," and "Breathe into the stretch."

It is inevitable that students will engage in micromovements during the posture hold as they explore their edge. Restate body cues to reinforce proper alignment to help prevent injury. Body cues can have other purposes as well, such as to stabilize the posture, create length in the spine, and relax unnecessary gripping.

Phase 3: Release

The Release phase includes whatever movement is necessary to return the body to the ready position. Without proper guidance, students will often overlook the release phase and move out of a posture unskillfully. This is why most injuries occur as students move out of a posture, not while holding one. The Movement Formula can again provide the best foundation for exiting a pose. Clear cues enhance body and breath awareness, conscious movement, and internal focus.

Phase 4: Integration

The Integration phase is an intentional pause designed to release the use of willful effort and receive the benefits of the posture before moving into the next expression of the yoga practice.

This static phase may be as short as one breath or it could be extended over several minutes. Your guidance should instruct students to focus their awareness on the effects of the pose, promoting self-observation.

Try using phrases such as "Pause to feel the effects of the posture" or "Take a couple of breaths and allow your body to digest the movements."

Phase 5: Transition

The Transition phase brings the body into readiness for the next pose. Use the Movement Formula during this phase to increase body awareness, strengthen attention and focus, and support an internal gaze.

Method to Teach a Posture

Phrases such as 'lead the pose' or 'guide the pose' are used to indicate that the student is already familiar with the pose. In this training, the phrase "teach a posture" indicates the 'teach a posture' protocol, which is for the benefit of the student who has no previous knowledge of the posture. This methodology provides a step by step and reliable learning process.

Remember how you felt when you took your first yoga class? For most beginners, there is a period of adjustment. There are the natural insecurities of being in a new place, doing “weird” things with the body, and, most of all, being with yourself in a new way. For many people, this can be an overwhelming experience. As a teacher, it's important to be sensitive to this and to keep it in mind as you take on new students. This, along with creating an environment of acceptance and safety, can make a big difference for new students. What will also make a difference is your level of confidence and inner organization as you enter into the experience of teaching a new posture to beginners. For this reason, we offer a simple, reliable, and user-friendly format for teaching a new posture to beginners. This formula has been used for years and has provided security and support for many Kripalu Yoga teachers. It is comprised of eight sequential steps:

Methodology for Teaching a Posture

1. Give a context
2. Warm up students
3. Demonstrate and teach the posture
4. Benefits, precautions, and contraindications
5. Questions and clarifications
6. Lead the posture
7. Answer new questions
8. Lead the posture again (on the other side if a two-sided pose)

A final component to teaching a new posture is guiding the posture a second time and offering an opportunity for students to share about their experience. After becoming familiar with each step, you may wish to experiment with variations or other steps that you may find helpful in your discovery process. This is just a starting place; a springboard for your expression of creativity and personality.

Give a context

Context means “the weaving together of words.” To give a context in the beginning of a yoga class is to provide an overview of what you intend to offer. It’s a time to connect with your students and prepare them for what’s about to come. A context establishes a sense of safety and helps to set the mood of the class.

A typical context includes the name of the posture in English and in Sanskrit, the main reason for doing the posture, its history or mythology, any other awareness about the experience they are about to have, and perhaps your personal insights into the posture. This is a time to create inspiration. Here are two sample contexts:

“The experience that we’ll share is one that creates balance in the whole body. The first posture, Cobra, or Bhujangasana, opens us to a passive elongation in the front of the body and an opening in the heart center. It expands the belly, heart, and throat for dynamic expression. The other posture is a great counter-pose to Cobra: Garbasana, Child’s pose, where we place the head below the heart, allowing ourselves to be soft and receptive.”

“We are about to embark on a journey of balance, concentration, endurance, patience, flight, and falling as we explore three postures: Vrksasana, Tree; Garudasana, Eagle; and Setu Bhandasana, Bridge. This is an opportunity to align with the earth, to stand your ground, to focus your mind, to strengthen your arms and legs, and to fall out of your fears. Falling is a necessary part of the learning process, and today we’re learning how to fall with grace and how to accept ourselves as we fall. This may bring up some fears, but we will be using different support systems, like the wall or a partner. With support, we can feel safe to explore our sense of balance and imbalance, as the case may be.”

The length and detail of the context varies, of course, depending on the focus that you want to create, the experience level of the group you’re leading, and the amount of time you have. It’s more important to speak to the level of the group in order to create safety and trust than to tell everything you know about the posture and go into so much depth and detail that you lose your students. It’s essential to go for the balance. Remain aware of the class and notice if they’re with you or if they’re confused or distracted. The principle of “less is more” will always serve you and is worth remembering.

Warm up students

(See Warm-Ups section, Chapter 8, for more details.)

Warm-ups do more than prepare the body for yoga postures. They also help students move beyond the fluctuations of the mind and into the experience of being in the present moment. In this way, warm-ups are the opportunity to practice the yogic teachings of bringing the mind, body, and spirit into alignment. They create safety and connection between teacher and students. Warm-ups can be a wonderful way to move into gentle and/or invigorating variations of the posture you will be leading. You may want to experiment with feeling inquiries of the joints and muscles so that students can begin to explore their range of motion.

Demonstrate and teach the new posture

The goal of demonstration is to provide your students with a visual experience of the posture and to familiarize them with its basic mechanics. For a new student, entering a new pose can be like entering into a dark room; it's natural for them to feel timid or reluctant in an unexplored space. But by modeling the pose yourself while narrating the movements, you can shed some light by helping the students get to know the posture's physicality before they attempt it themselves.

To demonstrate the posture, offer ground-up cues and succinct instructions as you enter, sustain, release, and integrate the pose, and then safely transition out from it.

Remember to pause and explain where props can be supportive and normalize their use. You will want to strike a balance between giving enough information that a beginner student can safely and confidently explore but not so much that they are bombarded with information overload. You may also want to experiment with showing common misalignments and demonstrating how to prevent them.

Benefits, Precautions, and Contraindications

Benefit: a positive, healthy, response and/or condition created or enhanced through the practice of a specific technique or posture either intuitive and evidence-based.

Precaution: an existing condition that may or may not produce unwanted or unhealthy effects in the bodymind through the practice of a specific technique or posture. Adapting the technique or posture may eliminate this result and allow for safe practice.

Contraindication: an existing condition that *will* produce adverse, unhealthy, or unwanted effects in the bodymind as a result of practicing a specific technique or posture. In this case, the technique or posture should be avoided or replaced by a safe practice until the condition changes.

“Yoga is a holistic practice that impacts every level of our being and all the bodily systems. The tradition states that many postures are targeted to affect the endocrine glands and organs. The mechanism through which this occurs is often explained as ‘rinsing and soaking.’ When a posture compresses an area of the body, old blood is squeezed out in the process of rinsing. As the posture is released, fresh blood flows in the process of soaking. The dramatic increase in circulation that results is said to rejuvenate the glands/organs and lead to their optimal functioning. Similar statements are often made about the effects of yoga on the autonomic and sympathetic nervous system. While statements like these make subjective sense to experienced practitioners, they are difficult to objectively validate. The truth is that science is only beginning to study and understand how yoga works on these subtle levels.

As teachers, we must present yoga professionally, refraining from any tendency to make unsubstantiated claims or promise miraculous benefits. At the same time, we don’t want to close any doors to yoga’s more subtle effects and its tremendous capacity to heal the body and mind. Along with understanding and, when appropriate, explaining the traditional teachings, everyone’s subjective experience of yoga should be respected. For the purposes of this 200-hour training, we will focus on yoga’s ability to support the healthy functioning of the skeletal muscles and joints. A lot is known about how yoga stretches and strengthens the skeletal muscles, and how the muscles and joints work together in the postures. While imbalances and dysfunctions will be addressed in some situations, the therapeutic application of yoga is beyond our scope. As a professional yoga teacher, you cannot know too much anatomy. All students are encouraged to continue their study of anatomy as it relates to yoga through our 300-hour program and other means.”

—Shobhan Richard Faulds

Each posture has a life of its own. It's like entering into a whole universe of cause and effect, each with its own unique energetic relationships and corresponding benefits. The postures are like individual energy signatures, and as you place yourself and breathe into each posture with conscious awareness, you automatically begin to receive its benefits. Many postures have overlapping benefits on an external level, but the true essence of the posture is revealed at the deeper energetic level.

Another important factor is what you as a practitioner bring to the posture: your sensitivity and level of awareness. The benefits of the posture do not happen in spite of you. The energy you bring to the posture, as well as your attitudes and thoughts, all blend together with the posture's energy, creating an experience that is unique to you.

For this reason, it's not necessary to mention all the benefits of the postures to your students. It's appropriate to invite them to discover the benefits themselves as they experience each posture. It's helpful to mention some of the main benefits on a practical level, as a way to inspire your students. Explaining the physiological benefits is also appropriate when teaching beginners. As your students progress, you can gradually introduce more of the subtler benefits. Your students will probably share with you the benefits they're feeling and come to these realizations on their own. You will want to affirm their experience and give encouragement.

Benefit statements can be woven into all parts of a yoga class. They do not necessarily have to be discussed in the order given here. As we've suggested, they may be used when creating the context, during verbal demonstrations, or as you guide the posture. Decide which benefits are most important to you and discuss them consciously. Precautions and contraindications are also important to mention in all class levels. For safety purposes, it's a good idea to tell your students about the precautions or contraindications before they do a posture. The intention is not to induce fear, but rather to educate them about when it's okay to do the postures and when it's better not to. Not all precautions and contraindications apply to everyone. For example, remind any students with injuries to be gentle with themselves and to do only what feels comfortable. You may also wish to offer them a simpler variation of the posture you're teaching, or suggest the aid of a prop. In the case of acute injury or medical problems, do not hesitate to ask students not to do particular postures that may be detrimental to their health. You will want to know ahead of time about any serious illnesses or injuries—this is information you can learn from the forms the students filled out at registration. If you are ever unsure whether a student should participate in your class, it's appropriate to encourage them to consult a physician.

Benefits of Yoga

“As teachers, we must present yoga professionally, refraining from any tendency to make unsubstantiated claims or promise miraculous benefits. At the same time, we don’t want to close any doors to yoga’s more subtle effects and its tremendous capacity to heal the body and mind. Along with understanding and, when appropriate, explaining the traditional teachings, everyone’s subjective experience of yoga should be respected.”

—Shobhan Richard Faulds

Sharing the traditional and scientific benefits of yoga has the potential to deepen students' experiences and appreciation of yoga. Unfortunately, many teachers speak inaccurately about yoga's effects when they confuse the traditional and scientific benefits or when they use second hand information without verifying its source. It is imperative that you use only verified and trustworthy sources. Not only will this boost your confidence in your teaching, but it will enhance students' confidence in you as well.

Some of your students will be intrigued by the scientific benefits of yoga, while others may feel more compelled by the traditional benefits. Knowing both will help you to connect with and serve more students.

Benefit statements can be woven into all parts of a yoga class. They may be used when creating the context, during teaching demonstrations, or as you guide the posture. It's not necessary to mention all the benefits of every posture you lead—limit the use of benefit statements to focus on deepening learning and/or experiential awareness.

Whereas benefit statements can be shared anytime, to keep your classes safe, name the precautions and contraindications of a pose before leading students into it. See the Five Step Safety Protocol for more information about how to support students who may require posture modifications.

Speaking About the Traditional Benefits of Yoga

Examples:

- “My experience is that Warrior can give a sense of confidence.”
- “Many of my teachers share that Child’s pose can quiet an anxious mind.”
- “Many students find forward folds relaxing.”

Personal experience: At times, it’s very useful to speak about the benefits of yoga from your own personal experience. How has yoga helped you? What impact have you noticed (either in your own body or working with other students) of a particular pose or practice? Your subjective experience of the practice will be of value to many students.

Teachers/guru: When you hear a teacher talk about the benefit of yoga from his/her experience, you may wish to share this benefit with your students. If so, first determine if it is a traditional yoga benefit or a modern science benefit. If a modern science benefit such as “this pose increases parasympathetic activity,” you may want to double-check this with a scientific reference. If not, share the benefit from the traditional yoga doorway. Students may feel inspired to know that a well-seasoned teacher knows the scientific benefit of a certain pose or practice. It is important to be clear who you are quoting and that it is a teacher you trust and respect.

Ancient yoga texts: You might also talk about the benefits of yoga by citing a certain doctrine, such as the Yoga Sutras or *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. As long as you note where you are offering this benefit from, this could inspire students to understand more about the traditional benefits of yoga as well as interest them in reading more about yoga philosophy.

Yoga framework/philosophy: It’s important as a teacher to be clear about which framework you’re referencing. For example, if you are talking about the benefits of nadi shodhana and you want to offer a traditional yoga benefit, you could say, “Traditionally, this practice is aimed at clearing the energy channels.”

Speaking About the Modern Science Benefits of Yoga

This doorway can be broken down into two sub-doorways: yoga research and modern medicine.

Examples:

- “Research shows that Cobra pose can help people with low-back pain.”
- “Numerous studies show that this breathing practice can activate the relaxation response and reduce anxiety.”

Yoga research: When you cite a benefit that has been rigorously researched, you are citing a yoga-research benefit. This includes any peer-reviewed research study on yoga practices. Peer-reviewed research articles have been reviewed by a group of experts to determine a study’s rigor. Many such studies can be found at www.pubmed.com, an extensive research database that holds all peer-reviewed studies being conducted in the US and around the world. These studies are also considered “evidence-based,” meaning they include a rigorous research protocol, study implementation, and statistical analysis.

Modern medicine: This doorway may include more general research studies, but it specifically includes any documented science on such things as Western anatomy and physiology, brain science, and systems recognized/developed by modern science. This doorway can help you speak about the benefits of yoga from a broader Western medical perspective. For example, from this doorway you might say something like “Warrior poses help to strengthen the muscles of the legs,” because you know from Western medicine that engaging in any kind of stretching and holding can increase the strength of the muscle group being held.

Evidence-Based Yoga for Special Populations

As a yoga teacher, it is likely that you will eventually encounter students who are working with a physical condition that affects their practice. It is not in your scope of training to offer yoga as a treatment for their condition, but it is your responsibility to help your students practice safely.

Empower yourself by reading up on the latest yoga research, studying with an expert on a particular condition, or consider training to become a yoga therapist.

Below are some websites that provide the latest yoga research. Periodically revisit them to refresh your knowledge, as scientific evidence can change—sometimes dramatically—as more yoga-based studies are performed and peer-reviewed.

PubMed: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed

Google Scholar: www.scholar.google.com

Kundalini Research Institute: www.kundaliniresearchinstitute.org

Directory of Open Access Journals: www.doaj.org

Science Daily: www.sciencedaily.com

Notes

Five Step Safety Protocol

1. Be proactive: Ask your students about special conditions. Before class starts, ask your students if they have any concerns or health conditions that you need to be aware of.
2. Thank any students who let you know about their condition. This is privileged information that your student trusts you with.
3. Ask the student if their doctor knows about their condition and also knows that they are taking yoga classes. If the student reports that their doctor does not know that they are practicing yoga, encourage them to let their doctor know in order to optimize their safety, comfort and learning process. Above all be very clear with your student that even as a certified Yoga Teacher your scope of practice is limited to teaching classes rather than diagnosing or treating conditions. You may want to suggest that your student see a qualified specialist. General Practitioner physicians may not always know the potentials, possibilities, and pitfalls of practicing yoga.
4. Encourage students to use modifications, be gentle, and listen to their bodies. Encourage them to take care of themselves in class, and remind them that pushing too much could actually aggravate their condition. Let them know you are there to support them as much as you can.
5. Check in with students after the class. You might ask them, “Did the class meet your needs?” Follow up to see how they might continue to feel supported in the next class.

Notes

Notes

Leading the Posture

Silently acknowledge the students' transition from watching how the posture is done to actually experiencing the posture for themselves. Here, the deeper learning happens: a natural integration of all that they've just seen as they make contact with the wisdom of their own bodies.

The following is a brief overview of the suggested steps in guiding a posture.

- Invite the students to come into the preparatory position for the posture and relax. Ask them to take a few long, deep breaths before continuing into the pose.
- Using the press points, have the students slowly come partway into the posture, then release. Repeat this a few times, moving in and out of the posture, synchronizing breath with the movements. These movements will not only clarify the dynamics of the posture but will also help warm up the body.
- Guide the students into the full expression of the posture and then sustain it. Remind them to allow any subtle adjustments or spontaneous micromovements to happen as they hold.
- After a number of breaths, have the students slowly and safely release the posture.
- Ask the students to take a moment to experience the effects of the posture. Then allow them to flow into a complementary stretch.

Notes

Use of Language

All movement patterns are stored as images in the brain. To perform a movement, a command must be translated into an image that creates it. The simple command “Lift your right arm” must actually be translated into an image before the movement can be performed. Try directing it like this: “As you inhale, allow your breath to slowly lift your right arm over your head. See how effortless and relaxed you can be as you allow the breath to lift your arm.” Functional imagery deepens the experience beyond the mechanics and can include sound, touch, feeling, taste, or visual images: “Notice if your body wants to let go into this long, deep stretch. Allow your body to melt into the ground. Glide your palms forward and notice how this stretch feels.”

Clear, precise directions

There is a time lag for the brain between hearing an instruction, interpreting the request, and translating it into a movement. Since beginners are just developing an awareness of their bodies, our initial instructions are often a puzzle for the mind. Giving clear, simple, and precise directions makes the learning process much more efficient. Suppose the movement you want to create is tilting the head to one side. You might need to repeat the directions in several different ways to make sure the students understand what you’re requesting. You could just say, “Tilt your head to the right and relax into the stretch.” But the mind will want to know: “What does ‘tilt’ mean, and how far to the right?” These ambiguities can engage the mind and not allow the mind and body to be fully involved in the desired experience. Another way of giving this direction might be:

“Lower your right ear toward your right shoulder. Slow the movement down. Feel your head hanging. Inhale, and stretch as far as is comfortable for you. Hold the breath for a moment, then inhale the head back to center. Feel your head returning to the upright position. Notice the effects of the stretch.”

Graduated sequence of instructions

Every movement can be broken down into smaller and smaller movements, which makes our awareness much more precise. To enter into a sequence of such micromovements with deep concentration requires that the instructions build from the simple to the complex. Using the example above, the movement could be composed thus:

“Become aware of your head. How is it tilted right now? Is it pointing downward, parallel to the ground, or upward, toward the sky? Consciously drop your head to the right, moving your right ear toward your right shoulder. Relax the shoulders and breathe into the left side of your neck. As you inhale, slowly raise your head back to center. Then exhale and lower the ear back down toward your shoulder. Repeat this simple movement several times, relaxing more and more deeply into the breath. Each time you exhale, stretch the neck a little deeper. Notice how your head tilts sideways as the ear drops down. The next time you lower the ear, hold the stretch, continuing to hold as you breathe into the neck and shoulders.”

Experiential language

Asking a student to perform a specific action might sound like this: “Now I want you to raise your right arm. Now lower your right arm. Next, I want you to inhale and stretch both arms overhead.” If having the student perform those specific movements was our only goal, this style of teaching would be appropriate. Yet our intention is to communicate with our students in such a way that they hear the instructions as though they were listening to the inner voices of their own bodies. This form of communication requires experiential language that creates internal awareness.

In the example above, when the teacher says, “I want you to...” our minds hear and interpret the message as “I am now doing this movement because the teacher wants me to.” Because the teacher is giving the commands as though your body were at his or her disposal, you are passively involved in the action.

Experiential language is a way of speaking in which the teacher removes him- or herself from wanting the student to do anything at all:

“Become aware of the sensations in your right arm and right shoulder. What is your shoulder saying to you in this moment?”

“Let go of doing and simply watch how the movement is happening through you.”

“Allow your fingertips to stretch overhead, reaching toward the ceiling.”

“Inhale into the entire right side of your body. Feel the length of your whole right side being opened by the breath.”

“Feel the space you have created inside for your shoulder and your arm to expand.”

Notice the use of words such as “be aware of,” “let go,” “allow,” and “feel,” as compared to “I want you to ...” When we hear ourselves saying to our students, “I want you to ...,” it is helpful to ask ourselves why we want them to. Is it because if they do what I am asking it will mean that I am a good teacher? Our language reveals our intention.

Simple, Clear, and Effective Posture Cues

As yoga teachers, communication is as important as study and personal practice. Each student has a different way (i.e., visual, kinesthetic, auditory) of absorbing information and integrating it. We must be able to skillfully translate the practices in a manner that is simple, clear, and effective. A teacher's verbal cues should offer enough information to keep the student safe and engaged, while leaving enough space for them to have their own experience. Depending on the aim of the class, there can also be a range in voice quality and word choice, from soft and nurturing to strong and encouraging.

Simple: Common principles create a foundation for understanding.

Many postures have common principles that help simplify the complex human skeleton and muscular systems. As a teacher, the more you can identify these principles, the easier it will be to remember the details of each posture. For example, Mountain, Warrior, Side Warrior, Tree, and Bridge are all aligned with one or both knees stacked over the ankle. Triangle, and Half Moon are lateral bends that require abdominal engagement, length on both sides of the ribs, and the neck to curve as an extension of the spine. Being able to see the commonalities between postures will help you to focus on the specifics.

Clear: Clear language is direct and easy to follow.

As a yoga teacher, can you use clear language that offers your students an obvious action? Using too many words can get in the way of clarity. Words such as “kind of,” “try to,” and “you’re gonna” are extraneous and can take away from the essential cues of a posture. When you communicate, be as direct as possible, identifying a body part, an action, and a direction to move. Whether working with a large group or one-on-one, speak to each individual. For example, the cue “Let’s all stand tall in Mountain pose” brings awareness to the group as a whole, whereas “Stand tall in Mountain pose” aims at each individual. This can help your students stay focused on their own experiences, and worry less about what everyone else is doing.

Formula for generating essential movement cues

- 'Movement formula' = [breath + action verb + body part + direction/location]
- Example: "exhale + lengthen + your arm + lowering hands to rest/by your side"

The words you use can often have an effect on the way a student engages with a posture. Depending on the intention of the posture, it can be skillful to adjust your words to match the experience you're aiming for. For example, there is an energetic difference between relaxing your shoulders down your back and pulling your shoulders down and back. The first way offers a more gentle and nurturing type of action, whereas the latter gives a stronger, more vigorous mode. Neither way is objectively right or wrong, but one may help or hinder the experience you're trying to cultivate. Postures can be done in many ways, from relaxing to vigorous. As you translate each cue, be clear about whether you are aiming for intensity, ease, or some quality in between.

Questions and Clarifications

Immediately after their first experience in the posture, give your students a chance to ask any questions so you can clarify the details. Then guide them into the posture again. During the first experience, they may be uncertain. They're still thinking about the details and trying to get the posture "right." They might discover things about their bodies they did not notice before.

Lead the posture again

In the second guiding, your students are in familiar territory and can more fully let go and relax into the posture. This introduces the experiential part of the class, in which several more familiar postures will be led, each flowing into the next. The way you guide your students has a powerful effect on how open and receptive they are to their intuition.

If teaching a new posture to beginners is anything like eating a meal, all the previous steps would be like the appetizers, and this step would be the main course. You might want to allot the majority of time spent in class to this experience.

Share and discuss

After having the experience of doing postures and being guided through all the appropriate steps (which may include a series of postures, holding postures, releasing into a spontaneous free flow, and ending with relaxation, pranayama, and/or meditation), you will realize that much has taken place. Sharing at the end of a Kripalu Yoga class helps the mind integrate on a physical level what was experienced on a more subtle level. It's a way to come back to earth, so to speak, and to acknowledge what has taken place inside you. Sometimes we're not aware that anything has changed. And there are times when sharing feels inappropriate. Swami Kripalu once said that unless what you have to say is an improvement upon silence, it's better not to say it. But for our purposes as teachers of beginner yoga classes, sharing brings the experience to completion and helps your students feel integrated.

Sharing also helps you to make contact with your students and get to know them. As they share, allow yourself to receive the effect of your teaching. Listen to how your students are being affected by your openness, by the environment that you create, and by the experience of yoga. This is a time to make a connection with your students, to inspire them to practice. You can use this as an opportunity to share what you've learned from your experience, or simply be a listener. When the sharing and discussion are over, you might draw the group together one last time by chanting om.

Leading Stage One

Stage One practice is a time for the students to become familiar with their bodies, to experience the sensations produced by the postures, and to bring attention to the breath. The eyes may remain open, and the senses are alert, to support the mind staying focused on structural alignment and the coordination of breath and movement. Stage One increases discipline and mental focus, awakens the ability to objectively witness personal experience, and lays the foundation for deeper practice.

KEY COMPONENTS

Graduated sequence

- Give primary directions first.
- Go back and fill in details as needed.
- Build the posture from the ground up.

Action language

- Be clear, simple, and precise.
- Use anatomical references.
- Be direct (i.e., “extend,” “press,” “lift”).
- Suggest modifications and variations.
- Use repetition.
- Use references to the body and breath.
- Explain alignment and use press points.
- Suggest warm-up movements during entry phase as needed.
- Encourage conscious effort.

Do not do the posture as you lead.

- It’s okay to begin the posture with the students.
- Walk around the room, observing as you teach.
- Focus your awareness on the class.

Observe the group and speak to what you see.

- Bring in necessary details.
- Give modifications as needed.

Hands-on assisting

- Keep talking to the whole class.
- Assist everyone.
- End by affirming.

Holding

- Once in the posture, hold 10 to 20 seconds maximum, or three to five breaths.
- If you lead the posture a second time, hold longer (five to seven breaths).

Transitions (when leading a Stage One flow)

- No complementary movement or cooldown is necessary between postures.
- Feel the effects as you move to the next posture.
- Take brief rests at intervals as needed.

For example:

“Let’s start with standing postures. Our first posture is Ardha Chandrasana, Half Moon. Enter into Mountain, Tadasana, with your arms at your sides. Inhale, raise your arms out to your sides and overhead, and interlace your fingers. Press down through your feet and lift up and out of your waist through the crown of your head. If your elbows do not straighten, you can hold a belt. Press your left hip out to the left and extend up and out to the right. Feel the elongation along both sides of the body. Let your breath be calm and full. Keep both hips and shoulders squared to the front. Continue to lift out of the waist. Inhale, and lengthen back to center. We’ll repeat on the left side.” (Repeat on left side.)

“Take a moment to breathe and relax, feeling the benefits of Ardha Chandrasana. Let’s move right into Utkatasana, Standing Squat. Place your feet directly under your hips and come into Tadasana. Inhale, and extend both arms directly out in front of you.”

Action Words for Guiding Postures

Below is a list of action words you can use while guiding postures.

Relaxation verbs:

Rest, allow, soften, let go, release, sink, drop, relax

Action verbs:

- Breath: inhale, exhale, breathe
- Length: stretch, lengthen, straighten, elongate, extend, reach, point, press
- Strength: squeeze, contract, support, stabilize, hold, firm, keep, engage, maintain, strengthen
- Position: stand, kneel, sit, lie, squat, place, align, position, locate, orient
- Movement: circle, hook, draw, slide, interlace, bend, swing, catch, rotate, roll, lift, turn, lower, raise, swivel, follow, move, open, come into

Awareness verbs:

Focus, feel, pause, find, notice, observe, distinguish, sense

Formula for generating essential movement cues:

Movement formula = breath + action verb + body part + direction/location

Example: "exhale + lengthen + your arms + lowering your hands to rest/by your side"

Class Design and Sequencing The Planning Process

Suggestions for planning a yoga class

1. Set aside a time when you can relax and not be disturbed.
2. Create an atmosphere that fosters your own relaxation and creativity (light candles, play music, find a clear space in which you can do some postures).
3. Relax, center yourself, and allow yourself to be open and receptive.
4. Visualize and/or “feel” the people in your class—imagine where they might be stiff, what their problems might be, and how you can support them.
5. Visualize how they will feel at the end of the class. What is your intent for them and for yourself?
6. Do the postures that you have decided to teach in this class. Do them in the most basic ways; think simple. Break them down into sequential steps.
7. Go inside your body for guidance. Decide which are the most important details—for example, which body parts get the most stretch. Predict which postures might be hard for your students and how you can support them with an easier version or with props.
8. Decide which warm-ups are appropriate.
9. Decide how you want to lead the posture you’re teaching (for example, with partner assist, using ties, or against the wall).
10. Decide which methodologies you will use (for example, experiential language, functional imagery, before/after comparisons, graduated sequence).
11. Review benefits and precautions.
12. Explore a good counterpose or complementary stretch.
13. Consider a topic of discussion to focus on.
14. Decide how you will guide the relaxation.
15. In light of what you’ve planned and envisioned, review the materials, props, handouts, etc., you will need (for example, small lamp, incense, music, pillows, ties).

Outline for Creating a Complete Experience

Overview

There are three basic steps for creating a complete experience:

- Tell your students what you are going to do.
- Do it.
- Tell them what you did.

Beginning - Establish Safety

- Welcome students.
- Opening Centering.
- Create the context for today's experience.

Middle - Embodied Learning

- Guide warm-ups.
- Review of material from previous class.
- Introduce new material.
- Discuss the benefits and contraindications.
- Verbally demonstrate.
- Guide the posture.

End - Promote Integration

- Transition into relaxation.
- Share, discuss, ask for questions.
- Provide inspiration/invitation for the next class.
- Make announcements/provide resources.
- Closing Centering.

The Art of Sequencing

There are a number of basic principles for sequencing asana that can support an optimal experience for students. Although some of the information below follows a particular logic, it's not etched in stone. It's important to be attuned to what your class is craving, or to focus on what you're teaching in your curriculum (for example, beginner's series). When teaching, it's useful to distinguish whether you're leading a class that will visit and touch upon many posture categories or a class that has a particular focus (for example, backbending). If you are emphasizing a particular posture category, use your warm-up sequence and first round of postures to open, strengthen, and stretch the following:

- *Standing postures*: calves, quads, hips
- *Backbends*: shoulders, quads, spine, abdominals
- *Arm balances*: hips, spine, abdominals
- *Twists*: side body, shoulders, abdominals
- *Inversions*: shoulders.

Sequencing may also vary depending on the time of day. In a morning class, we might spend more time warming the muscles and joints; in an afternoon practice, we might sequence more cooling and nervous system-balancing postures to help students wind down from a full day.

In general, a class begins with warm-ups, and progresses to asanas that require strength and stamina (standing, balancing, abdominal) within the first half of the class. The middle or high point of a class should consist of the postures that require the most strength, stamina, and flexibility (backbends, deep twists, arm balances). It's important that the last quarter of the class contain asanas that are cooling, quieting, and balancing (forward folds, gentler twists, inversions).

General asana categories

Warm-Ups: Begin with joint warm-ups. Lead slow, repetitive movements, gradually increasing the pace and tempo. Open the hips and shoulders. Establish coordination of breath and movement. Explore utilizing a simple vinyasa to warm up the major muscles and joints. Surya Namaskar and its variations help to open the main muscles of the legs, hips, torso, arms, and shoulders. It flexes and lengthens the spine and helps to build stamina and strength.

Standing postures: Best practiced early in a class, standing postures require strength and stamina, and work the upper legs which are the largest muscles in the body. They are also stimulating in nature, which increases mental alertness and builds confidence, to help students feel more grounded and stable.

Balancing postures: Best done toward the end of a standing sequence, when students feel grounded and stable, balancing poses create stability or reflect the current mental and physical state. Although asymmetrical postures occur in almost every category, they are most common in the balancing category. Balancing poses point out differences in strength and/or flexibility and, through practice, provide an opportunity to even out these differences. In order to increase either strength or flexibility, guide students to practice on the weaker or tighter side first and last, and on the stronger or more flexible side just once.

Lateral bends: Best explored after the spine has warmed up, lateral bends help elongate the ribs and warm the tissue of the torso. They support elongation in backbends and help to stimulate the abdominals.

Abdominal strengtheners: Best practiced after warming up and stretching the muscles of the legs and groin, abdominal strengtheners can be interwoven throughout the practice or focused on in the first half of a class, as they tend to induce a great deal of heat.

Backbends: Backbends are typically done at the high point of a class because they require the greatest amount of physical preparation. The shoulders, low back, quadriceps, adductors, and pelvic floor must be sufficiently lengthened and warmed up in order to do backbends safely. Because deep backbends create heat and stimulate the nervous system, be sure to provide sufficient time to cool down afterward.

Forward bends: Forward bends are excellent poses to incorporate in the cool-down phase of practice because they are quieting, and help generate introversion. Forward bends provide a counterstretch for the opening in back extensions.

Twists: Considered to be neutralizing postures, twists calm the body if agitated and stimulate it if dull or lethargic. They help bring the nervous system and glandular system into balance. If done after backbends, they are cooling and soothing. They become stimulating if done after forward bends or restorative poses. They also serve as transitional poses to restore balance, and thus are good postures with which to end a class.

Inversions: Best performed after shoulder openers, such as Bridge, and shoulder strengtheners, such as Downward-Facing Dog. Explore Headstand before Shoulderstand (half or full), as Headstand is a heating inversion, while Shoulderstand is cooling and provides a counter-stretch to the neck muscles.

Lesson Planning Form

Theme		
Preparation		
Materials		
Timing	Details	
Safety	Welcome	
	Opening Centering	
	Context	
	Introduction	
	Theme	
	Intention	
	Overview	
	Q&A	
Embodied Learning	Warm-Ups Include all six movements of the spine and warm-ups sufficient to the level of practice.	
	Pranayama	
	Postures Include postures from each classification of movement. Note if a posture is new and how you will teach it. Note if you are planning to include pranayama in postures.	
Integration	Relaxation	
	Closing Centering	
	Integration	
	Reflection	
	Gratitude	
	Q&A	
	Closing	

Warm-Ups

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Warm-ups are gentle, repetitious, non-stressing movements that stretch and energize muscles and connective tissue. As the muscles open, they begin to lubricate the joints. In Kripalu Yoga, we divide warm-ups into three categories: warm-up movements, kriyas, and postures.

Warm-up movements

Warm-up movements are movements from any physical modality that can be used to prepare the body for yoga postures. Examples include crunches, windmills, and jumping jacks. One concern with using traditional exercise movements is that the students might have associations with them that are contrary to the intention of a yoga class—the movements might remind students of a competitive athletic environment, for example, which could detract from their yogic experience.

Kriyas

Kriya is a Sanskrit word meaning “to move” or “purify.” In this context, it refers to yogic movements. In asanas, the positions are held somewhat statically. However, on a more subtle level, we are adjusting the form of the posture with breath and awareness. Thus, a kriya can be a posture that we go in and out of in continuous motion. For example, in Bridge pose, gently move in and out of the posture several times before going into the full extension and holding.

Postures may be broken down into component stretches and performed as kriyas. For example, the shoulder stretch you receive during Bridge can be mimicked in a seated position with Yoga Mudra arms, squeezing the shoulder blades and lifting the sternum. If you hold and release this stretch several times, it could be an appropriate warm-up for Bridge.

Since kriyas consist of repetitive movement of certain body parts while other body parts remain relaxed, they support the student in developing detailed awareness of the mechanics of the postures. Because some parts of the body are passive during kriyas, not as much effort is exerted. This allows students to learn and practice the movements in ways that are less taxing.

Postures

Easier postures can be used as warm-ups for more challenging ones. For example, Standing Squat helps prepare the body for Warrior.

Sometimes warm-ups take the form of static holding positions, such as Fire Hydrant. These holdings engage the joint in a non-stressful yet still physically demanding way. The holding generates heat and fatigues the muscles, which can release tension and increase circulation. It's always safest to begin with repetitive movements and follow with static warm-ups.

Summary

Warm-up movements tend to be more external than either kriyas or postures, and can be especially effective for new students. The variety of available movements can meet almost any need, and are endlessly adaptable. Kriyas, on the other hand, tend to be more internal. They invite the student to feel from the inside and begin cultivating body and breath awareness. Kriyas often focus, sometimes intensely, on specific joints or muscle groups, and need to be practiced cautiously so as not to overstrain. Postures work best as warm-ups when students have already learned to safely practice the postures being offered.

A simple method for sequencing warm-ups is to first list the postures to be taught or the most advanced postures to be led. Then create a warm-up sequence for each posture on your list, combining a mix of warm-up movements, kriyas, and postures. Integrating these various techniques into a safe and thorough series of movements will provide a solid outline for a class.

Benefits of warm-ups

- Raise body temperature.
- Increase pulse rate.
- Invite breath awareness.
- Lubricate joints.
- Awaken supportive tissue.
- Encourage body awareness and introversion.
- Prepare muscles by increasing circulation and movement of interstitial fluids.
- Incrementally open the muscles in preparation for more advanced postures.
- Allow students to let go of judgments and competitive tendencies.
- Work muscles until they are tired, which may release tension, allowing them to stretch more fully and safely in the postures.
- Create a more enjoyable, safe, and beneficial physical experience.

Warm-up guidelines

- Assume the students are not warmed up at the start of class and begin from there.
- Warm up to the level of intensity of the postures you will be working with.
- Work the muscles and joints most affected by the chosen postures.
- Flow from one warm-up to the next, with only brief pauses between so that heat is generated.

Warm-up sequence

1. Slow, gentle stretching.
2. Circular movements that explore range of motion.
3. More vigorous circular or repetitive movements.
4. Static warm-up movements and postures.

Chapter learning outcomes:

- Understand the benefits of warm-ups.
- Understand the purpose of warm-ups to empower your class by fostering:
 - > Safety
 - > Introversion
 - > Body awareness
 - > Breath awareness
 - > Adaptation to incrementally deeper challenges.
- Distinguish between warm-ups, kriyas, and postures.
- Develop skill in choosing appropriate warm-ups and sequencing them into an overall class design.

Warm-up guidelines

1. These warm-ups are in seed form and may be evolved into various expressions—for example, by simply shifting from a seated position to standing, or using a chair.
2. Inhale, and open or expand the body. Exhale, and close or contract the body.
3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.

Head Lift and Tilt

Neck Flexion and Extension

1. On an inhale, maintaining length in the neck, lift your chin.



2. On an exhale, draw your chin to your chest.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. Maintain length in the neck and focus on the stretch in the throat.



Variations

Note that this movement may be expanded from the neck into the spine, torso, and body.

Head Side-to-Side

Lateral Flexion/Extension

1. On an exhale, lower your chin to your chest.



2. On an inhale, roll the right ear to the right shoulder. On an exhale, roll your chin back to your chest. On an inhale, roll your left ear to your left shoulder.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.



Upper-Back Cat and Dog

Spinal Flexion and Extension

Variation 1

1. Interlace your fingers and place your palms behind your head, right where the head and neck meet. On an inhale, open your elbows wide while lifting your chin. Make sure you avoid pulling on your head and overstretching the neck.



2. On an exhale, hug your elbows in, tuck your chin to your chest, and round your spine, lowering the elbows toward the knees or navel.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.

This movement can expand into the torso as well, by inhaling your elbows out while lifting through the chin and chest, creating a backbend.

Variation 2

1. Inhale, and interlace your fingers in front of the chest. On an exhale, press your palms away from you as you tuck your chin into your chest and round the spine. Note the variations available with the angle of the arms.



Variation 3

1. Exhale, and interlace your fingers in front of the chest. On an inhale, extend the palms up as you press your chest forward, coming into a backbend. Focus on opening the armpits, shoulders, and chest.

Variation 4

Add movement by making circles with the extended arms.



Dolphin Dives

1. Interlace your hands around your right knee. On an exhale, draw your chin into your chest and round your torso forward. Lower your nose to your navel, thigh or knee, pulling gently with your hands.

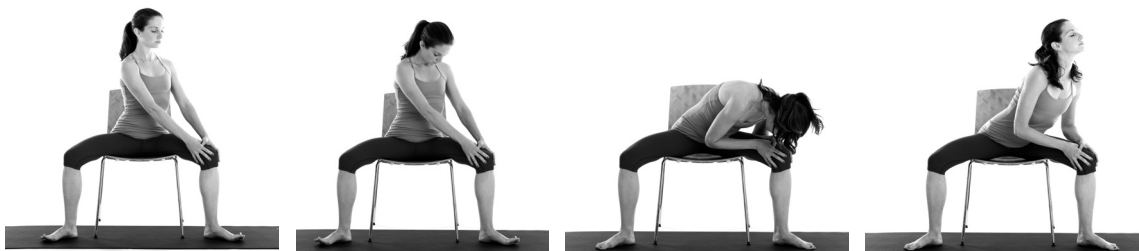


2. On an inhale, lift, leading with the chin, and push with your hands to arc your spine back to an upright position.



3. Repeat five or six times, coordinating breath and movement while creating a wavelike motion. Pause and feel the effects. Then continue on the other side.

Modifications

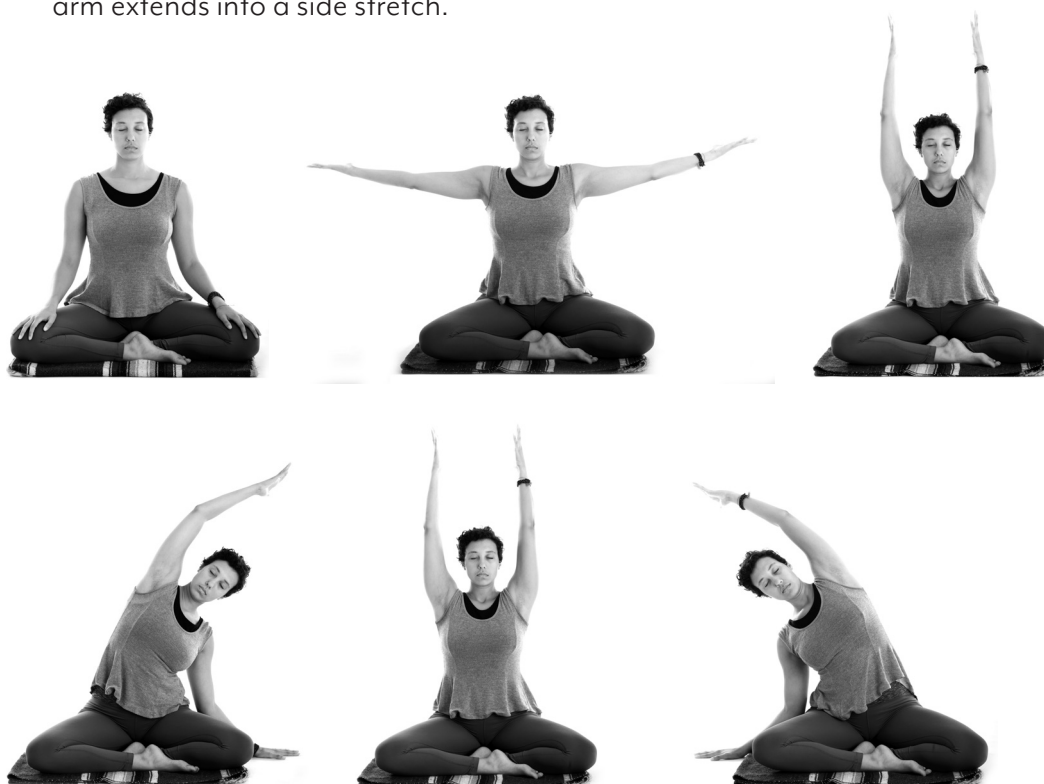


Extended Seated Side Stretch

Lateral Spinal Flexion/Extension

Variation 1

1. Inhale both arms out to the side and overhead. Exhale the right hand to the ground as the left arm extends into a side stretch.



2. Inhale both arms up as the torso straightens and, on the exhale, lower the left hand to the ground, as the right arm extends into a side stretch.
3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. Variations include keeping the hand on the ground by the hip and lowering onto that elbow, or letting that hand slide away from the hip, keeping the arm straight.



Extended Seated Side Stretch

Lateral Spinal Flexion/Extension

Variation 2

1. Bring your left hand to your right thigh or knee. Inhale your right hand overhead into a side stretch.



2. Inhale, and lift your right hand as the torso straightens. Exhale your right hand to your left knee or thigh. Inhale your left arm overhead into a side stretch.



3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. You can focus more on the side bend, letting the shoulders stay square to the front of the room, or allow the torso to twist with the side stretch.

Seated Twist

1. On an inhale, raise your arms overhead. On an exhale, lower the left hand to the right knee or thigh and lower the right hand behind the body into a twist.



2. On an inhale, unravel and raise the arms overhead. With an exhale, bring the right hand to the left leg and twist to the other side.



3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Side Stretch Arm Circles

1. Bring your right hand or forearm to the ground and the left arm overhead. Begin to circle the arm in big rotations. Allow the shoulder girdle to move as well.



2. Circle in both directions. Repeat on opposite side.

Sun Breaths

1. On an inhale, raise your arms overhead so that palms touch.



2. On an exhale, slowly lower your arms back down to your sides.
3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Variation

Inhale your arms up, then, on the exhale, bring the hands together and down through the center in a prayer position.



Torso Cat and Dog

1. Bring your hands to your knees, palms down. On an inhale, pull with your hands to draw your torso forward. Roll onto your sitz bones and press your chest forward, coming into a backbend.



2. On an exhale, pull back with your hands to roll onto your sacrum. Round the spine while tucking your chin to your chest.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement.

Torso Circles

1. Bring your hands onto the knees, palms down. Use your hands and arms to help rotate the torso around the pelvis.



2. Inhale forward through a backbend, and exhale back as the spine rounds. Allow this movement to work the shoulders, chest, spine, and hips.
3. Repeat a few circles in one direction, then change direction.

Hip Openers

1. Bring your hands to the ground behind your hips, with your feet hip-width distance apart or wider.



2. On an exhale, lower both knees to one side. On an inhale, raise them back through center and exhale both knees to the opposite side.



3. Continue swiveling the knees from side to side, coordinating breath with movement.

Hip Openers with Twist

1. Bring your hands to the ground behind your hips with your feet hip-width distance apart or wider.



2. Lower both knees to the left as bring your right hand to the floor on your left side. Use both hands to lengthen your torso away from your knees, toward the back of the room. Stay upright with your arms straight, or lower onto your elbows or all the way down on your forearms, and lower your forehead onto your hands.



3. Repeat on the other side.

Modified Table

If you have knee sensitivity, you can place a blanket under your knees, fold the corners of the mat, or place a rolled-up yoga mat just under the shins. This last option allows the knees to be completely off the ground and can help build core strength.



Table Cat and Dog

1. From a basic Table position, inhale, and lift the tailbone as the belly lowers, rotating the pelvis forward and arching the back.



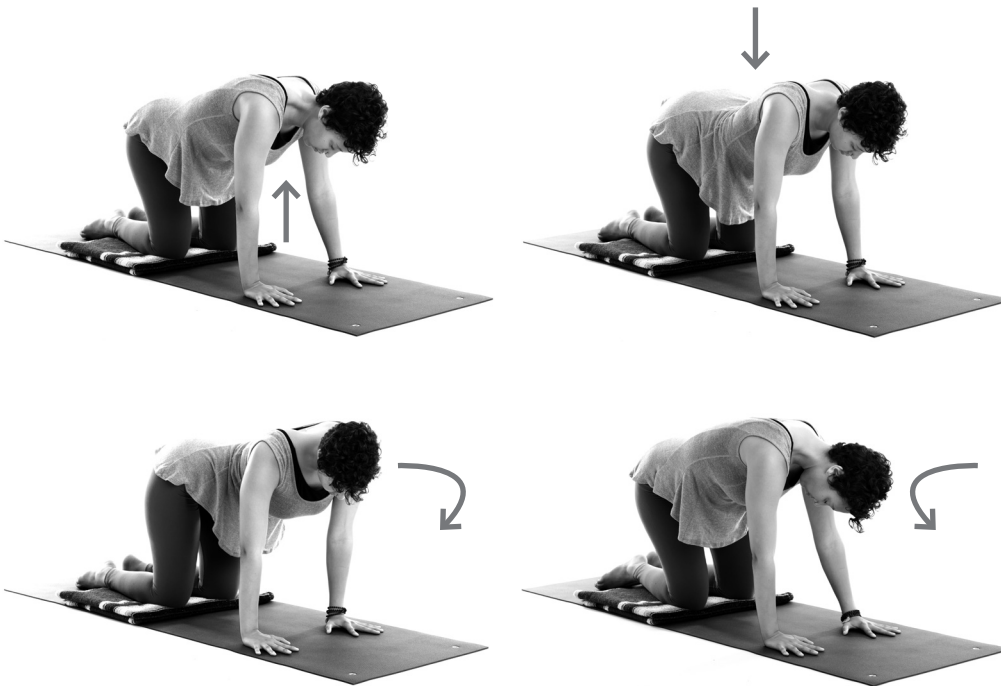
2. On the exhale, scoop the tailbone under, rotating the pelvis backward to round the spine, and tuck the chin into the chest.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. You can coordinate the movement with the opposite breath pattern as well (exhale as you arch the back, inhale as you round the back).

Table Cat and Dog Circles

From Table, transition between Cat and Dog by circling the torso in one direction and then the other.



Variation

From Table position, add horizontal arm and or leg extensions to generate abdominal engagement.



Puppy Pose

1. Bring your knees hip-width apart, or wider.



2. Keep the hips stacked over your knees as you extend the arms a comfortable distance away, or until the chin or forehead is resting on the mat.



3. Wrap your shoulders onto your back as you stretch your arms forward, keeping your elbows off or on the ground.
4. To release, lower the elbows and press down into your hands.

Lunge Arm Circles

1. Step your right foot between your hands. Lean your weight into your left hand and make large circles with the right arm, first in one direction, then the other.



2. Repeat on the second side.

Variation

Lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel.

Thread the Needle

1. Open the knees wider than hip-width and bring the thumbs to touch under the sternum. Inhale the right arm out to the side and up to the ceiling, moving into a twist.



2. Exhale, and thread the right hand between the left arm and knee, lowering onto the right shoulder. Inhale, and unravel, lifting the right hand back up to the ceiling.
3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement on one side for a few rounds; then repeat on the other side.



4. Inhale, and unravel, lifting the right hand back up to the ceiling. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement on one side for a few rounds, then repeat on the other side.

Table Twist

1. Open the knees out wider than hip-width and bring your thumbs to touch under the sternum. Inhale one arm up to the ceiling, coming into a twist. Exhale, and place the hand back to the mat.



2. Repeat this action with the other arm. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Variation

Pause when lifting each arm and make large circles in either direction.



Arm Circles

1. Open the knees wider than hip-width and bring the thumbs to touch under the sternum. Reach your right hand forward, up, and back, making a large circle with the arm.



2. Alternate between sides, moving the circles in both directions.

Gate Pose (Parighasana)

1. From Table, come up to stand on both knees. Extend your right leg out to your side, aligned with your hip, toes pointing forward.



2. Lower your right hand onto your hip crease, or, for a deeper stretch, place your forearm onto the thigh. Lengthen through the spine and the left arm, then lean toward the right.



3. Inhale back up to center and raise both arms overhead. Exhale your left hand to the ground as you extend your right hand away from your right foot.
4. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. Repeat on the other side.

Hip-Opening Knee Circles

1. From Table, lift your right knee out to the side. Start with the knee bent at 90 degrees, shin parallel to the floor. Begin making circles with the knee, allowing the circles to be wide.



2. After five to 10 circles, repeat on the other side. You may want to rest in Child's pose after each side.

Cross-Crawl

1. Lift your right knee and sweep it in a circle, crossing your right leg over your left, so that both knees are touching on the ground, with the right knee in front.



2. Then, lift the left knee back and sweep it in a circle, crossing it in front of the right leg.



3. Continue this movement from side to side, either staying in place or walking up and down the mat.

Variation

Extend the right leg horizontally and place your foot on floor, by the left side of body. Look over the left shoulder for a lateral stretch.

Hips Side-to-Side

1. Bring the knees and feet to touch, with the hands out wider than shoulder-width. Begin to rock your hips side to side, allowing the movement to grow, as it feels appropriate.



2. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Hip Circles

1. Bring the knees and feet to touch with the hands out wider than shoulder-width. Start to circle your hips around your knees, allowing the circles to grow to an appropriate size.



2. You can increase the circling so that you pass through Upward-Facing Dog and all the way back to Child's pose.



3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. Then circle the hips in the opposite direction.

Table Leg Swings

1. From Table, extend your right leg behind you. As you exhale, pull the leg to your right into a side-kick position.

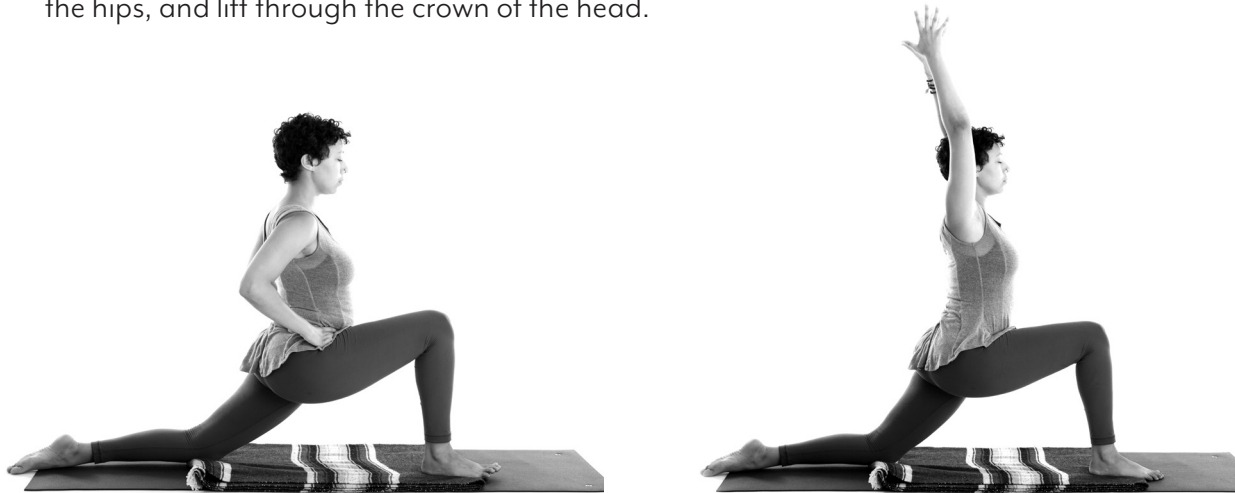


2. As you inhale, swing the leg back behind and over to your left side. Briefly touch your right toes to the floor and, moving your head to your left, bring your forehead as close to your right foot as you can, creating a C curve. Exhale as you quickly pull the right leg back to a side-kick position and repeat kicking back on your inhales and forward on your exhales. When you're done, rest in Child's pose for a few breaths and then repeat on the other side.



Hamstring Stretch

1. Step your right foot between your hands. On an inhale, place your hands onto your hips, sink the hips, and lift through the crown of the head.



2. On an exhale, straighten your right leg, pressing your hips back, and fold forward over your extended leg. The front foot can stay planted on the ground, or the toes can draw back toward the body as the heel presses into the ground.



3. Continue this movement forward and backward, coordinating the breath and movement. Repeat on the second side. For more ease, keep the palms on the floor. For more challenge, lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel, coming into Warrior.

Runner's Lunge

1. Step your right foot between your hands. Bring both hands to the inside of the right foot. Stay lifted on your hands, or lower down onto your forearms and sway your hips side to side.



2. Repeat on the left side. For more challenge, lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel.



Modification

For sensitive knees, place padding beneath the back bent knee to support the leg.

Side-to-Side Extended Arms

1. Come into Puppy Pose, keeping the arms straight.



2. On an exhale, lower your shoulder to one side. You can lower it to touch the ground, if you can. Inhale back up to a neutral position.



3. Move side to side, coordinating breath with movement.

Pelvic Tilt

1. Bend your knees and bring your feet hip-width distance apart on the ground. Bring your hands to your hips.



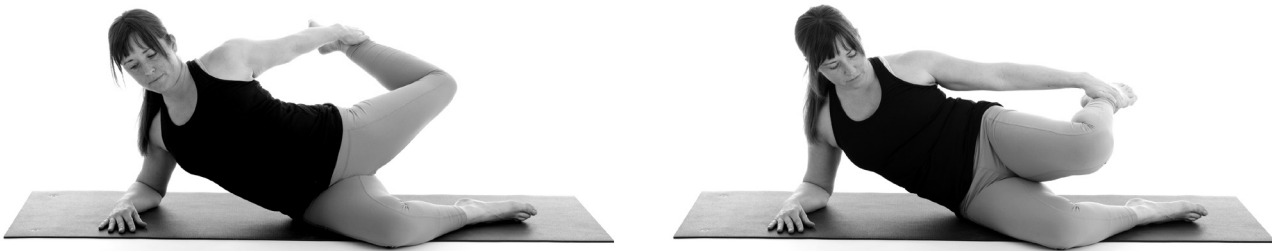
2. Inhale, and rock your pelvis forward and tailbone down. Exhale back, scooping the tailbone up to the ceiling.



3. Repeat, coordinating movement with breath, or pause with the knees down to one side.

Reclining Dancer

1. From a supine position with your knees bent, roll onto your right side and lift yourself up onto your right forearm. Clasp your left ankle with your left hand.

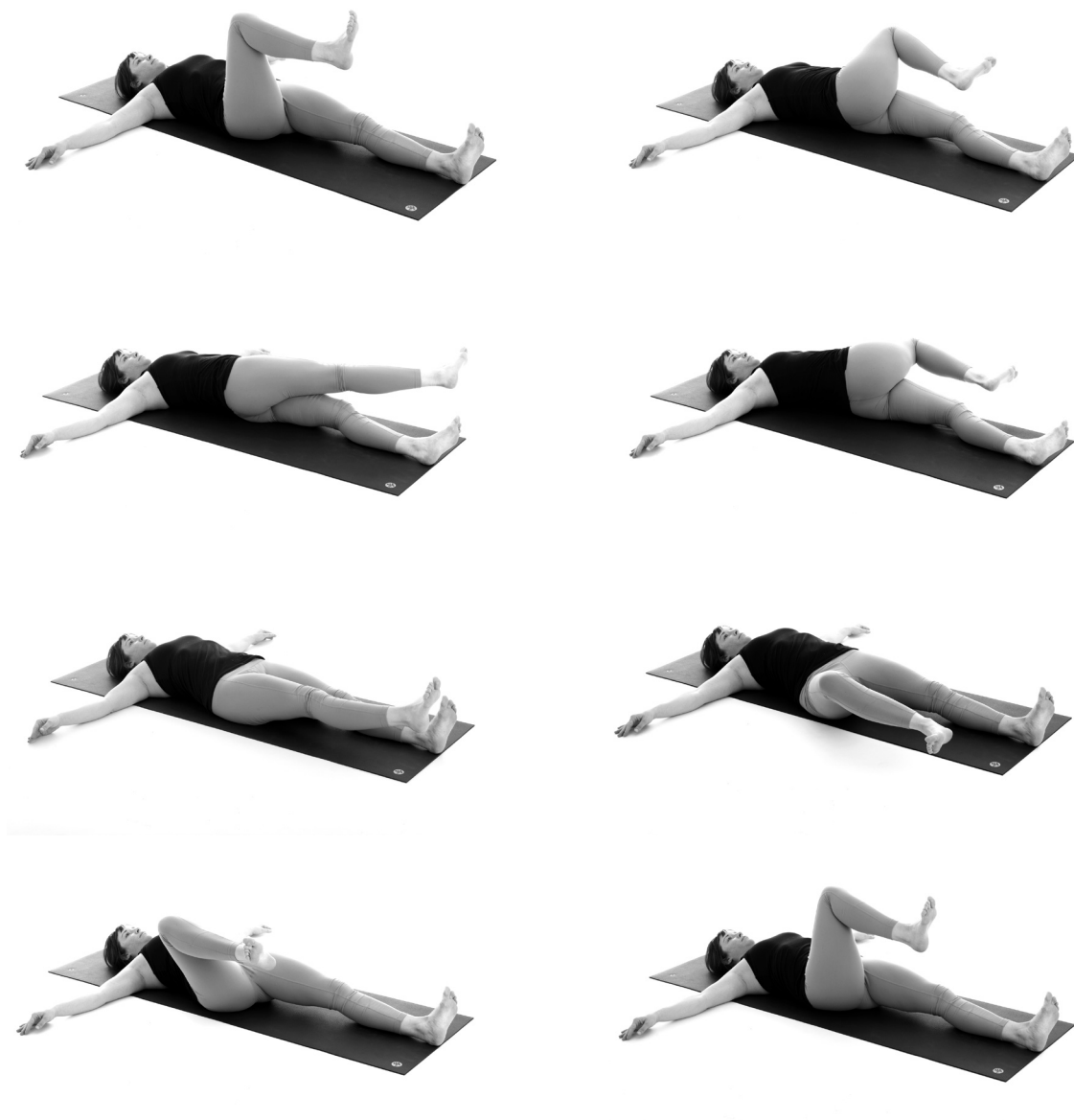


2. On an exhale, draw your forehead and left knee toward each other. As you inhale, extend your left leg out behind into a reclining Dancer's pose. Continue moving back and forth several times before switching to the other side.



Reclining Knee Circles

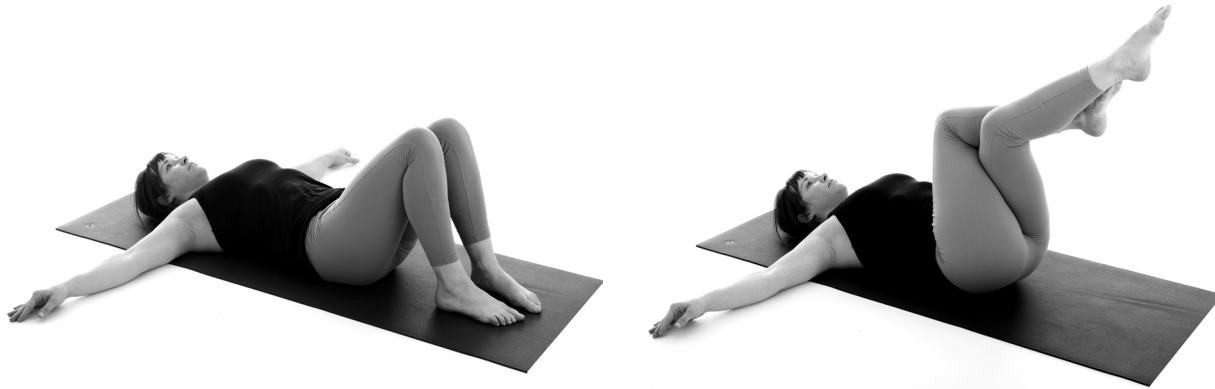
1. Lie in Supine Spinal Twist with your right knee over your abdomen. Start to make small circles with your right knee, gradually increasing the circles. As your circles increase, your pelvis will begin to twist, and the moving knee will draw closer to the floor on both sides.



2. When you are ready to end the movement, spiral the knee back to vertical. Release your right leg to rest straight on the mat and bend your left knee to repeat the sequence on the other side.

Eagle Leg Reclining Twist

1. Lie on your back with your arms on the floor in a T position and your knees bent. Wrap your right leg over your left into Eagle legs position. Lift the left foot off the floor and rock your knees from side to side.

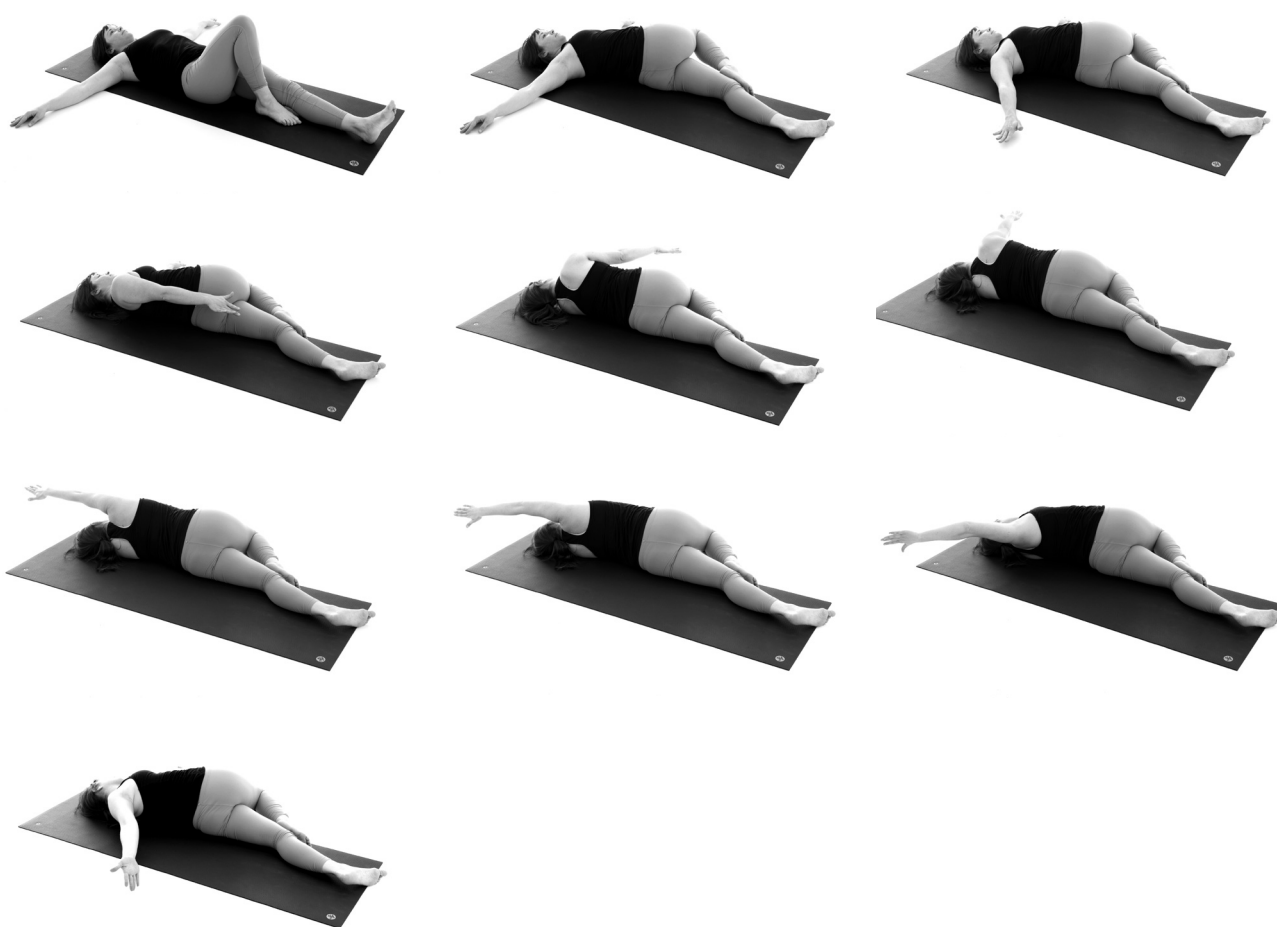


2. You may also rest your knees to the left for several breaths. Unwind your legs and repeat with the left leg over the right.



Reclining Arm Circles

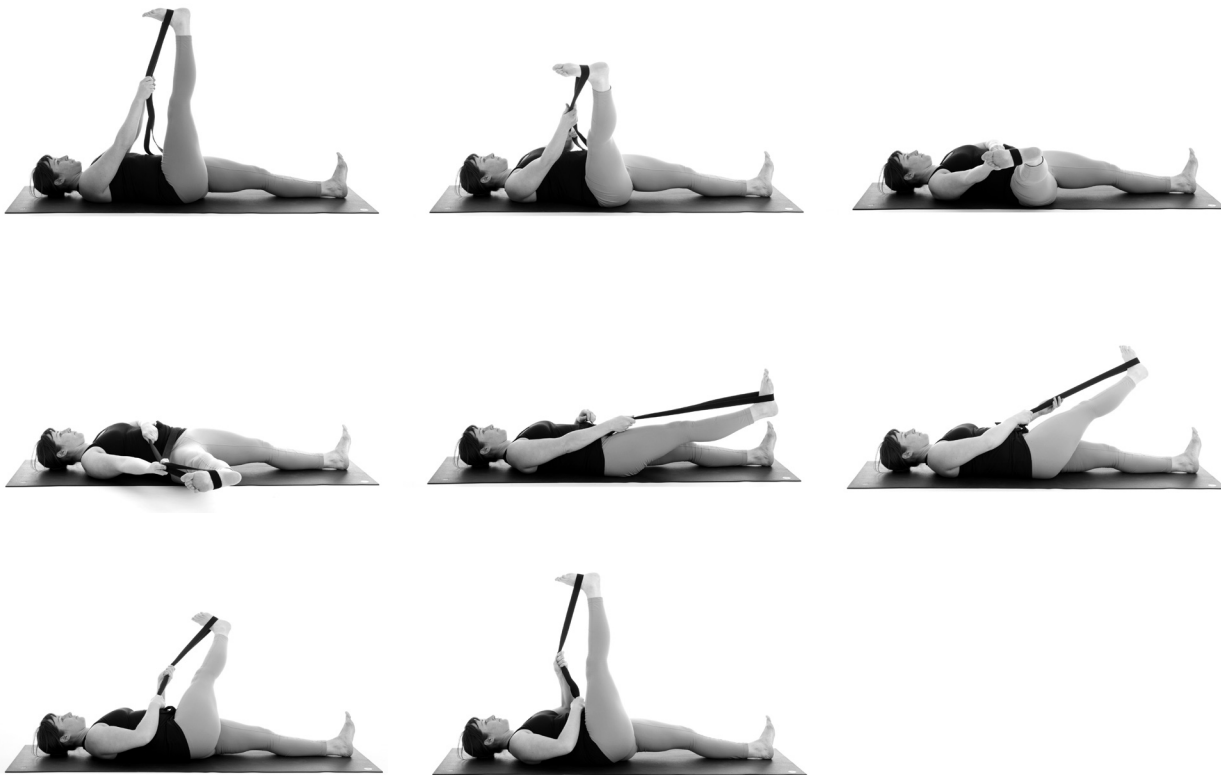
1. Lie in Supine Spinal Twist with your right knee over on your left side. Inhale, and as you exhale slide your right hand along your mat, down toward your left foot. Let the shoulder stretch as you reach your hand long through the whole arc of the movement. Lift your arm as much as you need to clear your hips, and continue to move the right arm in a big circle over to the left, overhead, and back to the right.



2. Continue several times. Allow your waist to twist with the movement, and when the right hand passes your left arm, roll onto your left shoulder to stretch your posterior deltoid. Exhale as your arm moves down toward your foot and over to the left, and inhale as it passes overhead and back to your right. After five circles, repeat on the left after moving into Supine Spinal Twist on the other side.

Reclining Tie Stretches

1. Lie on your back with your legs extended and a strap around your right foot, holding the ends of the strap in both hands. Pull on the strap as you extend your right leg overhead for a hamstring stretch. Begin to make circles in the air with the right foot. Keep both knees straight.



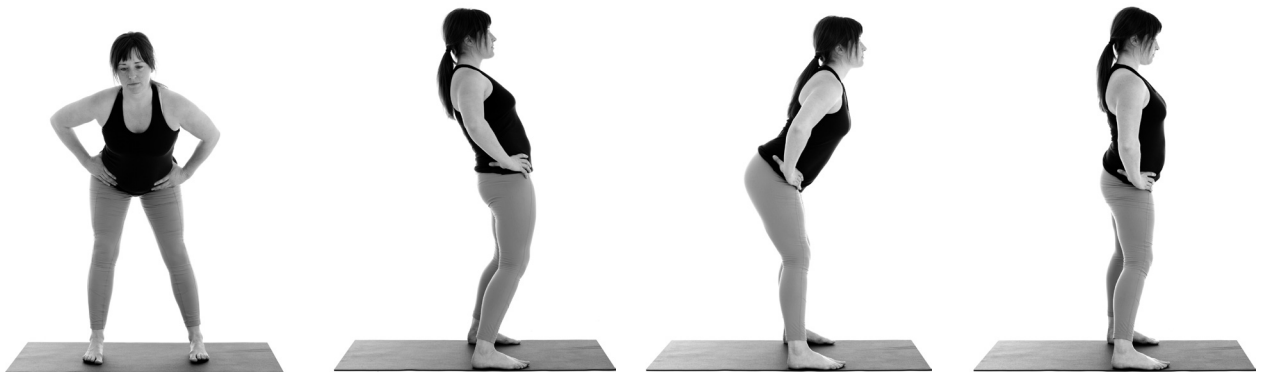
2. Adjust your hand positions to best support your body. You could also hold the strap with just your right hand and extend your left arm out to the side on the floor.
3. After five to 10 circles with the right leg, spiral the leg back to vertical and lower it down by the left. Rest for a few breaths and repeat on the other side.

Standing Hip Circles

1. Stand with your feet about mat-wide apart, your hands on your hips. Keeping your knees straight but not locked, begin to circle your hips.

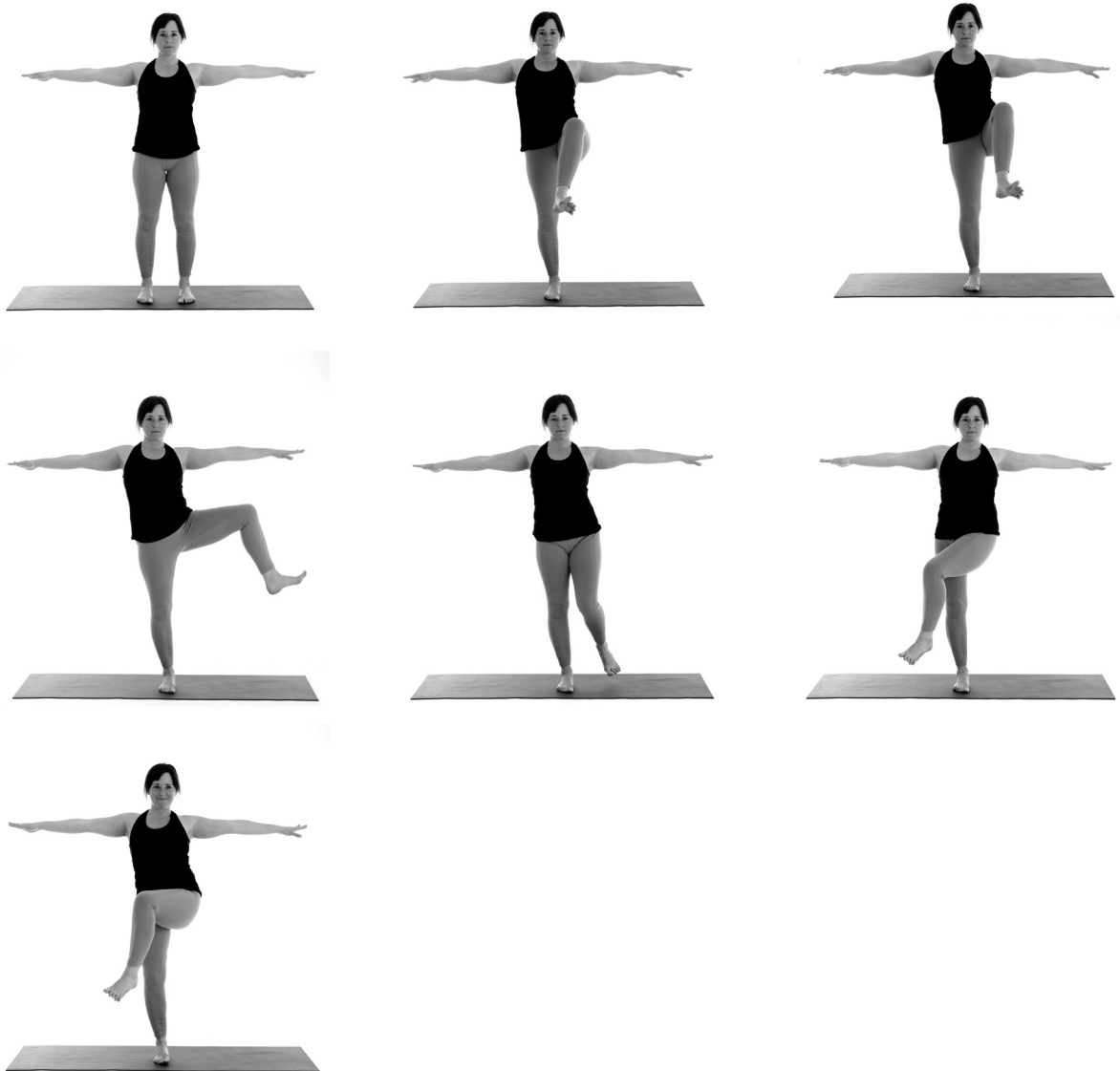


2. Move with your breath and allow the circles get gradually larger.



Balancing Knee Circles

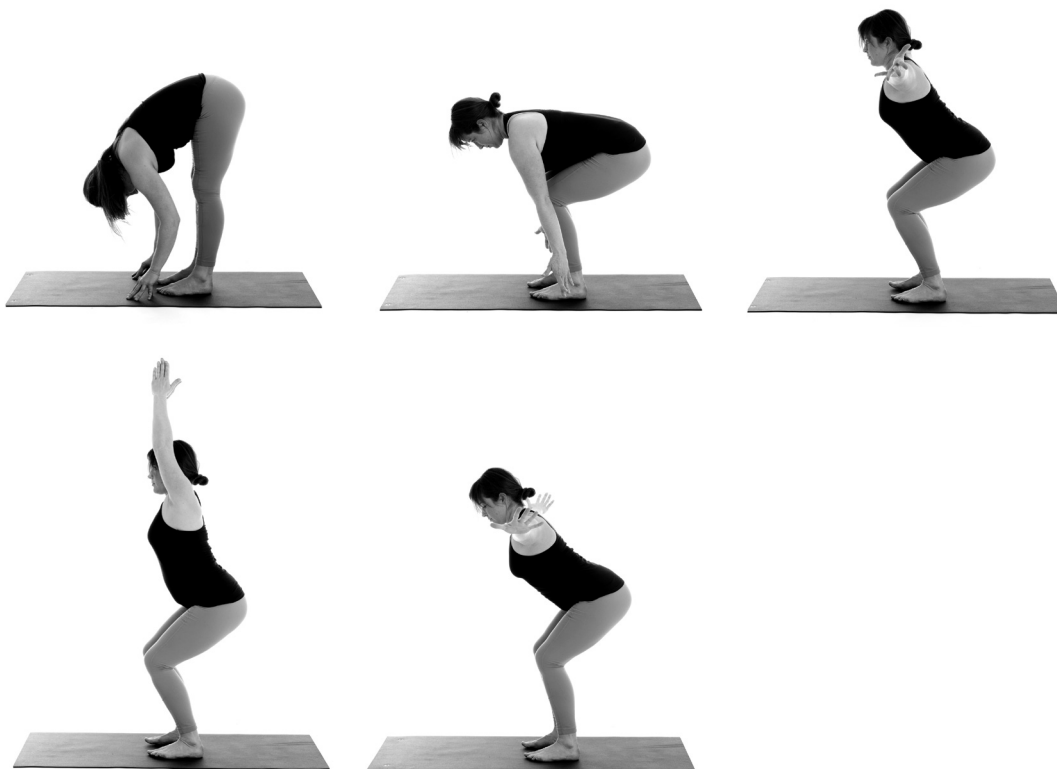
1. Stand with your feet close together and extend your arms out to your sides. Lift your right knee up in front of you until your thigh is parallel to the floor. Sweep your right knee out to your right and make a circle, moving down and then over to your left and up as high as you can and over to the right again.



2. Make two or three circles in both directions for each leg.

Chair Kriya

1. Start in Standing Forward Fold with your knees slightly bent and your fingers touching or reaching for the floor. Exhale, and as you inhale, bend your knees and lower your hips into Standing Squat. As your hips sink down, sweep your arms out to the sides and overhead.

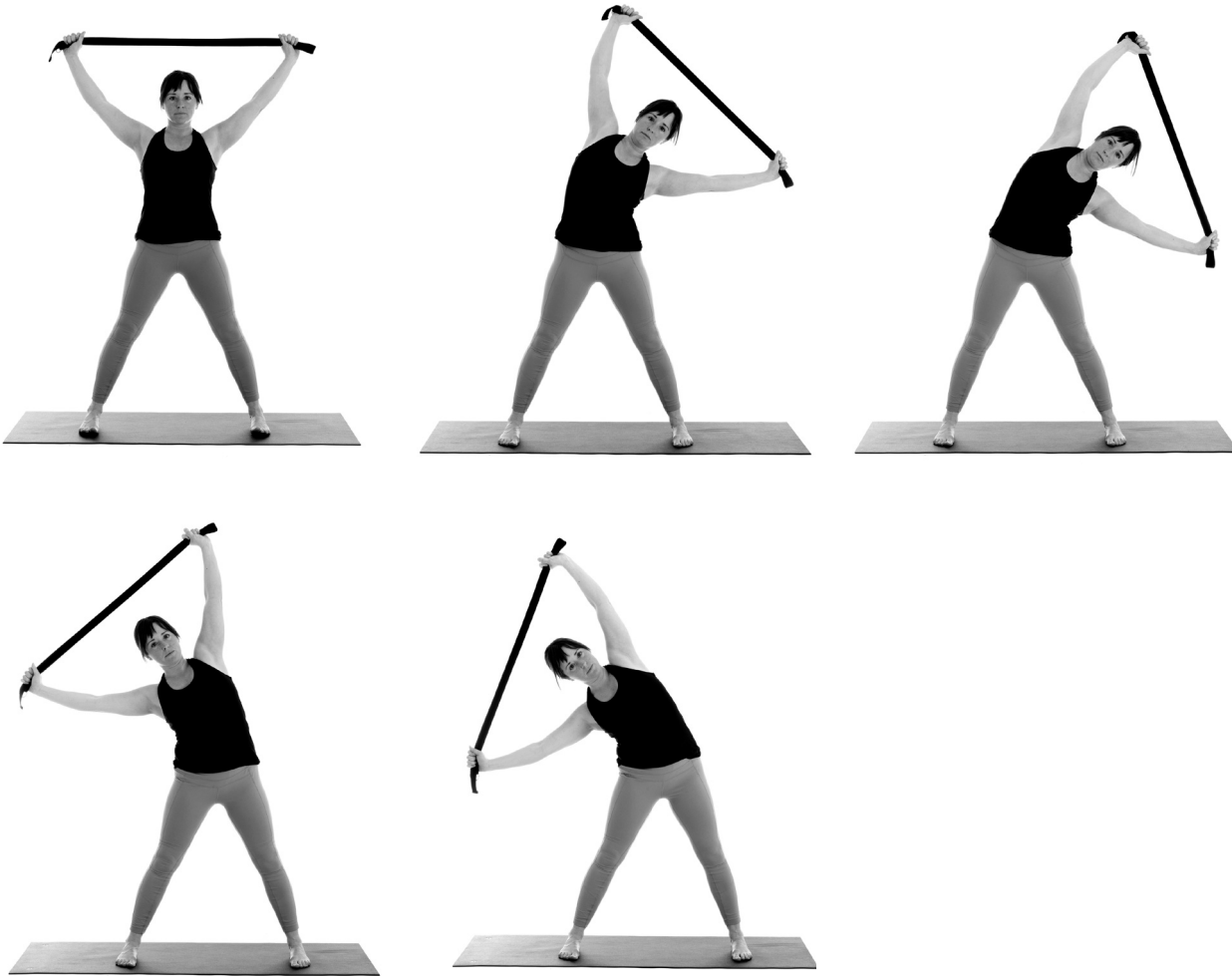


2. As you exhale, raise your hips and lower your arms and torso. Repeat for several breaths.



Arms Overhead Tie Stretch

1. Stand with your feet one leg-length apart, facing forward. Hold a strap out in front of you with your hands about as wide apart as your feet. Straighten your arms and lift them overhead, placing your arms behind your ears if you can. Sway from side to side, deepening the arc.



2. Exhale to each side and inhale to center.

Pyramid Kriya

1. Stand in Pyramid with your right foot about two to three feet behind the left foot, both feet facing forward. Extend your torso over your left leg. Keep the hamstring stretch manageable by supporting your body with your fingertips on the floor or on blocks by your front foot. On an inhale, bend the left knee slightly, shift your weight forward, and lift your head, keeping the back of your neck long.



2. As you exhale, straighten your left leg, shift your weight back and pull your forehead toward your left shin.



3. Repeat several times before switching sides.

Pyramid Twist

1. Stand in Pyramid with your right foot about two to three feet behind the left foot, both feet facing forward. Extend your torso over your left leg. Keep the hamstring stretch manageable by supporting your body with your fingertips on the floor or on blocks by your front foot. On an inhale, sweep your right arm out to the right. Let your torso follow by twisting toward the right hand.



2. Exhale and release, bringing the right fingers back to the mat or the blocks. Inhale, and twist to your left, sweeping your left hand out to the left.



3. Repeat, alternating left and right several times before switching sides.

Down Dog Pigeon Kriya

1. From a bent-kneed Downward-Facing Dog, lift your right leg out behind you on an inhalation.



2. As you exhale, pull your right knee into your chest and then slide the knee between your hands into Pigeon. (Your right foot can stay under your right thigh, which is easiest, or your right foot can land by your left hip, which offers a deeper stretch.) As you inhale, lift your torso by pressing down into your hands and arching your back. Exhale, and lift your hips back to bent-kneed Downward Dog and repeat on your left side.



3. Continue alternating sides for several cycles.

Strap Stretch Forward Fold and Twist

1. Stand with your feet wide apart, toes pointing forward or slightly in. Hold onto a yoga strap with your arms wide. Straighten your arms as much as you can and lift the strap over your head. Draw your shoulders back and down and see if you can bring your arms behind your ears. As you exhale, hinge at your hips and bring your torso forward. Keep your arms pressing back and your shoulders moving down. Keep your spine as long as possible, coming forward only to the point where your belly or arms are parallel to the floor. Inhale back to center and press your pelvis forward to create a small backbend. Continue folding and arching with your breath several times before adding the twist.

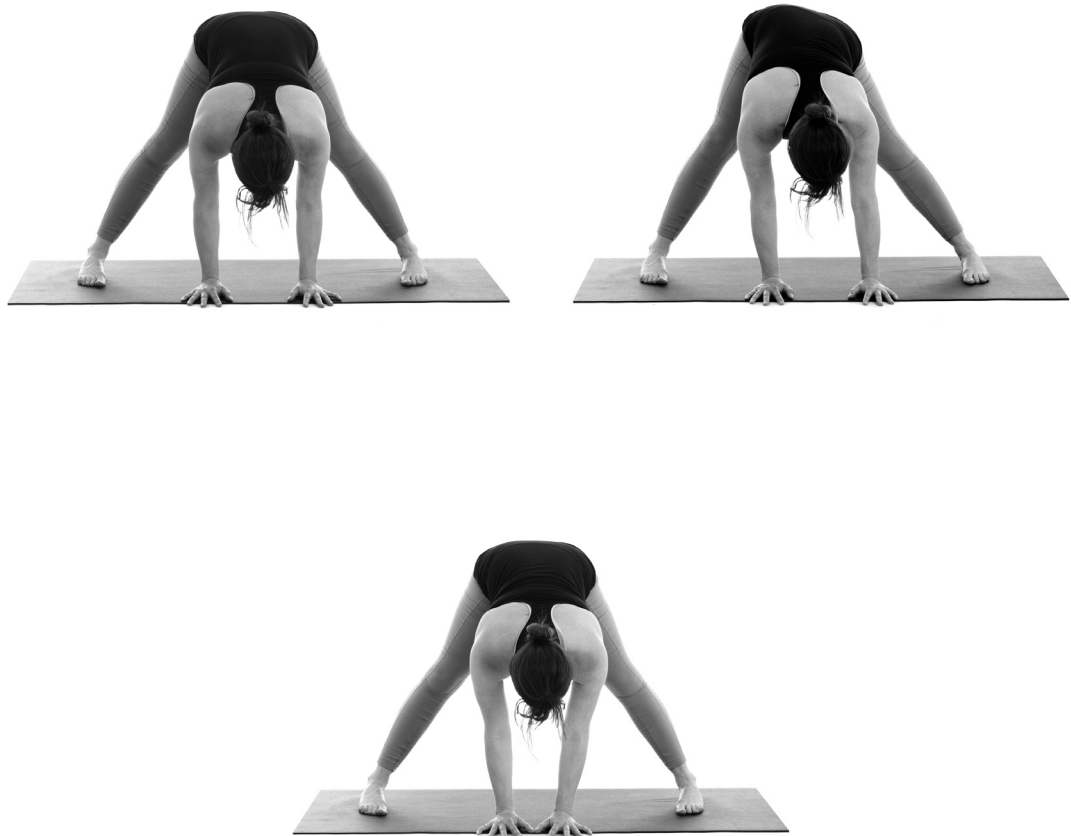


2. The next time you hinge forward, twist to your left. The right hand moves toward your left foot and your left hand lifts. Keep your spine long. Inhale back up. Arch your back slightly, and as you exhale forward, twist to your right. Repeat, alternating the twist from side to side.



Standing Wide-Angle Pelvic Rock

1. Stand in a wide-legged forward fold. Your hands can rest on the floor or on blocks underneath your shoulders. Without bending your knees begin to rock your pelvis from side to side, gradually increasing your range of motion.



2. You may hold and stretch for a few breaths with the pelvis tilted to each side.

Wide Angle to Squat Kriya

1. Stand with your feet wide apart, toes slightly turned out. Bring your hands to the floor under your shoulders. Bend one knee and lower slightly to that side. Straighten both legs and then lower slightly to the other side.



2. Alternate from side to side, bringing your hips closer to the mat each time. If there is any discomfort in your knees, adjust your feet so that the toes point out in the same line as your thighs.



3. Move with your breath, exhaling to each side and inhaling to center. You may pause on each side for a few breaths.

Wide Angle Twist

1. Stand with your feet wide apart, toes pointing forward or slightly in. Place your hands on your hips and hinge forward at your hips. Slowly lower your hands to the mat under your shoulders. You can also place your hands on blocks or on a chair. Lengthen your spine to stretch your hamstrings. Press into your left hand and as you inhale, lift your right arm out to the right and overhead, twisting from your shoulder and waist.



2. Exhale to release, lowering your right hand to the mat. Press into your right hand, lift your left arm, and twist to your left. Repeat, alternating sides.



Notes

Sun Salutation

Surya Namaskar Vinyasa

Traditional benefits

- Provides an excellent warm-up for stretching and invigorating the whole body
- Tones the digestive system, massaging the liver, stomach, spleen, intestines, and kidneys
- Increases cardiac activity and blood circulation
- Regulates kidney functioning
- Develops concentration, coordination, balance, poise, strength, and groundedness

Precautions (proceed with care)

- High blood pressure and heart conditions: practice carefully without holding, and do not drop the head below the heart

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent surgery or recent or chronic injury or inflammation of back, knees, or hips
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure or systemic weakness

Options

- There are many ways to do Sun Salutation. Experiment with adding or varying the postures in the sequence and the ways that you do them.
- Experiment with moving only on the exhalation and with sustaining certain postures longer than others.

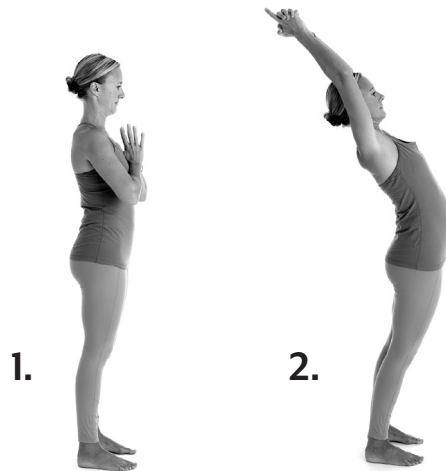
Assists

Because this is a vinyasa, you will not usually offer hands-on assisting. If you guide your students to hold certain postures during the flow, you may move around and assist during the holdings.



Essential Cues

1. *Begin* in Mountain, with palms in anjali mudra.
2. *Back Extension*: Raise the arms overhead and press the pelvic triangle slightly forward, lift out of the waist, and arch back.
3. *Forward Fold*: Hinge forward at the hips, keeping the back long, and place the palms on the ground.
4. *Lunge (anjaneyasana)*: Step the right foot back about a leg's distance and press the right heel toward the ground as the leg straightens. Draw the shoulders back, expand the sternum forward, and press up through the crown.
5. *Plank*: Step the left foot back, with the legs, torso, neck, and head in one line.
6. *Child's pose*: Lower knees to the ground and bring hips to heels.





7. *Upward-Facing Dog (Urdhva Mukha Shvanasana):* The toes uncurl or stay curled, the legs rest on the earth or rise up off the ground. As you lengthen from the sacrum to the crown, the chest expanding forward, the shoulders drawing back, and the chin remaining neutral.
8. *Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Shvanasana):* Curl the toes, lift the hips, and press up through the sitz bones. Lengthen from the sitz bones to the crown. Press into the palms and open the space between the shoulder blades. Press the heels toward the ground.
9. *Lunge:* Step the right foot forward about a leg's distance and press the left heel toward the ground as the leg straightens. Draw the shoulders back, expand the sternum forward, and press up through the crown (optional variation Warrior).
10. *Forward Fold:* Step the left foot forward beside the right foot and fold forward.
11. *Back Extension:* Come up through Jackknife with a long back. Raise the arms overhead and press the pelvic triangle slightly forward. Lift out of the waist, and arch the back.
12. *Mountain:* Bring the hands in front of the heart in Anjali Mudra.

Repeat the sequence, initiating movement in step four with the left foot.

Child's Pose

Garbhasana



“Everyone is continually performing postures while standing, sitting, lying down, and performing various tasks. Similarly, every human being begins to breathe immediately upon birth and sustains the breathing process until death. Most people do asana and pranayama haphazardly. A yogi is one who performs these same practices consciously and systematically.”

—Swami Kripalu

Traditional Benefits

- Stretches the legs, buttocks, and back
- Stretches the ankles, knees, hips, and pelvic floor
- Reduces head, neck, and chest pain when head and torso are supported
- Tones abdominal organs, stimulates peristalsis, and relieves constipation
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, reduces stress, and deeply tranquilizes the body, mind, and emotions

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Constipation: practice carefully and avoid long holding
- Sensitivity in the knees: use a soft folded blanket under knees

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic hip, knee, or ankle injury; inflammation or pain

Essential Cues

1. Begin in Vajrasana.
2. Elongate the spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.
3. Hinge forward at the hips and extend the torso over the thighs.
4. Bring the forehead toward the ground.
5. Extend the arms along the sides, palms facing each other up or down.



Options

- Extend the arms overhead.
- Stack two fists under the forehead.
- Open the knees wide and allow the big toes to touch.



Assists

Hands-On

1. Stand behind the student, hands on either side of the sacrum. Press down and back.
2. Step on the student's feet, place your thumbs on the iliac crest, fingers in the hip crease, and pull back.
3. Stand in front of the student and have them grab your ankles. Walk your feet away from the student, and lean forward, placing your hands on either side of their sacrum. Press down and back.



Plank

Phalakasana



"A significant number of earnest spiritual seekers take up the practice of yoga. Unfortunately, many stop because exactly the right things happen."

—Swami Kripalu

Traditional Benefits

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, and wrists
- Stimulates circulation and digestion
- Energizes the body and builds core strength
- Improves concentration and develops focus

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Pregnancy: keep knees on ground
- Weak torso or limbs: keep knees on ground

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Recent surgery or recent or chronic wrist, arm, shoulder, back, or abdomen injury, inflammation, or pain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Essential Cues

1. Begin in Table.
2. Curl the toes under and straighten one leg at a time. Keeping the toes on the ground, lift the knees.
3. Keep shoulders, hips, and heels in one line.
4. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels, pressing out through the crown.
5. Press out through the heels.

Options

- Keep knees on the ground.
- Keep forearms on the ground.
- Lift one leg at a time.
- Chaturanga Dandasana/Four-Limbed Staff pose: Keep alignment in Plank and slowly lower to a few inches off the ground.

Props

- Block between the thighs
- Blocks under the hands
- Belt wrapped above the elbows
- Blocks under the ASIS bones
- Block under the sternum

Assists

Hands-On

1. Hip lift

Press Point

1. Heels
2. Crown

Four-Limbed Staff

Chaturanga Dandasana



“The highest form of nonviolence is love.”

—Swami Kripalu

Traditional benefits

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, and wrists
- Stimulates circulation and digestion
- Energizes the body and builds core strength
- Improves concentration and develops focus

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Pregnancy: Keep knees on the ground
- Weak torso or limbs: Keep knees on the ground

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Recent surgery or recent or chronic wrist, arm, shoulder, back, or abdomen injury; inflammation or pain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Essential Cues

1. Begin in Plank.
2. Bend the elbows and lower the torso to a few inches above the ground, drawing the elbows in.
3. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels and pressing out through the crown.
4. Press out through the heels.

Options

- Keep knees on the ground.
- Keep forearms on the ground.
- Lift one leg at a time.

Props

- Belt wrapped above the elbows
- Blocks under the ASIS bones
- Block under the sternum

Assists

Press Points

5. Heels
6. Crown

Upward-Facing Dog

Urdhva Mukha Shvanasana



“Service is one of the highest expressions of love.”

—Swami Kripalu

Traditional benefits

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, and arms
- Stretches the chest, abdomen, and throat
- Stimulates the circulatory, digestive, lymphatic systems, and the thyroid and thymus glands
- Decongests the abdominal organs and the kidneys, helping in the elimination of toxins
- Relieves asthma
- Relieves back and abdominal discomfort of menopause and menstruation
- Energizes the mind and may relieve stress, anxiety, and mild depression

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back muscles: move in and out of the posture with the breath, and lift with the back rather than the arms to strengthen

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Pregnancy (after the third trimester)
- Recent or chronic back, neck, or abdominal injury; inflammation or pain
- High blood pressure

Essential Cues

1. Begin in Plank.
2. Lower the hips, arching the spine.
3. Draw the shoulder blades back.
4. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels, and press out through the crown.

Options

- Keep tops of the feet on the ground

Props

- Cushion under the hips
- Blocks under the hands

Assists

Hands-On

1. Straddle the student at the elbows. Squeeze the student's hips with your shins. Place your hands on the shoulders, and, with straight arms, lift up and back.

Press Point

1. Hips
2. Sternum
3. Crown

Part Eight

Asana

Yoga Postures

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Asana

Sitting, abiding, seated posture, posture of hatha yoga

The key to Kripalu Yoga lies in experiencing prana as the link between body, mind, and spirit. In Kripalu Yoga, prana is our ultimate object of concentration, fostering union to achieve a harmonious state of being. The process by which we enter this state is cultivated through the following methods.

Kripalu Yoga practice guidelines

- Breathe fully into each movement and moment.
- Consciously maintain a relaxed state of awareness.
- Fully feel as sensations, thoughts, emotions, and energy arise.
- Remain present to each experience as a witness.
- Allow yourself to surrender to the unfolding experience of the moment.

General Guidance

In Kripalu Yoga, we cultivate a relaxed awareness throughout our practice. Before you begin your practice, feel yourself becoming **ready** through mental focus and physical centeredness. As you do your warm-ups, let your body be soft and receptive. There is nothing to achieve. There is no need to strain or push. Enjoy a deep breath, along with **entry** into the posture. Each time you feel any sensations or tensions as you **sustain** a posture, allow yourself to relax. When you let go of resistance within the posture, the tension can dissolve. As you **release** the posture, take a moment to **integrate**. Allow your awareness to be fully absorbed in the rush of energy as you discover the natural **transition**. Maintain awareness at all times during your practice to heighten your ability to adapt while remaining centered, allowing prana to flow and support your action.

Anatomy of Asana

The physical benefits of yoga postures are tangible and measurable. A regular, balanced asana practice will strengthen some muscles and stretch others, making the entire body stronger and more flexible. A therapeutic practice may ease imbalances of weak/tight muscles that are often the source of structural instability.

The benefits listed on the posture sheets can be gained from the asanas practiced as taught in our program. Variations of the asanas may shift the work and stretches to other muscle groups and change the benefits. Wider stances, longer hold times, and increased muscular engagement may bolster these benefits. Conversely, modifications, less engagement, and shorter holding times may diminish or even eliminate them.

The skeletal muscles do not work independently. Whenever a muscle group contracts to move a body part, other muscles will contract to provide stability. If, for example, you shift your weight onto one foot and lift the other knee in Mountain pose, the hip flexors of the lifted leg will be strengthening, but your abdominal and back muscles will also engage slightly in order to hold your torso stable. This is true in most yoga postures. To provide stability, muscular engagements can be slight or strong, localized in one group or spread out over several.

In listing the strengthening and stretching muscles for the postures below, we will not be naming the muscles engaging to provide stability unless their engagement is tangible and contributes a substantial strengthening aspect to the posture.

Notes

Yoga Posture Sheets

The 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is focused on a core set of 21 postures. The intention of this set is to support the novice yoga teacher in building a solid foundation of expertise.

As you explore each posture in this core set during your training, make a note of the respective modifications, variations, and personal inquiries that help prepare you in meeting the diverse needs of your perspective students.

The Training Posture Sheets include

- Images of the posture
- Sanskrit pronunciation
- Relevant anatomical information
- Precautions and contraindications
- Key principles
- Preparations and warm-ups
- Space to fill in traditional and science-based benefits
- Essential cues
- Modifications and props
- Assists and press points
- Teacher observations

Boat

Navasana

“It is worth remembering that there is only one yoga and can only be one yoga. True, aspirants are of different natures and resort to various doctrines and practices to progress along the path. But one who completes the process of yoga understands its different paths and sees that the systematic practice of various disciplines leads to the same place. In the end, all yogas lead to one great Yoga.”

—Swami Kripalu



Boat

Navasana

nava: boat | (nah-VAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- Most of the skeletal muscles associated with extension strengthen in order to lift limbs off the mat: the quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteus maximus, quadratus lumborum and erector spinea, all trapezius and rhomboids, latissimus dorsii, posterior deltoid, and the triceps
- Stretching occurs in the complementary flexing muscles: the hip flexors, pectorals, the anterior deltoid, and the sternocleidomastoid

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Release posture if you feel discomfort
- Weak back muscles: use repetitions coming in and out of the posture with minimal holding to strengthen
- Constipation: avoid long holding, and release posture if pain develops

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Pregnancy (after first trimester)
- Recent or chronic back, neck, or abdominal injury, inflammation, or pain
- Recent abdominal surgery
- Surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure

Key Principles

- Extend the spine
- Legs hip distance or less apart
- Lengthen entire front of the body

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper-Back Cat and Dog, Reclining Arm Circles and Sun Breaths
- Spine with Table Cat and Dog, Thread the Needle, Table Twist, and Reclining Dancer
- Hips and legs with Hip Openers, Hip Circles, Runner's Lunge, and Hamstring Stretch
- Simple Cobra for low back strength

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Stretches the abdomen and chest
- Strengthens the lungs and decongests the kidneys, helping in the elimination of toxins
- Aligns the spinal column
- Stimulates the nervous, circulatory, digestive, lymphatic, and endocrine systems

Essential Cues

1. Lie on your belly with your arms about 45 degrees out from your sides, palms facing down. Bring your chin, mouth, or forehead onto the floor.
2. Press the front of your pelvis down firmly and lengthen through the crown of your head and your toes.
3. Lift your legs and torso off the floor. Keep lengthening your legs by reaching out through your toes. Lift the crown of your head while keeping your neck long.
4. Raise your arms off the floor and bring your hands about one foot away from your body. Reach back through your fingertips. Lift your torso as much as you can, maintaining length in the neck and spine.
5. To release, lower your torso, arms, and legs to the floor. Turn your head to one side and rest.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Only lift the upper body
- Hands remain on the ground
- Only lift one leg

Prop

- Hold belt from feet to both hands behind the back

Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis
- Extend through the crown with the chin close to the throat
- Big toes together, thighs drawn inward



Press points

- Toes, heels, or the backs of the legs
- Fingertips
- Crown
- Shoulder blades



Teacher Observations

Awareness

For all prone backbends, it is important to elongate the torso before entering the posture. This can be accomplished by reaching the arms overhead along the floor and pressing back through the toes. It is also effective to stretch one arm forward and the opposite leg back, and then repeat on the other side.

The Full Boat variation is a vigorous asana that strengthens the muscles of the abdomen, back, neck, arms, and legs. Practice it only after adequate preparation with the easier versions. If a student experiences strain in the low back, bring his or her arms back to the sides of the body, or lower them to the floor and have them press the thighs towards each other as well as more firmly down through their pelvic triangle to stimulate core engagement. Or simply have the student release the posture.

Common misalignments

- *Legs wider than hip-width apart.* Help your student bring the legs toward one another by using the press points on the inner knees, or give verbal instructions to bring the legs together.
- *Neck hyperextended.* Students often overactivate the neck muscles, causing the head to pull back and the chin to lift. Help your students keep the neck in line with the spine by reminding them to tuck the chin slightly or to look down rather than forward.



Bridge

Setu Bandhasana

"Accepting the truth proclaimed by the scriptures does not produce knowledge. Real knowledge is only obtained through personal experience. For experience, practice is indispensable. It is only through the diligent practice of the elementary techniques of yoga that its advanced techniques can be known. Only through elementary yoga is the advanced yoga generated."

—Swami Kripalu



Bridge

Setu Bandhasana

setu bandha: forming of causeway or bridge | (SET-too bahn-DAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The upper and middle back flex in the posture, and the lower back extends.

- The quadriceps work to straighten the legs so that the hips can lift. The hamstrings pull against the knees to extend the hips and lift the pelvis. The quadratus lumborum contracts to arch the low back and lift the hips. The rhomboids and the middle and lower trapezius contract to abduct the arms toward each other under the body.
- The abdominals stretch. The upper trapezius is stretched by the flexion of the neck as the ribs lift. The anterior deltoids stretch, and the extension of the arms stretches the biceps.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Low back sensitivity: move in and out of the posture with breath
- Pregnancy: last trimester, avoid if breath is inhibited at any point

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic neck, shoulder, or back injury, inflammation, or pain
- Surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure

Key Principles

- Feet and knees hip-width apart
- Weight on shoulders instead of neck
- Neck relaxed
- Stretch the front of the body

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Sun Breaths, and Thread the Needle
- Spine with Table Twist, Pelvic Tilt, and Dolphin Dives
- Hips and legs with Hamstring Stretch, Knees Side-to-Side, Standing Wide Angle Pelvic Rock, Standing Hip Circles, and Runner's Lunge

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Increases spinal flexibility
- Expands the chest, strengthens the lungs, and relieves asthma and sinusitis
- Stimulates the nervous system and digestion
- Regulates metabolism and stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- Reduces high blood pressure and menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- May relieve fatigue, stress, and anxiety

Essential Cues

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms by your sides, palms face down. Bring your feet hip-width apart and parallel to each other. Draw your heels close to your sitz bones.
2. Press down through your feet and lift your pelvis off the ground. Keep your knees hip-width apart.
3. Relax your neck as your weight shifts toward the shoulders. Interlace your fingers and lengthen your arms.
4. Draw your shoulder blades toward each other and reach your hands toward your feet. Press down with the arms and shoulders and press up with the sternum.
5. To release, separate your hands and relax your shoulders. Roll your spine down to the floor. Extend your legs, or hug your knees into your chest.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Keep pelvis low, hip joints flexed
- Lift and lower hips instead of maintaining a static hold

Props

- Block under the sacrum/low back
- Block in between the thighs or knees
- Hold belt in both hands behind the back



Assists

Verbal

- Draw the shoulder blades in and down to stabilize the spine
- Draw the thighs inward to parallel
- Press down through the feet to raise the pelvis

Press points

- Inside knees
- Palms on ASIS bones
- One hand on sternum
- Hands to fingertips



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Bridge is a supported backbend that stretches the abdominals. Breathe deeply and focus on intercostal breathing.

Bridge is an excellent posture for prolonged holding. Take your time, gradually working the body into a full expression of the posture. With the breath flowing deeply, release any muscles that are not essential for holding up the hips. Release the posture and rest for a few minutes before continuing.

Common misalignment

- *Knees splay wider than hip-width apart.* Emphasize proper alignment of the feet, weight pressed more strongly on the inside edges of the feet. Have students come into the posture with a pillow or a block between their thighs to get a sense of how hard the adductors need to work to keep the knees aligned over the ankles. Sometimes when we walk the shoulders in under the body to bring the hands together, the shoulders move down toward the feet. This can cause tension in the neck. Watch for the shoulders moving in, not down.



Cobra

Bhujangasana

“When the body is alert and the mind is joyful, you can rest assured that your practice is going well. Isn’t that a beautiful test?”

—Swami Kripalu



Cobra

bhujangasana

bhujanga: a serpent, moving in curves | (boo-jang-GAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- The erector spinea and the upper and lower trapezius contract to lift the back when the arms are not used. The triceps and forearm muscles engage to lift the chest higher.
- The sternocleidomastoid, the pectorals, and the abdominals stretch

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back muscles: move in and out of the posture with breath, and lift with the back rather than the arms to strengthen

Contraindications (avoid posture)

- Pregnancy (after first trimester)
- Recent or chronic back, neck, or abdominal injury, inflammation, or pain
- Surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure

Key Principles

- Legs and feet hip-width apart or less
- Elbows in close to the body
- Pelvic triangle presses down
- Shoulders roll back and down

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck, shoulders, arms, and back with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper-Back Cat and Dog, Dolphin Dives, Table Twist, Extended Seated Side Stretch, and Down Dog Pigeon Kriya
- Spine with Torso Circles and Standing Swinging Twist
- Practice Sphinx before moving into Cobra to increase flexibility in the thoracic spine.

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Stimulates the circulatory, digestive, and lymphatic systems
- Decongests the abdominal organs
- Stimulates the thyroid and thymus glands
- Relieves asthma
- May relieve stress and anxiety

Essential Cues

1. Lie on your belly with your legs extended and big toes touching. Bring your chin, mouth, or forehead onto the floor. Slide your hands under your shoulders, and draw your elbows back and in toward your torso.
2. Press your pelvic triangle into the floor and elongate through your toes and the crown of your head. Without pressing into your hands, lift your upper torso off the mat.
3. Press upward through the crown. Encourage the neck to be an extension of the whole spine. Roll your shoulders down and back. Keep pressing your elbows toward your torso. Without pressing into your hands, arch your spine as much as you can.
4. Press the pelvic triangle into the floor. As you press the palms lightly into the ground to lift the torso higher (there should be no compression in the low back), draw your elbows back to project your sternum forward.
5. Elongate the neck and reach your crown forward and up.
6. To release, extend your torso forward and down onto the floor. Relax your shoulders and back.



Posture Options

Modifications

- Lift and lower with breath without static hold
- Sphinx: forearms on the ground with palms facing down and elbows directly under the shoulders

Props

- Block between the thighs
- Blanket under ASIS bones

Assists

Verbal

- Thighs together to stabilize and support the spine
- Lengthen through the spine, open first at the ribs
- Chin close to the throat to protect the neck

Press points

- Shoulder blades
- Inner elbows
- Crown
- Sternum



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Sphinx is a variation of Cobra that utilizes the support of the elbows and lower placement of the body to isolate the elongation and stretch in the upper chest and spine. By restricting the movement of the diaphragm, Sphinx encourages you to breathe in and out of the upper chest.

For all prone backbending asanas, it's important to elongate the torso before entering the posture.

Reach the arms overhead along the floor and press back through the toes, or stretch one arm forward and the opposite leg back, then repeat on the other side.

The downward press of the pelvic triangle and ASIS bones is the foundation of Cobra, providing a solid base from which to engage the muscles of the back and lift the torso off the floor.

The backbend emphasized in Cobra is in the middle and upper back, not in the lower back or neck.

Common misalignments

- *As with Boat, when the back muscles engage to lift the torso, students often overactivate the muscles of the neck, causing the head to pull back.* Help your students to keep the neck in line with the spine by inviting them to keep their chin slightly tucked or to look slightly down rather than forward.
- *Pressing into the palms as you move into Cobra sometimes shifts all of the arch to the lumbar spine.* Come up only as far as you can with the upper and middle spine arched, press out through the sternum and pull the hands back toward the body. If there is any pinching in the lumbar spine, press more firmly into the pelvic triangle. If the pinching is not relieved, come out of the posture and then re-enter it with more focus on the curve in the thoracic spine.
- *Sometimes the legs come off the floor as the torso lifts.* Press into the tops of the feet to keep the legs firmly grounded.
- *Pressing into the palms often causes the shoulders to ride up to the ears.* Roll the shoulder blades back and down to keep the shoulders and back in alignment.



Downward-Facing Dog

Adho Mukha Shvanasana

“The uniqueness of Kripalu Yoga is that postures, pranayama, and meditation are all happening simultaneously, not separately. In the beginning stages, the practice of postures is primary and the other aspects of yoga are secondary. In the later stages, meditation is the primary experience.”

—Swami Kripalu



Downward-Facing Dog

Adho Mukha Shvanasana

adho: downward | mukha: face | shvana: dog
(AH-doh-MOO-kah-shvah-NAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

Stabilizing the body in Downward-Facing Dog can involve considerable effort, which strengthens numerous muscles.

- Most of the strengthening happens in the upper body, and stretching predominates in the lower body. The serratus anterior is the main stabilizer for the shoulders. All the shoulder and arm muscles work against gravity to maintain alignment. The abdominals keep the spine in anatomical position, while the quadriceps hold the legs straight.
- The gastrocnemius/soleus stretches as the heels press down. The hamstrings and the gluteus maximus stretch as the legs straighten. The latissimus dorsi and the pectorals stretch as the arms hold the alignment of the posture.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak or stiff back muscles, hamstrings, sciatica, or knee problems: practice carefully, keeping knees bent and spine straight
- Carpal tunnel syndrome: press into the base of the fingers

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Inflammation, injury, or disease of the eyes or ears
- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, leg, hip, back, shoulder, arm, or wrist injury, inflammation, or pain or recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Feet hip-width apart
- Arms and hands shoulder-width apart
- Sitz bones press toward the ceiling
- Spine elongates

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck, shoulders, back, arms, and wrists with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper-Back Cat and Dog, Dolphin Dives, and Hip Circles
- Hips and legs with Table Cat and Dog variations, Puppy Stretch, Runner's Lunge, Hip Opening Knee Circles, Pyramid Pose Kriya, and Dandasana

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Increases circulation of blood and lymph
- May relieve insomnia, menstrual and menopausal discomfort, low back pain, and sciatica
- Energizes the body and mind
- Improves focus
- May relieve stress and mild anxiety

Essential Cues

1. Come into Table position. Bring your knees directly under your hips and palms under your shoulders. Spread your fingers and curl your toes under.
2. Press into your hands and engage your arms, shoulders, and pectoral muscles to stabilize your body. Keep your knees bent as you raise your hips as high as you can.
3. Pull your shoulder blades down and draw them outward, away from your spine. Engage and stabilize your shoulders as you lengthen your waist.
4. Press your heels down and straighten your legs as much as you can, maintaining an elongated spine.
5. To release, bend your knees and lower them to the floor into Table.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Widen the feet to reduce the hamstring stretch if uncomfortable
- Bend the knees to ease pressure on the hamstrings and lower back

Props

- Palms on rolled blanket or mat
- Block in between the inner thighs
- Cushion under the heels
- Chair or wall for an easier forward fold



Assists

Verbal

- Use the whole hand to stabilize: heels, knuckles, and fingertips
- Lengthen belly

Press point

- Heels
- Scapula
- Back of palms



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Downward-Facing Dog is a partial inversion. Consult with your physician before practicing if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, a detached retina, or other eye problems.

The stability in the shoulders comes not from drawing the shoulder blades close together, but rather by engaging the pectoral and serratus anterior muscles as the shoulder blades move out and down. This creates the necessary stability for the weight of the body to be supported by the arms and shoulders.

To build endurance, come in and out of the posture several times, resting in Table in between. Over time, your flexibility and strength will increase.

Common misalignments

- *Rounding the lumbar spine.* This is caused by tight hamstrings and may be corrected by bending the knees slightly and then drawing the heels to the floor one at a time. Warming up properly will also help. Having the student bring the pelvis into a slight Dog tilt before pressing up into the posture will often help keep the correct alignment. The “eyes” of the elbows tend to roll forward, which can put pressure on the elbow joints. Rolling the “eyes” of the elbows in to face each other will protect the elbow joints and help to open the shoulders.
- *Allowing the chest to collapse between the arms.* This creates an unstable posture. Develop upper body strength through coming in and out of this posture from Table.



Eagle

Garudasana



Eagle

Garudasana

garuda: the mythic “king of the birds,” the vehicle of Vishnu | (gah-rue-DAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The major work of this posture is holding the body stable in an:

Eccentric contraction: a slow descent against the pull of gravity.

Isometric contraction: holding steady.

Concentric contraction: lifting against gravity back to vertical. This is preformed while the arms and legs are entwined and squeezed in an isometric embrace.

- The abovementioned contractions strengthen the legs, particularly the quadriceps and the adductors. Most other hip and thigh muscles engage to stabilize the thighs and pelvis. The erector spinea and the quadratus lumborum contract to maintain a straight or slightly arched spine. The rhomboids and the middle and lower trapezius contract to keep the upper back from rounding. The pectorals might contract and contribute to the work of this posture.
- The medial rotation and adduction in the thighs stretches the lateral rotators and the gluteus medius and minimus. Entwining the arms stretches the upper and middle trapezius and the rhomboids.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Heart conditions: practice carefully without long holding
- Weak knees: avoid long holding and keep the knees even with the toes

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic knee, hip, or leg injury, inflammation, or pain or recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- All limbs squeeze together
- Spine and torso are elongated and arched or rounded
- Both hips are level and facing forward, with knees and elbows in one vertical line

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Shoulders and back with Upper Back Cat and Dog and Thread the Needle
- Cow-Head arms
- Hips and legs with Hip Openers, Table Cat and Dog Circles, Reclining Knee Circles, Eagle Leg Reclining Twist, and Cross-Crawl
- Standing Squat for leg and back strength

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Improves focus and concentration
- Improves balance
- Strengthens and stretches the ankles and calves
- Stretches the legs, thighs, hips, shoulders, and upper back

Essential Cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your feet parallel and your arms down by your sides.
2. Extend your arms out to the sides, parallel to the floor. Bend your knees until you feel your quadriceps engage.
3. Shift your weight into your left foot and raise your right foot. Swing your right knee out and circle it high over your left leg, crossing your right thigh over your left.
4. Bend your left knee as much as you can, maintaining stability and comfort.
5. Wrap your right toes behind your left calf, if you can.
6. Lift your sternum to support your balance. Reach out through your fingertips to lengthen your arms.
7. Cross your left arm over your right. Reach both arms in opposite directions as far as you can. Bend your elbows and touch opposite shoulders. Raise your hands in front of your face. Cross your wrists and clasp your hands or forearms.
8. Squeeze your arms and legs together tightly and bend your left knee to lower your hips. Adjust your torso so that your elbows are over your knees. Allow your spine to arch.
9. Lift your sternum and elbows. If you feel any compression in the low back, lengthen your tailbone down until the tension is relieved.
10. To release, unwind your arms.
11. Lift your hips. Unwind your right leg and stand balanced on both feet in Tadasana.
12. Relax your arms by your sides.
13. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Eagle arms only
- Eagle legs only
- Eagle arms in Standing Squat
- Use a wall to support your back while learning to balance
- Lie on the floor for stability

Props

- Place the foot of the top leg on a block for stability
- Hold a yoga belt between the hands if shoulders are tight

Assists

General principle: Avoid assists for balancing postures.

Verbal

- Find a soft gaze on a stable object

Teacher Observations

Awareness

- Stretch the trapezius and rhomboids as opposed to stressing the shoulder joint
- Keep elbows aligned over the knees rather than twisting to the side

Common misalignment

- *Elbows not aligned over the knees*

Half Moon

Ardha Chandrasana

*"Whoever relies on the breath
has obtained a key to yoga and
has taken a good path."*

—Swami Kripalu



Half Moon

Ardha Chandrasana

ardha: half; chandra: moon | (ARE-dah-chan-DRAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- The lateral and medial hip rotators engage to stabilize the pelvis. Abdominal rectus engages to hold the rib cage aligned over the pelvis, so the chest doesn't drop back and the low back does not arch. Due to the symmetry of this posture, the muscles stretched on one side are strengthened on the other.
- Abdominal obliques and quadratus lumborum are strengthened by pulling the torso into the side bend. The middle and lower trapezius, as well as the rhomboids, are strengthened as the arms are held back.
- The IT band and attached muscles (tensor fasciae latae and gluteus maximus) are stretched as the pelvis moves to the opposite side. The abdominal obliques, the quadratus lumborum, and the erector spinae are stretched by the side bend. The intercostals, latissimus dorsi, and the pectorals are stretched as the hands reach over to the side. The scalenes and sternocleidomastoid are stretched if the head leans to the side.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back muscles or shoulder injury: keep hands on hips
- Heart conditions and nervous disorders: avoid long holding times

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Both feet firmly grounded
- Neck in line with the spine
- Extend from the heels to the fingertips
- Hips move to one side to support balance
- Hips remain close to center of balance

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Side-to-Side, Side Stretch Arm Circles, Side-to-Side Extended Arms, and Lunge Arm Circles
- Spine with Upper Back Cat and Dog, Torso Circles, and Extended Seated Side Stretch
- Waist and hips with Hips Side-to-Side, Cross-Crawl, Arms Overhead Tie Stretch, Standing Hip Circles, and Parighasana

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, abdomen, back, and shoulders
- Provides alternate stretching and strengthening of the entire body
- Increases spinal flexibility and alignment
- Tones the abdominal organs to stimulate digestion and peristalsis
- Increases coordination, balance, and poise
- Develops focus and concentration

Essential Cues

1. Stand in Tadasana, with your arms by your sides.
2. Raise your arms overhead and turn your palms up once they reach shoulder height.
3. Reach your arms straight up and lengthen through your fingertips.
4. Interlace your fingers in temple position.
5. Roll your shoulders down and back. Press down through the soles of your feet. Engage your abdominal muscles to lengthen your waist and reach up through the crown of your head.
6. Press your hips to the left, keeping your shoulders and hips squared to the front. Allow the weight to shift toward your left foot.
7. Lift your rib cage and lengthen the front and back of your torso. Keep your hips and shoulders squared to the front as you extend through your fingertips and reach your upper body to the right. Your weight will shift toward your right foot. Press through your left hip and your fingertips to balance the weight on both feet. Maintain alignment as you continue to press through both feet and lift out of your waist.
8. To release, press down through your feet, shift your hips back to center, and lift your shoulders over your waist.
9. Relax your arms down by your sides, turning your palms down once they reach shoulder height.
10. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Hands stay on hips
- One hand stays on hip
- Arms shoulder-width apart, grasping opposite elbows behind head

Props

- Hold belt with both hands and keep arms wide apart
- Block between thighs
- Block between palms



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize both legs
- Lengthen through the flexed side of the spine

Press points

- Fingertips
- Scapula
- Sternum
- Hip
- Feet



Teacher Observations

Awareness

As you enter Half Moon, imagine that the body is pressed between two planes of glass, or both shoulder blades are pressed against a wall. This will help avoid the tendency to twist the hips or shoulders, targeting the stretch on the often inflexible intercostal muscles.

Bring attention back to the feet and keep the weight evenly distributed between them.

Shift the weight back to center. Reach through the fingertips.

In Half Moon, focus the extension in the thoracic spine. Lift up and out through the sternum.

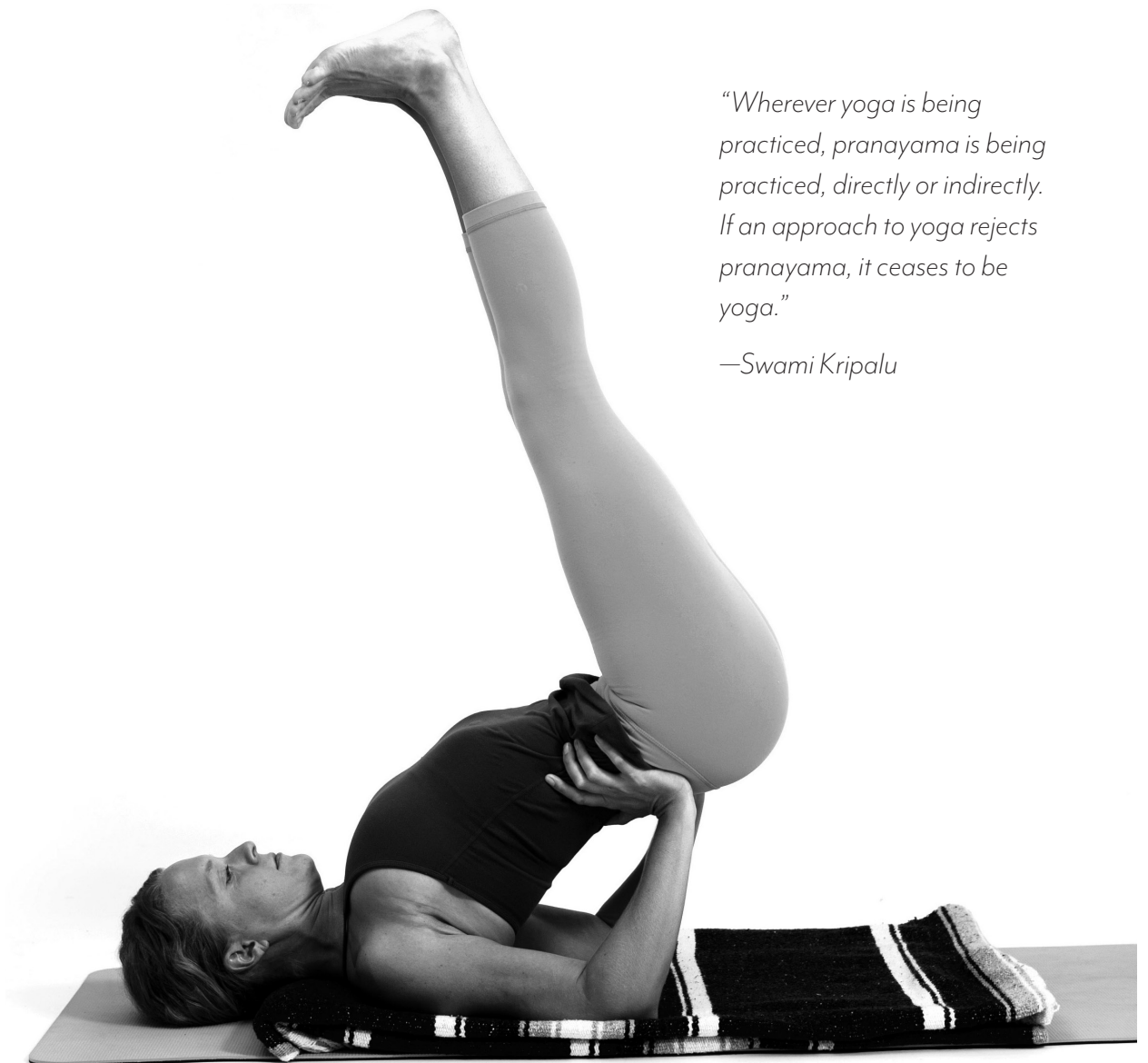
Common misalignments

- *Twisting the spine as you arch to the side.* This is due partly to weak back and abdominal muscles and partly to a lack of body awareness. Help students come into alignment as mentioned in assists below.
- *Collapsing the rib cage on the inside of the stretch.* The intention is to stretch the side of the body, not to arch to the side as far as possible. Encourage students to come back up and hold the posture with length on both sides of the rib cage.
- *Shoulders lifting up around the ears.* Be sure to keep the shoulder blades down while lengthening the torso up and over.
- *Hyperextending the lumbar spine*



Half Shoulderstand

Ardha Sarvangasana



“Wherever yoga is being practiced, pranayama is being practiced, directly or indirectly. If an approach to yoga rejects pranayama, it ceases to be yoga.”

—Swami Kripalu

Half Shoulderstand

Ardha Sarvangasana

ardha: half; sarva: entire; anga: limb | (ARE-dah-sar-van-GAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- The gluteus maximus contracts to hold the legs lifted and the hamstrings maintain an isometric stretch as they lift the legs and stretch. The quadratus lumborum and the erector spinae contract to hold the lumbar arch. The rhomboids and the middle and lower trapezius contract to raise the chest. The biceps engage to hold the middle spine in place.
- The hamstring stretch is a focus of this posture, though it takes work to create it. If the rest of the body is properly aligned, the hamstring stretch occurs. If the feet are dorsiflexed, the gastrocnemius /soleus are stretched. The abdominals are stretched, as are the pectorals and the upper trapezius.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Pregnancy: press the soles of the feet against a wall to bring yourself into the posture. Avoid in the second and third trimesters
- Menstruation: avoid if uncomfortable

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic neck, shoulder, or back injury, inflammation, or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Injury or inflammation of eyes or ears

Key Principles

- Weight is on the shoulders and the upper arms
- Neck is loose and relaxed
- Belly is open
- Back is arched

Preparation and Warm-ups

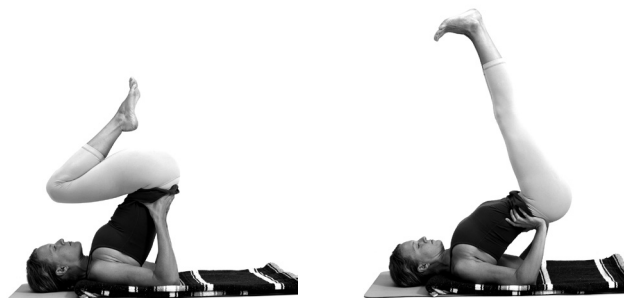
- Awaken the core with abdominal strengtheners like Chair Kriya and modified Sun Salutations
- Neck and shoulders with Lunge Arm Circles, Head Lift and Tilt, and Head Side-to-Side
- Back with Upper Back Cat and Dog, Torso Circles, Pelvic Tilt, Strap Stretch Forward Fold and Twist, and Simple Bridge
- Strengthen the low back with Simple Boat and Simple Cobra
- Hips and thighs with Dolphin Dives, Pelvic Tilt, and Hip Circles
- Strengthen the arms and upper back with repetitions of Chaturanga, Upward-Facing Dog, and Downward-Facing Dog

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms
- Relieves constipation
- Increases blood flow to the brain, stimulates mental function, and improves memory
- Improves venous blood and lymph circulation, reducing edema and varicose veins
- Relieves insomnia, asthma, respiratory ailments, and menopausal discomfort

Essential Cues

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Bring your heels close to your buttocks and your arms close to your sides. Press your forearms and palms into the floor. Engage your abdominals and bring your knees toward your forehead and your hips off the floor. Rock back toward your shoulders and lift your hips high enough to hold them with your hands.
2. Adjust your hands to support your hips without straining your wrists. Walk your elbows in toward each other and press down through your shoulder blades. Lift your sternum and arch your back.
3. Lengthen your legs and adjust the hinge of your hips so that your weight is evenly distributed between your elbows and shoulders. There should be no weight on your neck. Press out through your heels and up through your sternum, maintaining the arch in your spine.
4. To release, bend your knees, release your hands, and press your palms into the floor. Keep your neck engaged and chin tucked as you roll your spine down. When your sacrum touches, lower your legs with your knees either bent or straight.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Stay in Bridge
- Keep the knees bent

Props

- Lie on your back with the buttocks and feet on the wall. Press your feet against the wall until the hips rise off ground. Support the hips in your hands. Move the legs away from the wall, bend the knees, and bring the knees toward the forehead, one at a time.
- Blanket underneath the shoulders
- Belt around the arms
- Block under the sacrum



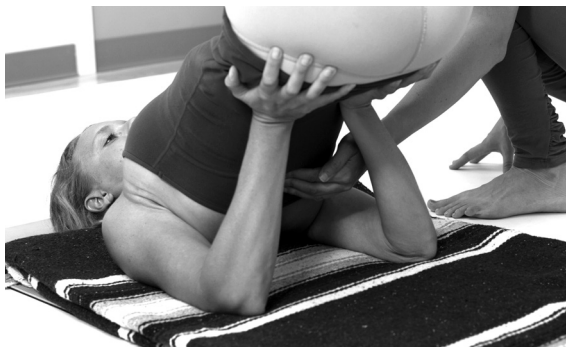
Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize through the upper arms

Press points

- Heel
- Sternum
- Scapula



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Half Shoulderstand is a safe inversion that provides many benefits. Being upside down reverses the pull of gravity on the body, facilitating the flow of blood and lymph out of the legs and into the torso and upper body. All the organs and glands are turned upside down and gently stimulated. When the inversion is released, the whole body rebalances as the effects of gravity and circulation return to normal.

Common misalignments

- *Feet coming too far over the head.*
- *Back rounded and collapsed rather than extended.*
- *Elbows wider than the shoulders or splayed out.*
- *Weight on the neck rather than the shoulders.*
- *Lifting the hips too high.*



Head to Knee

Janu Shirshasana

“The soul and the breath are close friends. When the soul departs from the body in death, the breath leaves simultaneously. This close relationship is why the technique of pranayama is so important to the practice of yoga. Pranayama is the soul of yoga. In fact, it is yoga itself.”

—Swami Kripalu



Head to Knee

Janu Shirshasana

janu: knee; shirsa: head | (jah-noo-shear-shah-sa-nah)

Muscular Anatomy

- When the torso is straight and the arms are overhead, the deltoids contract to lift the arms. The back extensors work to keep the back from rounding. In the rounded position, the latissimus dorsi, pectorals, rhomboids, middle and lower trapezius, and the biceps work to pull the head toward the extended foot.
- In the vertical position with the arms raised overhead, the latissimus dorsi and the pectorals are stretched. As the body tilts forward, the hamstrings and gluteus medius are stretched. (Some students will feel a strong hamstring stretch before tilting forward; consider offering these students the option of sitting on a cushion.) The adductors on the bent-knee side are stretched. When the back rounds, the back extensors (quadratus lumborum and erector spinae) are added to the gluteus maximus and the hamstring stretch. Dorsiflexing the feet stretches the gastrocnemius/soleus.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak or stiff back muscles: do not extend arms above the head; try using cushion(s) under the hips or knees
- Sciatica: practice carefully, and use cushions under the hips and the knees to avoid strain
- Pregnancy: practice carefully; avoid constricting the belly

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation
- Surgery or injury to any joint affected

Key Principles

- Extend the spine
- Straight, flat back, or lengthened and rounded
- Pelvis rotates forward as movement originates at the hips

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Shoulders with Table Twist and Thread the Needle
- Back, hips, and legs with Dolphin Dives, Hip Circles, Hamstring Stretch, Runner's Stretch, Balancing Knee Circles, and Reclining Tie Stretches

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the back, abdomen, and legs
- Stretches the back side of the body from the heels to the back of the neck
- Lengthens the spinal column
- Increases flexibility in the spine and the hips, which can alleviate certain cases of sciatica
- Stimulates digestion and peristalsis
- Tranquilizes one's sense of being

Essential Cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended in front of you. If your back is rounded, place a cushion under your buttocks to tilt your pelvis forward.
2. Bend your right knee and bring the sole of your foot against the inside of your left thigh. Press your right knee down toward the ground and face your torso toward your extended leg.
3. Press your sitz bones down and reach out through the sole of your left foot. Engage your pelvic and abdominal muscles to elongate your waist.
4. Arch your spine by pulling the shoulders back and down to open your chest. Raise your arms out to the sides and overhead. Extend your arms in a V position by your ears.
5. Hinge at your hips and reach your heart forward as you extend over your left leg. Engage your abdominal muscles to keep lengthening your spine. Continue to elongate forward until you reach your full extension, without rounding your back.
6. Lower your arms and hold your foot, ankle, or shin with your hands. Continue to engage your back muscles and keep your spine arched. Press out through your left heel and lengthen your leg, without hyperextending your knee.
7. Align your left shoulder over the extended leg. Reach your sternum forward and allow the back to lengthen forward. The back may round here, but maintain the stretch in your hamstring muscles. Draw your elbows in and down, close to your left leg. Use your arms and abdominals to pull the crown forward. Focus the stretch in the back of your left leg, rather than your low back.
8. To release, bring your hands to the floor, press into your palms, and lift your shoulders over your waist. Extend your right leg next to your left.
9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Hands stay on the floor
- Keep the extended leg knee bent
- Only come as far forward as you can without rounding your back

Props

- Belt around the extended foot
- Blanket under either knee
- Blanket under the pelvis

Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize through the pelvi.
- Lengthen the belly
- Extend through the heel

Press points

- Heel
- Sternum
- Scapula
- Crown



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Forward bends foster an attitude of surrender. The flexibility required in the hamstrings, pelvis, and hips to bend forward cannot be forced. If there is strain, you are likely to experience low back pain from muscle soreness or disc compression. As you work with patience and self-acceptance, your flexibility will steadily increase over time.

The Great Seal, a variation of Head to Knee, is an excellent holding posture. Come into the posture as described and hold for an extended period of time, letting gravity do the work of stretching the body forward. Breathe deeply, emphasizing the exhalation, and notice how breathing in this way increases the depth of the posture. Rock the head and neck from side to side to release the neck and shoulders. After holding for a bit, you may find that you can come farther forward with a straight back. To release, place your hands near your hips and press into them to give support to the back muscles as you come out.

Common misalignments

- *Buttock on side of bent knee slides back, turning the torso to the side instead of facing forward.* Press hands down into the floor near the hips as you press the bent knee toward the opposite foot, bringing the hips into alignment.
- *Bent knee high in the air.* Place a pillow under the knee.
- *Rounding at the lumbar spine.* Because we cannot see our own backs, it's hard to know when the spine is rounding. When the forward bend comes from the lumbar spine, instead of the hip joint, there is the possibility of back strain. Assist your students in knowing if the spine is rounding by speaking to it as you see it happening. Rounding the back in this posture should be a conscious choice.
- *Shoulders riding up the back.* Consciously relax the shoulders down and back.
- *Chin jutting forward.* Tuck the chin.



Knee-Down Twist

Supta Matsyendrasana

“Mitahar, or moderation in diet, is one of the foundations of spiritual progress. One’s energy is generated, protected and maintained by mitahar, which can be defined as eating the amount of food required to keep the body alert and efficient.”

—Swami Kripalu



Knee-Down Twist

Supta Matsyendrasana

supta: supine; matsyendra: a sage of yoga | (SOUP-tah MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

Very little strengthening happens in this reclining posture. Most of the stretching is generated by gravity. The abdominal obliques engage to twist the waist and the arms are used to press the bent knee down. The rhomboids work to pull the shoulder down on the side opposite the bent knee.

- The hip extensors on the bent-knee side are stretched and there might be some stretch in the abductor muscles as well. All waist muscles are stretched by the rotation of the hips. The pectorals might stretch in the side away from the bent knee.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Pregnancy: practice gently; avoid if it causes discomfort

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Movement comes from the waist
- Avoid arching the spine

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side and Upper Back Cat and Dog
- Spine with Hips Side-to-Side, Torso Circles, Seated Spinal Twist, Pyramid Twist, and Knee-Down Twist Warm-Up
- Hips with Seated Twist, Side Stretch Arm Circles, Table Legs Swings, Hip Circles, and Runner's Lunge

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Stretches the buttocks, back, abdomen, and chest
- Rotates and aligns the spine, maintaining flexibility and hydrating the discs
- Stimulates the circulatory and lymphatic systems
- Promotes digestion and peristalsis, relieving constipation
- Eases menstrual discomfort, asthma, and sciatica
- May reduce stress and anxiety

Essential Cues

1. Lie on your back with your arms out in a T position, palms facing down. Press down through your palms and out through the feet and the crown of your head.
2. Bend your right knee and place the foot on the floor inside your left knee. Shift your hips to the right.
3. Place your right foot on top of your left thigh. Draw your right knee over to your left, rolling onto your left hip. Reach the right knee to the left and down toward the floor.
4. Hold your shoulders down toward the floor. Keep reaching out through your left heel.
5. Turn your head to the right.
6. To release, lift your right knee and roll your hips and head back to center.
7. Extend your right leg long, and even out your hips.
8. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modification

- Hand on knee

Prop

- Cushion under the bent knee and/or shoulder



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the shoulder blades

Press points

- Extended heel
- Scapula



Teacher Observations

Awareness

The intention of this posture is not to get the knee to the floor, but rather to create a complete twist in the spine. The knee serves as a lever to support the twist and allow the muscles to relax once in it, rather than remaining engaged to sustain the rotation. For some people, when the stability of the hips has been compromised, pressing down on the bent knee to bring it to the floor can dislocate the hip.

Common misalignment

- *Lifting the shoulder off the floor.* Place a pillow on the floor under the bent knee.

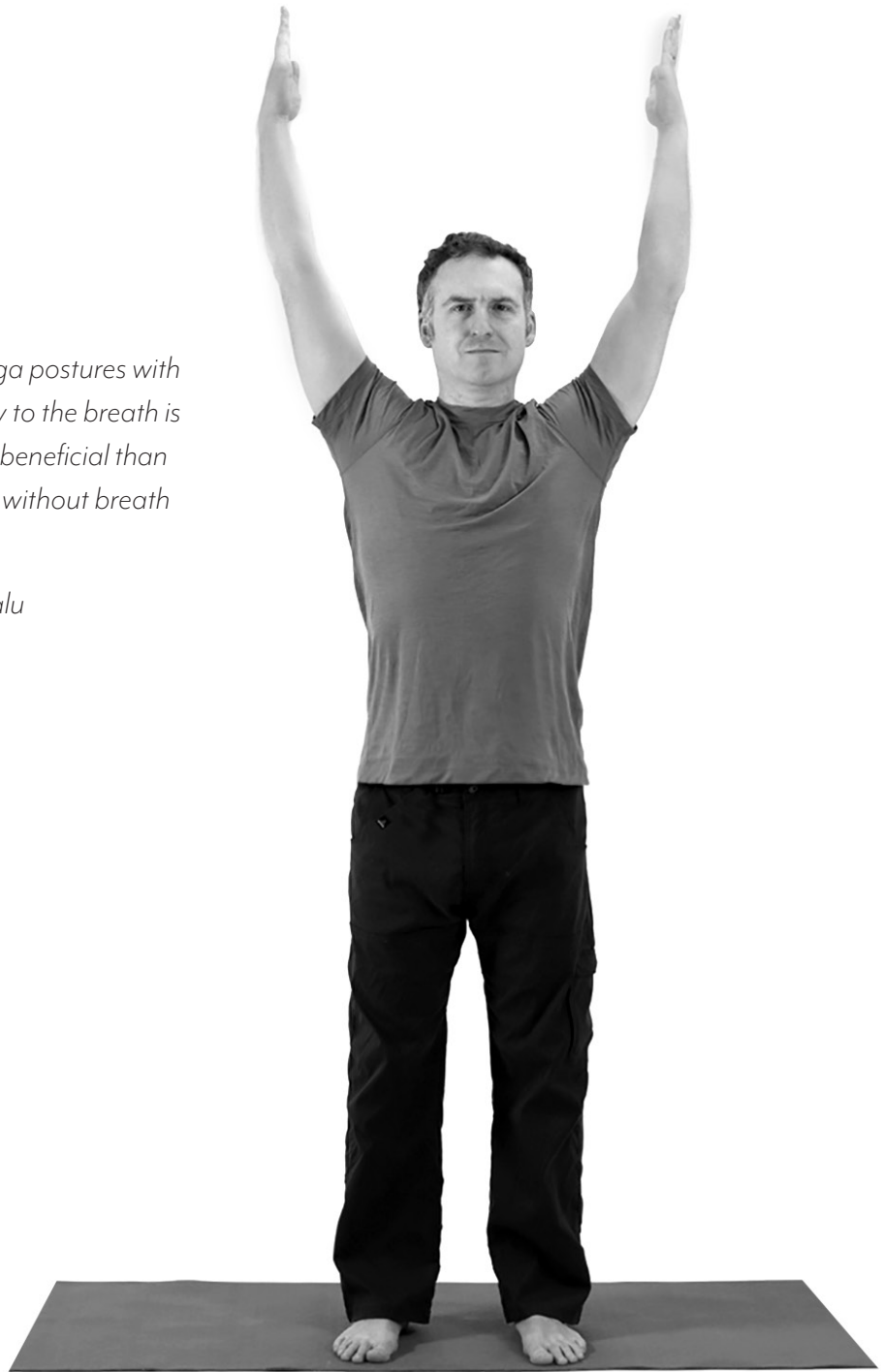


Mountain

Tadasana

"Practicing yoga postures with deep sensitivity to the breath is 10 times more beneficial than postures done without breath awareness."

—Swami Kripalu



Mountain

Tadasana

tada: mountain | (tah-DAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

Minimal stretching occurs in Tadasana, unless the arms are raised. This basic posture is an exercise in consciously stabilizing the joints of the body. All muscles crossing the hip joint engage to stabilize the pelvis. All abdominal and back muscles are used to hold the rib cage in alignment and the shoulder muscles to stabilize the arms, if they are lifted.

- The deltoids are strengthened by lifting the arms out and overhead.
- The pectoralis major and the latissimus dorsi are stretched by lifting the arms.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure and heart conditions: keep the arms below the head
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Feet firmly grounded
- Pelvis level or neutral
- Shoulders relaxed and down
- Spine extended

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Any simple movements that generate body awareness such as Upper Back Cat and Dog, Sun Breaths, Torso Circles, Hip Openers, Table Cat and Dog Circles, and Hamstring Stretch
- Rocking Heel to Toe to activate the soles of the feet
- Standing Squat and Wide Angle to Squat Kriya
- Dirgha pranayama to focus the mind

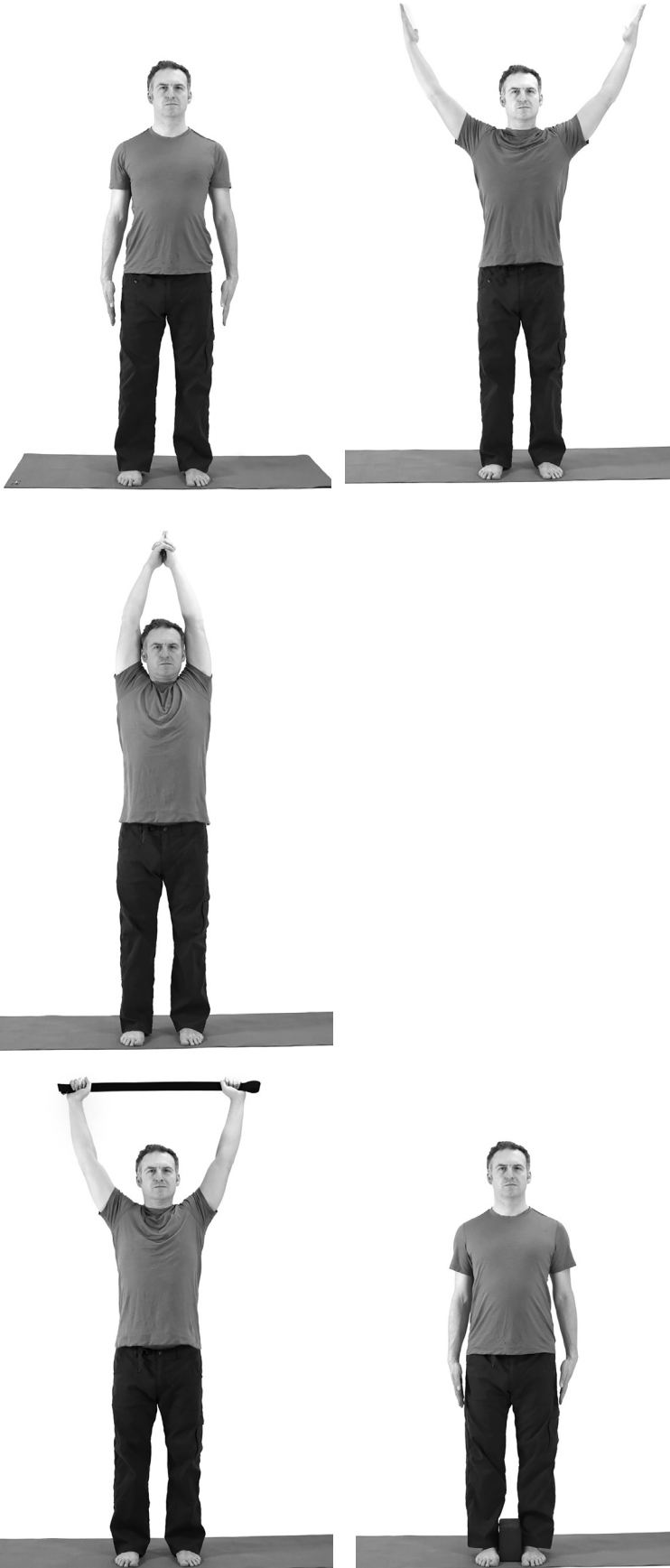
Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, shoulders, arms, and neck
- Stabilizes the ankles, knees, hips, torso, and shoulders
- Brings the entire body into alignment
- Develops concentration, coordination, stability, balance, and poise
- May relieve mild anxiety

Essential Cues

1. Stand tall with your feet parallel, hip-width apart, arms down by your sides.
2. Press down through the soles of your feet. Distribute your weight evenly between the inner and outer edges, the ball of each foot and your heels.
3. Lightly engage your quadriceps to stabilize your pelvis. Keep your knees unlocked.
4. Extend your tailbone down to elongate your lumbar spine and lengthen your waist. Roll your shoulders up, back, and down to open your chest. Reach down through your fingertips and press up through the crown of your head.
5. Reach out through your fingertips as you raise your arms out to the sides.
6. At shoulder height, roll your arms so that your palms face up.
7. Continue to raise your arms into a V position overhead. Keep your chest open and your arms extended next to or behind your ears. Keep drawing your shoulders back and down.
8. To release, reach out through your fingertips and lower your arms to your sides. Relax your torso and legs.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Keep your arms down
- Arms in a wide V
- Hands on the hips, pulling your elbows back to open the chest

Props

- Hold belt with both hands
- Belt around the shins
- Block between the hands
- Block between the thighs
- Block between the ankles

Assists

Verbal

- Ground the feet
- Pelvis settles into legs
- Lengthen the waist
- Reach up through crown



Press points

- Crown
- Fingertips
- Sternum
- Scapula
- ASIS



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Mountain is the foundation of all standing postures, and the principles of alignment learned through its practice apply to every yoga posture. Learning how to engage the leg muscles without hyperextending the knees, stabilize the core, and elongate the spine are key to the safe and effective practice of Kripalu Yoga. Some people like to practice Mountain with the feet closer together, or even touching. Experiment to see what works for you.

Common misalignments

- *Shoulders coming up around the ears when the arms are overhead.* To correct, encourage your students to press the shoulders down and back.
- *Upper torso and shoulders rounding forward.* Guide your students in lifting the sternum to realign the spine.



Pigeon

Kapotasana

“Asanas can involve inhalation, exhalation, and breath retention. The breath can be held either after inhalation or exhalation. It is best to follow the guidance of an expert, but here are some general guidelines in breathing with asanas: Inhale when bending backward, exhale when bending forward or twisting. While performing an asana, one usually instinctively senses whether inhalation, exhalation, or retention is appropriate. Perform a few asanas watching the natural flow of breath, and learn from your experience when to inhale, exhale, or hold.”

—Swami Kripalu



Pigeon

Kapotasana

kapota: pigeon | (cop-poh-TAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- The quadratus lumborum and the erector spinea engage to arch the spine. The shoulder muscles engage to arch the upper back and to stabilize the deltoids when lifting the torso and pulling the ribs forward.
- The hip flexors of the extended leg are stretched by the torso lifting. The calf muscles involved in plantar flexion are passively stretched on both legs, unless the ankle of the folded leg is dorsiflexed. The gluteus maximus and the lateral rotators of the folded leg are stretched, as are the abdominal and pectoral muscles.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Stiffness in the hips: use a cushion under one buttock
- Sensitive knees: place a cushion between the thigh and calf of the forward leg, or under the back thigh to support the knee

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic knee, back, or hip injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Hips squared to the front
- Hips are level
- Pelvis presses toward the floor

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, and Upper Back Cat and Dog
- Spine with Dolphin Dives, Seated Twist, Torso Circle variations, and modified Sun Salutations
- Hips and legs with Hip Openers, Balancing Knee Circles, Hips Side-to-Side, Pelvic Tilt, Cross-Crawl, Runner's Lunge, and Down Dog to Pigeon Kriya

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, back, and abdomen
- Stretches the chest, legs, and buttocks
- Stimulates the endocrine system—especially the adrenals, pancreas, and thyroid—and the digestive system
- May relieve stress and anxiety, and may generate a sense of well-being

Essential Cues

1. Come into Table position.
2. Slide your right knee forward between your hands. Draw your right heel underneath your left ASIS bone. If there's discomfort in your right knee, lift back up and explore a different location for your foot.
3. Curl your left toes under and walk your left knee back and allow your hips to lower, until you feel a strong stretch in your hips. Square your hip bones to the front of the mat.
4. Press your hips toward the floor, lift your sternum, and reach up through the crown of your head. Pull into your hands to open your chest and arch your back. If you feel any compression in your lumbar spine, decrease the arch until it is relieved. Hold your hips level.
5. To release, lift your hips and bring your right knee back to Table.
6. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Foot under thigh on the bent-knee side
- Fold forward
- Half Wind-Relieving pose

Props

- Cushion under the pelvis
- Cushion under the buttocks
- Cushion under the belly and chest in the forward fold
- Belt around the back ankle



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis
- Lengthen the belly
- Reach back through the toes
- Lift through the crown

Press points

- Toes
- Sternum
- Crown
- Scapula



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Pigeon is good for opening the hips, but it can stress the ligaments of the knee. Be sensitive to pain in the knee joint and do a modified version, keeping the heel of the bent foot near the same hip, as opposed to the opposite hip, or use cushions to prop the hip and torso. Make sure you're warmed up before doing this posture, especially the hips and knees. In its full expression, Pigeon is a deep heart-opening posture.

The initial stages, especially Simple Pigeon, can be quite introspective; therefore, feelings may arise in this posture.

Common misalignments

- *Hip of extended leg moves back so that the hips are not squared to the front.* Give a press point to the ASIS bone on the side of the extended leg. You may need to encourage your student to lift that side slightly, perhaps even propping it with a pillow.
- *The extended leg slides out to the side.* Check to see that it is aligned with that hip and that the toes are pressing out, rather than turning in to the side.
- *Hyperextension of the neck*



Posterior Stretch

Paschimottanasana

“Prana is the link between the soul and the physical body. Without this link, the body is lifeless. Whatever yoga one may practice, directly or indirectly, one must worship the life force.”

—Swami Kripalu



Posterior Stretch

Paschimottanasana

paschima: west; tana: stretch | (POSH-ee-moh-tan-AHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- When the torso is straight and the arms are overhead, the deltoids contract to lift the arms. The back extensors work to keep the back from rounding. In the rounded position, the latissimus dorsi, pectorals, rhomboids, middle and lower trapezius, and biceps work to pull the head toward the feet.
- In the vertical position with the arms raised overhead, the latissimus dorsi and the pectorals are stretched. As the body tilts forward, the hamstrings and gluteus medius stretch. (Some students will feel a strong hamstring stretch before tilting forward; consider offering these students the option of sitting on a cushion.) When the back rounds, the back extensors (quadratus lumborum and erector spinae) are added to the gluteus maximus and hamstring stretch. Dorsiflexing the feet stretches the gastrocnemius/soleus.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak or stiff back muscles: do not extend arms above the head; try using cushion(s) under the hips or knees
- Sciatica: practice carefully, and use cushions under the hips and the knees to avoid strain
- Pregnancy: practice carefully; avoid constricting the belly

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Acute sciatica

Key Principles

- Extend the spine
- Spine long or intentionally rounded
- Pelvis rotates forward, as movement originates from hips

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Shoulders and arms with Sun Breaths, Side-to-Side Arms Circles, and Extended Arms
- Spine with Torso Circles, Table Cat and Dog Circles, and Thread the Needle
- Hips and legs with Hip Circles, Standing Hip Circles, Runner's Lunge, Table Legs Swings, and Child's pose
- Simple Downward-Facing Dog, especially pedaling the feet by alternating pressing the heels to the ground, is a great preparatory posture for Posterior Stretch.
- Head-to-Knee is also effective because it lengthens the hamstrings one leg at a time, which eases the workload and intensity of sensation by half.

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs and back
 - Stretches the entire back side of the body and lengthens the spinal column
 - May soothe menstrual and menopausal discomfort
 - Stimulates the lymphatic system
 - Promotes digestion and peristalsis
 - Reduces high blood pressure
 - May relieve stress, anxiety, and insomnia
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Essential Cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended out in front of you and your palms on the floor by your thighs. If your back is rounded, place a cushion under your buttocks to tilt your pelvis forward.
2. Press your sitz bones into the floor, lift up through the crown of your head. Dorsiflex your ankles and reach out through your heels.
3. Lift your arms out to the sides and overhead into a V position.
4. Engage your back and abdominal muscles to elongate your spine as you hinge forward at your hips. Reach as far forward as you can without rounding your back.
5. Lower your arms to hold your feet, ankles, or shins. Continue to arch your spine by pressing out through your heels and lifting the tailbone.
6. Draw your elbows in and keep them close to your legs. Pull your sternum toward your toes as you lengthen your back. Maintain dorsiflexion of the ankles.
7. To release, press your palms into the floor and walk them back to your hips. Lift your torso back to center.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Begin with your arms down and walk your hands along the floor down to your knees or shins. Press into your hands to keep your back long.
- Avoid rounding your back in any stage of the posture.
- Legs apart
- Standing Forward Fold



Props

- Cushion under the hips
- Cushion under the knees
- Belt around the feet
- Block between the feet



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis
- Reach through the heels
- Lengthen the belly

Press points

- Heels
- Crown
- Sternum



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Forward bends are postures of relaxing into gravity with an attitude of surrender. The flexibility required in the hamstrings, pelvis, and hips to bend forward cannot be forced. If you strain forward, you are likely to experience low back pain from muscle soreness and disc compression.

If your hamstrings are tight and you cannot come forward easily, try using a yoga tie to gradually increase your flexibility. Drape the center of the tie across the balls of the feet, with the ends of the tie on either side of the knees. Enter the posture as described above. When you have come to your full extension with a straight back, grasp the tie and use your hand and arm strength to gently enhance the stretch of the hamstrings and the forward rotation of the pelvis and hips. Never force the opening. Work with the breath. With patience and self-acceptance, your flexibility will steadily increase over time.

Posterior Stretch is an excellent holding posture. Come into the pose as above and hold for an extended period of time, letting gravity do the work of stretching the body forward. Breathe deeply, emphasizing the exhalation, and notice how simply breathing in this way brings you deeply into the posture. Rock the head and neck slightly from side to side, letting go in the neck and shoulders. After holding for a bit, you may find that you can come forward even farther with a long spine.

Common misalignments

- *Rounding forward at the lumbar spine rather than hinging at the hips.* To prevent this, which transfers the stretch from the hamstrings to the low back, encourage your students to come forward only as far as they can with a straight back and, over time, flexibility will improve.
- *Straining forward with the chin.* Make sure the head is in line with the spine, even tucking the chin slightly.



Seated Spinal Twist

Matsyendrasana

“Through diligent practice, a seeker who makes use of yoga techniques will feel an awakening of prana.”

—Swami Kripalu



Seated Spinal Twist

Matsyendrasana

matsyendra: a 10th-century yoga teacher | (MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

- Minimal strengthening occurs in the oblique abdominals, rhomboids, and the middle and lower trapezius.
- The lateral rotators stretch in the hip of the folded leg. The gluteus maximus and the hamstrings of the extended leg are stretched, as are the oblique and transverse abdominals, the pectorals, and the sternocleidomastoid.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- In early pregnancy, practice carefully and avoid constricting the belly

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, hip, back, or shoulder injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Abdominal or digestive discomfort

Key Principles

- Sitz bones firmly grounded
- Rotation occurs along the entire length of the spine
- Spine remains perpendicular to the floor

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, Arm Circles, and Upper-Back Cat and Dog
- Spine with Table Cat and Dog, Thread the Needle, Table Twist, Strap Stretch Forward Fold and Twist, Wide Angle Twist, and Simple Knee-Down Twist
- Hips and legs with Hip Circles, Cross-Crawl, and Hips Side-to-Side

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the back, abdomen, and shoulders
 - Stretches the buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, and shoulders
 - Rotates and aligns the spine, maintaining flexibility and hydrating the discs
 - Stimulates circulation and the lymphatic system
 - Promotes digestion and peristalsis to relieve constipation
 - Soothes menstrual discomfort
 - May relieve stress and anxiety
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Essential Cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended in front of you.
2. Bend your right knee and cross the right foot over the left knee. Place the right foot outside the left knee, toes even with the knee. Balance your weight evenly between your sitz bones. Press down through your sitz bones and out through your left heel. Lift through your waist and the crown of your head.
3. Place both hands on top of your right knee and pull your torso toward your thigh to elongate your spine. Draw your shoulder blades down and toward each other.
4. Keep your torso long as you wrap your left arm around your right leg. Press your belly toward your right thigh to lengthen your lumbar spine.
5. Place your right palm on the floor behind your hips. Press down through your right palm and use your left arm to help you twist to the right. Adjust your hand positions for maximum twist while maintaining an elongated spine. Turn your head and look over your right shoulder.
6. Press down through both sitz bones and your right palm. Press out through the soles of both feet, and reach up through the crown of your head.
7. Continue to rotate your hips, waist, shoulders, and neck.
8. To release, relax your right arm and unwind your torso back to center. Extend your right leg next to your left.
9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Twist away from the inner thigh of the bent leg
- Keep the bent-knee foot on the inside of the thigh
- Bend your elbow to support the twist
- Ease into the twist; don't go as deep



Props

- Sit on a cushion



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis by keeping your weight even on both buttocks
- Lengthen the waist
- Keep your spine long as you twist

Press points

- Sternum
- Crown
- Heel



Teacher Observations

Awareness

The spine has much more ability to rotate in the cervical and thoracic regions (rib cage, shoulders, and neck) than in the lumbar and sacral regions (below the rib cage). Therefore, there will be very little movement below the rib cage. Beginning the rotation at the belly will help to spread the twist throughout the entire spine.

Common misalignments

- *Wrapping the elbow around the raised knee before beginning the twist, causing the spine to roll forward slightly.* This compresses the spine. Let the shoulder move closer to the knee through the twisting before wrapping the elbow around the knee.
- *Hunching the shoulder toward the ears.* Encourage students to lengthen through the spine and, if necessary, move the hand farther away from the body.
- *Spine is on an angle.*
- *Over-twisting the neck.*
- *Lifting the sitz bone of the bent leg off the floor.* This brings a lateral flexion to the spine and makes it difficult to rotate the spine completely. Encourage your students to keep both sitz bones pressing evenly into the floor.
- *Ankle of extended leg collapses:* Remember to keep the ankle flexed and press through the sole of the foot



Side Warrior

Parshva Virabhadrasana

“Exercise includes any activity that provides the body with a good workout. Sports and games fit into this category, providing exercise as well as innocent fun and laughter. This is not insignificant, as laughter nourishes the visceral organs and brain centers, and the joy it brings continues to influence a person for days at a time. In addition to benefiting the muscles, vigorous exercises like calisthenics, running, weight lifting, swimming, and mountain climbing elicit a powerful breath pattern similar to bhastrika pranayama. Dance is a genuine form of exercise that swiftly sweeps the dancer to the Lord’s feet. Rhythmic breathing occurs while singing and bestows joy and bliss. Find physical exercises that suit your body and temperament and practice them daily.”

—Swami Kripalu



Side Warrior

Parshva Virabhadrasana

parshva: side; vira: bravery, courage; bhadra: blessed, auspicious
(PAR-sh-va veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The hip opening generated by the wide stance in this posture may cause strong stretches in the adductor muscles. The back tends to arch to avoid this stretch; therefore, the abdominal rectus needs to engage to stabilize the torso.

- The calf muscles of both legs may be working to stabilize the ankle. The quadriceps of the front leg are working to hold the knee over the ankle. Many other thigh muscles engage to stabilize the knee. The hamstrings of the back leg are working to hold the body up. The lateral rotators are strongly contracted to open the legs. The rectus abdominus needs to contract to keep the back from arching. The abdominal and back muscles are strengthened to stabilize the pelvis and torso. The deltoids work to lift the arms. The sternocleidomastoid rotates the neck.
- Many students feel a stretch in the calf of the back leg. Some will feel it in the hamstrings of the back leg, depending on the amount of hip rotation. (The more lateral rotation in the hips, the less hamstring and more adductor stretch.) The adductors of both legs are stretched, the back leg probably more than the front. The lateral rotators strongly contract to abduct the legs.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- High blood pressure or heart conditions: practice carefully without long holding times, and keep hands on the hips

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, hip, or shoulder injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Bent knee remains directly over or behind the ankle
- Bent knee remains in line with the middle toe of the leading foot
- Hips face side of mat while the bent knee faces the toes
- Pelvis is level and the spine remains perpendicular to the floor

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, Side Stretch Arm Circles, Reclining Arm Circles, and Upper-Back Cat and Dog
- Spine with Seated Twist, Table Twist, and Table Cat and Dog with Torso Circles
- Hips and legs with Pelvic Tilt, Hip Circles, Parighasana, Reclining Knee Circles, and Runner's Lunge
- Lift and lower the toes to activate the feet
- Modified Sun Salutation to build core engagement and stability

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms
- Stretches the legs
- Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips
- Stimulates circulation and digestion and relieves sciatica
- Tones the abdominal organs
- Builds concentration, confidence, and strength

Essential Cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana at the front of your mat with your arms by your sides.
2. Place your hands on your hips and exhale as you step back with your right foot, about one leg's length. Bend your left knee and lower your hips.
3. Roll onto the big-toe side of your right foot and rotate your hips to your right. Square your hips to the side of the mat as much as you can, keeping your left knee over your ankle.
4. If the left knee is beyond the ankle, step your right foot farther back.
5. Level your hips. Press down through both the inside and the outside of your right foot.
6. Breathe deeply. Lengthen through your waist and lift your arms parallel to the floor. Reach out through your fingertips as you engage your shoulder muscles. Keep your neck long and look out over your left hand.
7. To release, lower your hands to your hips. Square your hips to the front of your mat as you roll onto the ball of your right foot. Exhale and step forward to Tadasana.
8. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Feet closer together
- Hands on hips
- Back knee on floor
- Back knee on floor with deeper lunge

Props

- Wall
- Chair



Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the feet
- Pelvis settles into leg support
- Lengthen the belly
- Reach up through the crown
- Draw the shoulder blades back and down



Press points

- Front knee
- Outside of the back foot
- Inside ankle of the back leg
- Scapula
- Pelvis
- Sternum
- Fingertips
- Crown



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Side Warrior strengthens the legs and opens the hip joints and groin. Do not extend the knee beyond the ankle, as this position can stress the knee, ankle, and foot. If the knee needs to move beyond the ankle for the thigh to reach parallel, come out of the posture and take a wider stance. The bent knee can also tend to collapse inward, which can stress the inside of the knee joint. Make sure the front of the knee points in the same direction as the toes.

If you want less of a challenge, do not bring the thigh parallel to the ground and the front knee over the ankle; rather, come into the posture only to the extent that you feel comfortable. Your legs will strengthen and the posture will deepen over time.

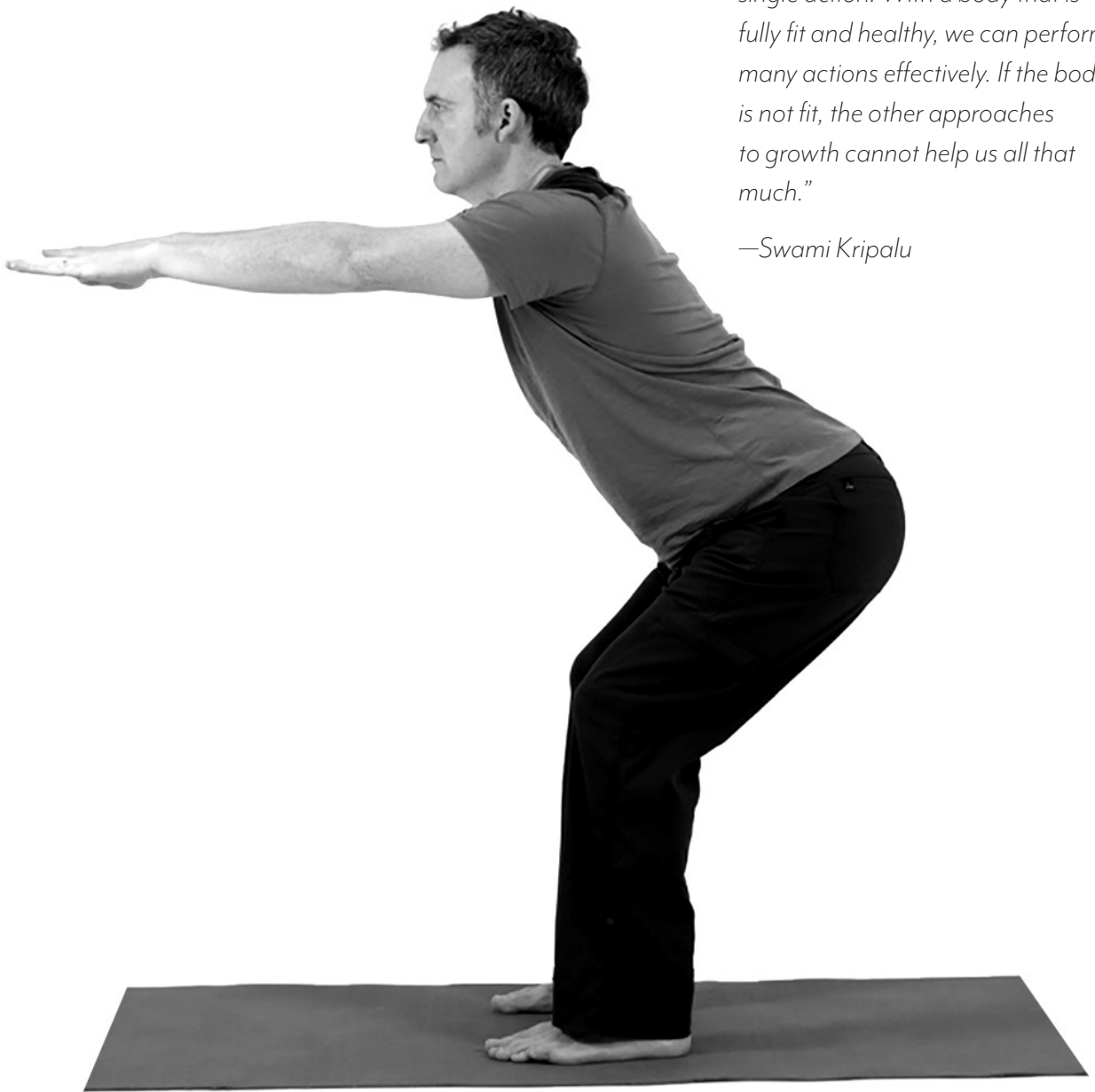
Common misalignments

- *Leaning over the bent knee.* If you equally distribute the weight between the feet and keep the shoulders facing forward, the torso will remain vertical.
- *Bending the knee beyond the ankle.* In order for the thigh to reach parallel, the student may need to come out of the posture and take a wider stance.
- *Bent knee collapsing inward.* Make sure the front of the knee points in the same direction as the toes.
- *One arm dropping or lifting higher than shoulder height.* Turn to look back over the shoulder to see what's happening with the back arm.



Standing Squat

Utkatasana



"The body plays a significant role in human life. Without a body, we would not be able to perform a single action. With a body that is fully fit and healthy, we can perform many actions effectively. If the body is not fit, the other approaches to growth cannot help us all that much."

—Swami Kripalu

Standing Squat

Utkatasana

utkata: exceeding the usual measure, difficult | (OOT-kah-TAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The major work of this posture is holding the body stable in an:

Eccentric contraction: a slow descent against the pull of gravity.

Isometric contraction: holding steady.

Concentric contraction: lifting against gravity back to standing straight.

- The above described contractions are very strengthening to many legs muscles, particularly the quadriceps. Most other hip and thigh muscles engage to stabilize the legs and pelvis. The erector spinea and the quadratus lumborum contract to maintain the straight or slightly arched spine. The rhomboids and the middle and lower trapezius contract to keep the upper back from rounding.
- There is minimal stretch in the leg muscles. There may be a slight stretch to the abdominals.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure and heart conditions: practice carefully, without long holding
- Weak knees: avoid long holding and keep the knees even with your toes

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, hip, or leg injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Feet, legs, and knees hip-width apart
- Shoulders relaxed and down
- Elongated spine
- Strengthening for the lower body

Preparation and Warm-ups

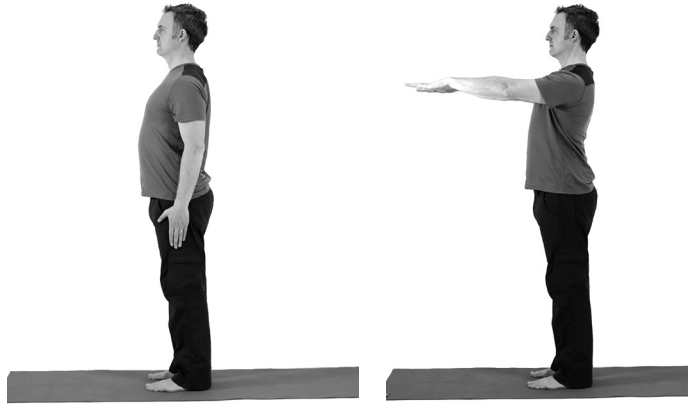
- Shoulders with Arm Circles, Sun Breaths, and Side Stretch Arm Circles
- Spine with Pelvic Tilt, Torso Cat and Dog, and Lunge Arm Circles
- Hips and legs with Cross-Crawl, Hamstring Stretch, Chair Kriya, Wide Angle to Squat Kriya, and Runner's Lunge

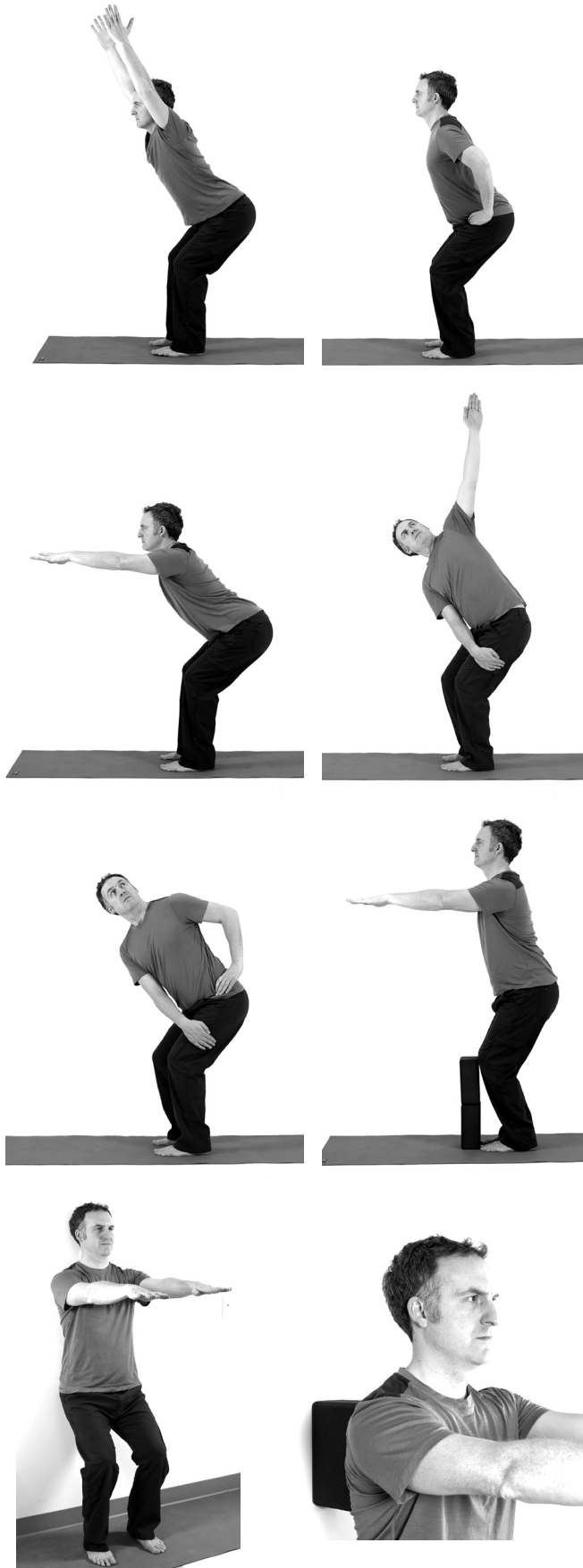
Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms
- Stretches the legs, buttocks, and back
- Stimulates the digestive, circulatory, and reproductive systems
- Relieves rheumatism and arthritis in the legs
- Soothes stress and develops concentration, balance, and strength

Essential Cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your arms by your sides.
2. Raise your arms in front of you to shoulder height, palms facing down.
3. Reach out through your fingertips and draw your shoulders back and down.
4. Bend knees to lower your hips and allow your back to arch gently while keeping your waist long. If you feel any compression in your low back, curl your tailbone down until the discomfort is relieved.
5. Lower your hips to work your quads and stretch your hamstrings. Lift your hips if you feel discomfort in the knees.
6. Hold your knees and chest back to maintain the arch in your spine.
7. To release, press down through your feet and rise to standing. Lower your arms by your side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Hands on the hips
- Don't lower the hips too far
- Add spinal twist, keep higher arm raised, or placed on the hip

Props

- Wall
- Block between the thighs
- Block between the hands
- Blocks stacked to limit the knee bend

Assists

Verbal

- Press strongly into your feet to engage your legs
- Lengthen both the back and the front of your waist
- Keep the back of your neck long

Press points

- Fingertips
- ASIS
- Crown
- Sternum
- Scapula
- Inner knee
- Inner forearms



Teacher Observations

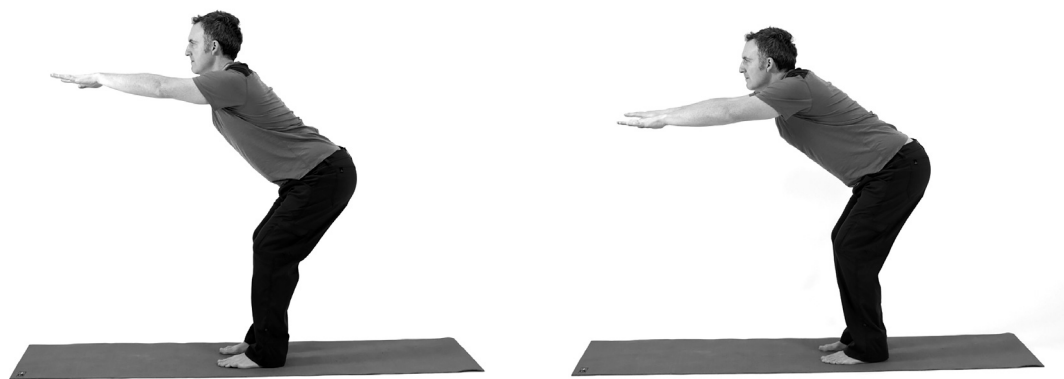
Awareness

The challenge in this posture is to maintain balance while lowering the buttocks and keeping the knees over the ankles. In the first phase, bringing a Dog Tilt to the spine helps keep the knees in alignment without compromising balance. In Phases Two and Three, the counterbalance of the body is assisted by the position of the feet, but other points of balance are more challenged. In Phases Two and Three, the knees come forward, past the toes.

Strengthening the quadriceps with poses such as Warrior will make this posture easier.

Common misalignments

- *Arching the low back more than is necessary to maintain balance.* Focus on bringing only as much Dog Tilt to the spine as you need to maintain balance.
- *Reaching too far forward; bringing the weight onto the toes and the knees forward, past the ankles.* Keep the weight over the heels, and bring a little more Dog Tilt to the spine.
- *Resting the thighs on the calves.* This can put a lot of strain on the knees. Maintain core stabilization and focus on developing strong quadriceps.



Standing Wide Angle

Prasarita Padottanasana



“Many people mistakenly believe that eating moderately means taking only a small, fixed quantity of food per day. When a person exercises a little, his appetite is naturally reduced, so he should eat less than usual. On days when he exercises a lot, his appetite is increased, so he should eat more than usual. Thus, a person must gauge how much he needs to eat at each meal by how much he exercises. One’s appetite also increases or decreases according to one’s emotions, for the body and mind are so intricately related. In this way, each meal tests our powers of discrimination.”

—Swami Kripalu

Standing Wide Angle

Prasarita Padottanasana

prasarita: stretched out, spread; pada: foot | (pra-sa-REE-tah pah-doh-tahn-AHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The adductor muscles might engage to keep the feet from sliding. (They will not have to work at all if the mat provides traction.) The strength of the stretches will be increased if the student pulls harder with their hands on their feet or ankles.

- Gripping the mat with the feet generates strengthening in the adductors. The back extensors are working strongly in the jackknife stage and stretching in the forward fold stage. The rhomboids and the middle and upper trapezius muscles work when the arms are lifted. The latissimus dorsi and the lower trapezius are strengthening when pulling against the feet or ankles. Raising the arms out to the side strengthens the deltoids.
- Some students feel a stretch in their adductors when their feet are positioned one leg-width apart. Other students need a wider stance for these muscles to stretch. The forward bend stretches the hamstrings and the gluteus maximus. Turning the feet inward stretches the gastrocnemius/soleus. The forward fold stretches the quadratus lumborum and the erector spinae. Holding the arms out and pulling on the feet or ankles in the forward fold might stretch the pectorals for some students.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak or stiff back muscles: lower only halfway down with a flat back
- Tight hamstrings or sciatica: bend the knees slightly to avoid excess stretch

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic back or leg injury, inflammation or pain
- Inflammation or injury of the eyes or ears
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Keep the back as straight as you can
- Focus on the hamstring stretch by lifting the tailbone
- Feet point straight ahead or slightly in
- Shoulder blades are together and down

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, Sun Breaths ,and Upper-Back Cat and Dog
- Spine with Pelvic Tilt, Torso Circles, Side-to-Side Extended Arms, and Child's pose
- Hips and legs with Hip Circles, Puppy pose, Standing Wide Angle Pelvic Rock, Wide Angle Twist, and Parighasana

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs and back
- Stretches the legs, buttocks, and back
- Stimulates digestion and circulation
- Relives headache and sinusitis

Essential Cues

1. Face the long edge of your mat with your feet about one leg's length apart. Point your toes straight ahead or slightly inward. For a deeper stretch widen your stance.
2. Extend your arms out to the sides and parallel to the floor. Tilt your pelvis to engage your abdominals and lengthen your low back. Draw your shoulder blades together and down.
3. Hinge at your hips and extend as far forward as you can without rounding your spine. Bring most of the stretch into your hamstrings. If you feel discomfort in the knees, lift up and rotate your toes more inward, or bring your feet closer together. Maintain length in the spine. Keep the arms outstretched at shoulder height.
4. Round your spine and relax into a forward bend. Lower the hands to the floor and allow them to relax, or support your balance.
5. Clasp your ankles or the outer edges of your feet with your hands. Reach your chest between your knees and bring the crown of your head toward the floor. If you need more room for your head, bring your feet closer together.
6. To release, let go of your feet or ankles and bring your hands to your hips. Use the support of your arms to lift your shoulders over your waist. Turn to face the front of your mat and step your left foot forward.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Hands stay on the hips
- Move right into the rounded back position with your hands on the floor

Props

- Arms on a chair
- Hands on a block
- Crown or forehead on a block

Assists

Verbal

- Press down on the feet
- Pelvis supported, hinge at the hips
- Lengthen the belly
- Relax the neck

Press Points

- Crown
- Scapula
- Pelvis
- Heels

Teacher Observations

Awareness

- Body weight extends through the ankles down into the feet, as opposed to rolling and straining the ankles.
- Keep feet one leg's length apart; adjust for body proportions and flexibility.
- Focus on lifting the tailbone rather than rounding the back.

Common misalignments

- *Rolling weight onto the outside edges of the feet*
- *Feet too wide or too narrow*
- *Back overly rounded*
- *Chin tucked or overextended*



Symbol of Yoga

Yoga Mudra

“Young people are growing and active and require more food. Elderly people tend to be less active and eat less. When an elephant and an ant decide what is moderation, their portions will definitely be different. Similarly, what is moderate eating will differ from one person to another.”

—Swami Kripalu



Symbol of Yoga

Yoga Mudra

yoga: act of yoking, connecting; mudra: seal | (yo-gah MOO-drah)

Muscular Anatomy

- The back extensors are strengthened if the student lowers and raises their torso slowly, with a straight or arched back.
- The calf muscles responsible for plantar flexion are passively stretched when sitting on the heels. The quadriceps receive a passive stretch in the seated position. Arching the back in this posture might stretch the abdominals. Reaching the arms forward stretches the rhomboids and the middle trapezius. Clasping the hands behind back stretches the pectorals, the posterior deltoid, and the serratus anterior. Lowering the torso forward stretches the quadratus lumborum and the erector spinae. Lowering the forehead to the mat and raising the hips stretches the upper trapezius.

Precaution (proceed with care)

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure: place a cushion under the head and keep the hips low

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, back, abdomen, or shoulder injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Inflammation or injury of the eyes or ears
- Detached retina or glaucoma

Key Principles

- Chest open
- Movement into posture initiates in the sternum; forward bend happens at the hips, not the waist
- Majority of weight remains in the legs

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper Back Cat and Dog, and Eagle arms
- Tie stretches may release the shoulders and allow for greater range of motion.
- Spine with Side Stretch Arm Circles, Arms Overhead Tie Stretch, Table Cat and Dog, Table Cat and Dog Circles, and Pyramid Twist
- Hips, legs, and ankles with Dolphin Dives, Hip Circles, and Child's pose

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the back, shoulders, arms, and hands
- Stretches the chest, shoulders, and arms
- Stimulates digestion and circulation
- May calm the body, mind, and emotions

Essential Cues

1. Sit kneeling in Vajrasana, with your knees together. Rest your palms on your knees or thighs. Lengthen your waist and reach through the crown of your head.
2. Raise your arms in front of you at shoulder height. Cross your thumbs, drop your chin, and reach long through your fingertips.
3. Keep reaching through your fingertips as you sweep your arms to the side and behind your back. Interlace your fingers and press your palms together, if you can. Keep your elbows unlocked.
4. Reach your knuckles toward the floor, lengthen your arms, and hug your shoulder blades together as you open your sternum. Lift your tailbone, hinge forward from your hips, and extend your torso over your thighs. Bring your forehead to the floor. Reach your knuckles away as you lift your arms overhead. Press the outer edges of your hands toward the floor in front of you.
5. Press your knuckles up and away as you draw your arms farther overhead.
6. To release, extend your sternum forward and up. Reach back through your knuckles, and raise your shoulders over your waist. Release your hands to your thighs.





Posture Options

Modification

- Belt between the hands

Props

- Belt between the hands
- Blanket under the knees or head



Assists

Verbal

- Focus on balance through the legs
- Shoulder blades back, chest open



Press points

- Fingers
- Sternum



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Yoga Mudra conveys an attitude of surrender, placing the head below the heart. This posture is traditionally practiced slowly, with great sensitivity to the flow of breath and feeling.

Common misalignments

- *Lifting the buttocks off the heels before the forehead reaches the floor.* This can be caused by tight hamstrings, quadriceps, or large calves. To correct, place a cushion under your forehead for support.
- *Tension in the shoulders.* Encourage your students to use a belt to allow greater opening in the chest and shoulders, and greater range of motion for the arms.

Tree

Vrikshasana

“Everyone knows that it is best to eat moderately. Most people, however, only understand this intellectually and eat indiscriminately. People also know that it is important to exercise regularly in order to digest their food properly. Yet people rarely exercise enough and their food does not digest properly. As a result, physical waste products are not excreted completely and go on collecting in the body. In much the same way, negative ideas accumulate in the mind. Purifying the body and the mind is not as easy as one might think. It is necessary to be very patient.”

—Swami Kripalu



Tree

Vrikshasana

vrksa: the trunk of a tree | (vrik-SHAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

The effort required to balance in this posture is essentially stabilizing and occurs in most skeletal muscle groups.

- The gluteus medius and other hip abductors are strengthened by maintaining the pelvis in anatomical position while standing on one leg. Once the lifted leg is in position, it is held there by the adductors. The lifted knee is pulled back by the lateral rotators. The deltoids raise the arms. If the hands are in prayer position, the upper trapezius are strengthening.
- The adductors of the lifted leg are stretched. The latissimus dorsi and the pectorals are stretched when the arms are lifted overhead.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Heart conditions: practice carefully and do not lift the arms overhead
- Weak knees: keep the standing knee soft to avoid hyperextension
- Difficulty balancing: lift only the heel, keeping the toes on the ground or on a block

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, or hip injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Extend the spine
- Bent knee presses back, down, and in toward supporting leg
- Hips squared to front and level
- Pelvis is level or neutral

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper-Back Cat and Dog, and Sun Breaths
- Spine with Sun Breaths, Extended Seated Side Stretch, and Torso Circles
- Hips and legs with Hip Circles, Cross-Crawl, Table Leg Swings, Reclining Tie Stretches, and Head to Knee

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the feet, legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, and shoulders
- Stretches the legs
- Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips
- Relieves sciatica
- Stimulates the nervous system
- Develops concentration, balance, and poise

Essential Cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your hands on your hips.
2. Shift your weight onto your left foot. Focus your gaze on the floor. Breathe deeply.
3. Lift your right foot as high as you can. If you can reach it with your hands while maintaining balance, guide the sole of the right foot to the inside of your left thigh. If you can't reach the foot, place it on the side of your shin.
4. Bring your hands to your hips and level the hips. Pull your pubic bone lightly toward your sternum to engage your abdominals and lengthen your low back.
5. Inhale as you press down through the supporting leg and reach up through the crown of head to extend your spine.
6. Inhale, and lift your arms out to the sides and overhead. Bring your arms into a V position and reach out through the fingertips. Keep your abdominals engaged. Roll your shoulders back and down.
7. Draw your bent knee back. Square your hips and keep them level. Maintain a neutral spine.
8. Exhale, and lower your arms out to the sides and down. Release your lifted leg to the ground.
9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Use an easier foot position, and keep the hands on the hips.
- Foot on the inner shin with the toe tips on the ground

Props

- Foot on a block
- Wall for balance

Assists

Verbal

- Balance on the whole foot
- Pelvis settles into the legs
- Lengthen the belly
- Lift the sternum
- Draw the shoulder blades down
- Reach up through the crown

General principle: Avoid hands-on assists for balancing postures.

Press points

- Crown
- Fingertips
- Sternum
- Scapula
- ASIS
- Foot on the floor
- Outside bent knee



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Several factors work together to allow you to balance on one leg. The first is keeping the standing leg straight and the thigh muscle contracted. (Don't lock the knee.) The second is the focus on one object with a soft gaze (drishti). The third is the use of breath as a focus. The fourth is the position of the lifted knee, which in all variations presses down and slightly back.

The last is the elongation of the spine, which begins with the leveling of the pelvis and continues to the pressing of the fingertips to the ceiling. When all these factors come together, stillness and balance result.

Common misalignments

- *Excessive Dog Tilt.* Look for buttocks that protrude more than usual as the abdomen comes forward, and encourage your students to drop the tailbone down.
- *Pressing the hip of the standing leg out to the side or lifting the hip of the bent knee.* After getting the foot in place, work to level and align the hips to face forward evenly.
- *Rotation in the torso.* Press forward through the ASIS bone to square the hips forward.

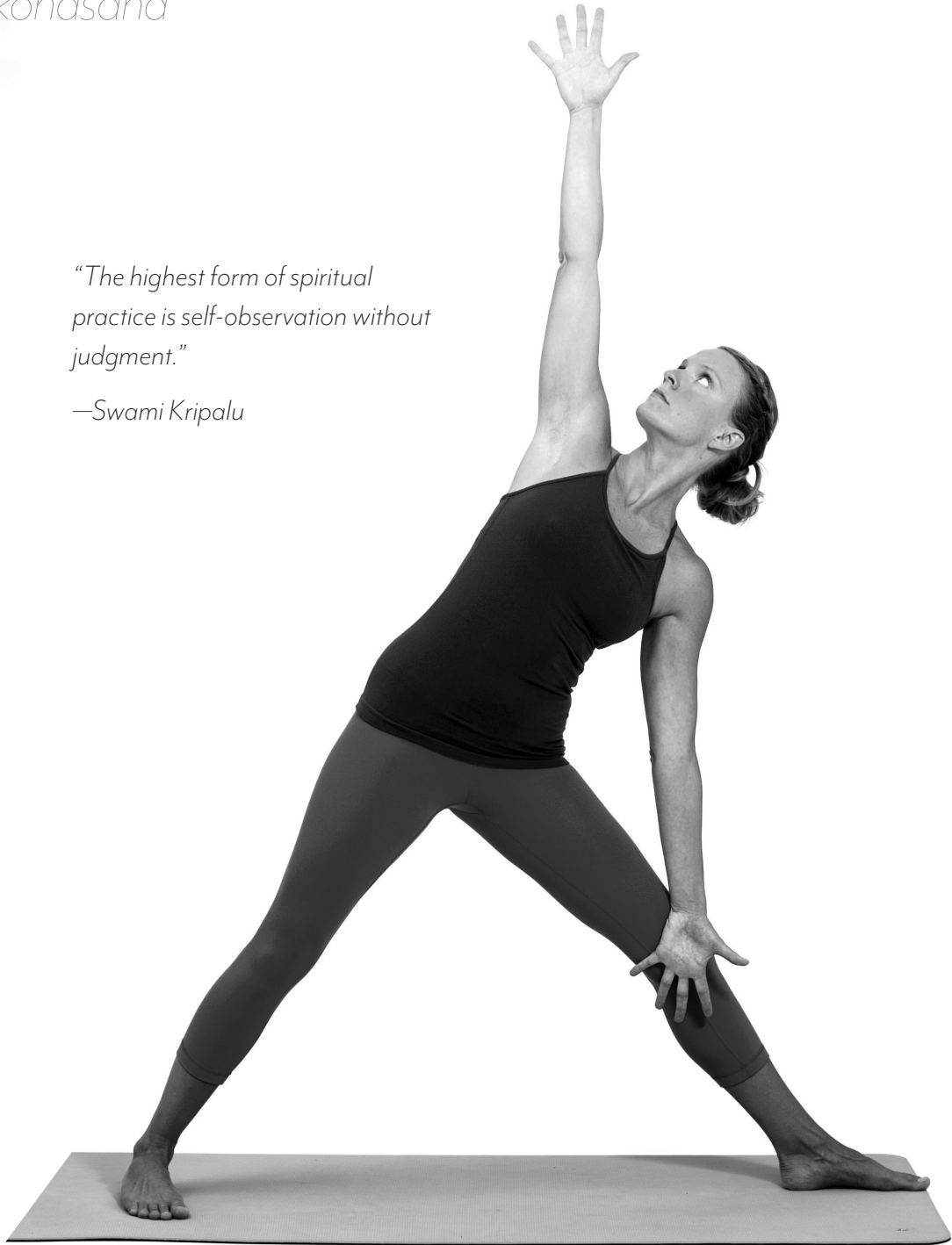


Triangle

Trikonasana

*"The highest form of spiritual
practice is self-observation without
judgment."*

—Swami Kripalu



Triangle

Trikonasana

tri: three; kona: angle | (trik-cone-AHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

All upper-body alignment in Triangle is dependent on pelvic alignment, which is maintained by the engagement of the muscles of the thighs, abdomen, and back. Depending on the student's flexibility and strength, pelvic rotation and level of lateral flexion will vary, shifting the work of stabilization to different muscle groups.

- The calf muscles contract to stabilize the ankles. Holding the front knee aligned and squaring the pelvis strengthens the lateral rotators. The adductors pull the thighs toward each other to hold the body upright. The lateral rotators and the gluteus maximus align the pelvis as lateral flexion of the pelvis lowers the body into the posture. All trunk muscles work to keep the torso from arching and twisting. The deltoids raise the arms and the sternocleidomastoid rotates the neck.
- Holding the front knee aligned and squaring the pelvis stretches the adductors. The lateral pelvic flexion increases the stretch in the adductors, and possibly the hamstrings.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back muscles: use props to support body weight
- Neck discomfort: if looking up is uncomfortable, look down or hold the head in a neutral position
- Headache

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, hip, abdomen, or shoulder injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure or heart conditions

Key Principles

- Weight is evenly distributed over both feet
- Knee remains in line with the leading foot
- Head remains in line with the spine
- Spine remains long throughout the posture
- Core strength supports the weight of the upper body

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, Sun Breaths, Table Twist, and Thread the Needle
- Spine with Torso Circles, Extended Seated Side Stretch, Hips Side-to-Side, and Lunge Arm Circles
- Hips and legs with Hip Circles, Cross-Crawl, Runner's Lunge, and Standing Wide Angle Pelvic Rock
- Core abdominals with Chair Kriya and simple versions of Boat, Cobra, Chaturanga, Plank, Standing Squat, Side Warrior, and Sun Salutations

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms
- Stretches the legs, buttocks, and chest
- Stimulates circulation and digestion
- Relieves and prevents rheumatism, scoliosis, osteoporosis, and sciatica, as well as menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- Develops concentration, coordination, and endurance

Essential Cues

1. Stand in Tadasana, on the left side of your mat.
2. On an inhale, take a wide step to the side with your right foot. Adjust your feet so that they are one leg's length apart.
3. Rotate your left leg outward 90 degrees. Rotate your right foot slightly inward. Point your left knee in the direction of your left toes, and square your hips to the side of your mat as much as you can. Hug your feet toward each other until your legs and pelvis are engaged.
4. Lengthen your low back. Level your hips and reach up through your waist. Extend your arms out to the sides to shoulder height. Reach out through your fingertips and draw your shoulder blades in and down.
5. Extend your torso to the left, reaching through your fingertips. Allow your hips to slide to the right, keeping them square. Keep your abdominals engaged to stabilize your torso.
6. Lengthen both sides of your torso. Rotate your left arm down and your right arm up.
7. Roll your chest upward and draw your right shoulder back. Reach through both arms. Lengthen your neck and look up toward your right hand. If there is discomfort in your neck or it is difficult to balance, bring your gaze down toward your left foot.
8. To release, lift through your right hand on an inhalation, and bring your torso to center. Turn your feet to face forward.
9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Practice Upper Body Triangle, Gate, or Modified Gate
- Keep both hands resting on the hips
- Upper body supported by hand pressing into low back/sacrum
- Gaze is downward or horizontal



Props

- Block outside or inside the front foot
- Lower hand rests on block for support



Assists

Verbal

- Balance on both feet equally
- Pelvis settles into the legs
- Lengthen the belly and spine

Press points

- Heel
- Crown
- Fingertips
- ASIS



Teacher Observations

Awareness

In working to square the hips, do not compromise the alignment of the front knee. Make sure the front knee continues to point in the same direction as the front foot throughout the posture.

There is a tendency to lean over the front leg and twist the upper body to come deeper into the posture. Counter this by pressing into the outside of the back foot to keep the weight evenly distributed between the feet, emphasizing the lateral stretch to the spine.

Instead of placing the lower hand onto the leg to help support your weight, keep the hand just off the leg. This helps build core strength, which is one of the primary benefits of Triangle.

Common misalignments

The forward knee rotates medially, back toward center. This can happen particularly if you say, “Turn the foot out,” but sometimes it occurs just through the desire to square the hips forward. This can compromise the inside of the kneecap, which is a vulnerable spot, since it’s the area of the knee least reinforced by ligaments and tendons. To counter this tendency, keep reminding students that the knee should be in line with the second toe and have them bend the knee slightly so they can see it if it starts to rotate in.

Collapsing over the forward leg. The integrity of this posture comes through lengthening both sides of the torso; therefore, when rotating the arms, keep the underside of the torso as long as the upper side. For many people, this is difficult, and it means they will not come very far toward. If the underside of the torso is rounded, then the lateral flexion is occurring in the spine rather than through rotation and abduction/flexion at the hip joint. Try to isolate the flexion to the hip joint by spending more time in the entry position (i.e., before you rotate your arms); this will allow the hips to open.

Twisting in the spine and torso as the upper shoulder comes forward. Correct this by giving a press point to the upper shoulder blade so the student can get a sense of where the body should be in space.



Upward Boat

Urdhva Navasana



Upward Boat

Urdhva Navasana

urdhva: upward; nava: boat | (uhrd-vah-nah-VAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

Holding the torso stable requires a strong engagement of the back extensor muscles, trapezius, and rhomboids, as well as the abdominals.

- The quadriceps work to hold the legs straight against the pull of gravity and the hamstrings. The hip flexors lift the legs and keep them in position. The anterior deltoids hold the arms lifted.
- The gluteus maximus and the hamstrings are stretched. If the feet are dorsiflexed, the gastrocnemius/soleus stretch.

Precautions

- Weak back or abdominal muscles: keep the knees bent or hold the back of knees
- Tight hamstrings: keep the knees bent or hold the back of the knees

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic hamstring, back, abdomen, or neck injury, inflammation or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint
- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure

Key Principles

- Keep the back straight by rotating pelvis forward and pulling the chest back
- Press out through the heels to straighten the legs
- Draw the shoulder blades back and down

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Head Side-to-Side, Upper Back Cat and Dog, and Plank
- Spine with Table Cat and Dog, modified Sun Salutations, and Thread the Needle
- Hips and legs with Puppy pose, Hamstring Stretch, and Runner's Lunge.
- Practice Dandasana, Posterior Stretch and Downward-Facing Dog to lengthen the hamstrings and develop awareness about maintaining a long spine
- Practice Bridge to stretch the abdominal muscles and strengthen the adductors
- Down Dog Pigeon Kriya to strengthen the abdominal muscles

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the hip flexors, back, abdomen, and shoulders
- Tones the abdominal and pelvic organs
- Stimulates digestion and circulation
- Develops concentration, confidence, and strength

Essential Cues

1. Sit tall with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
2. Clasp the backs of your thighs, just above your knees.
3. Pull your hands into your thighs to open your chest and arch your spine slightly. Balance between your sitz bones and the bottom of your sacrum.
4. Keep your back long or slightly arched as you lift your feet off the mat.
5. Elongate your legs as much as you can.
6. Extend your arms forward, parallel to the floor, palms facing up.
7. Maintain a long spine and an open chest.
8. To release, bend your knees and clasp the back of your thighs. Place your feet on the floor and relax.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Both feet on the floor
- One foot on the floor
- Hold onto the back of your thighs
- Bent knees, shins horizontal

Assists

General principle: avoid hands-on assists for balancing postures.

Verbal

- Balance on the sitting bones
- Extend through the heels
- Lift chest
- Open shoulders

Props

- Use the wall to support the arms or legs
- Strap around the feet
- Block between the thighs



Teacher Observations

Awareness

- Do not let the back round; pull the shoulders back to keep the chest open
- Back of the neck long

Common misalignments

- *Back rounding*
- *Chest collapsing*
- *Chin lifting*

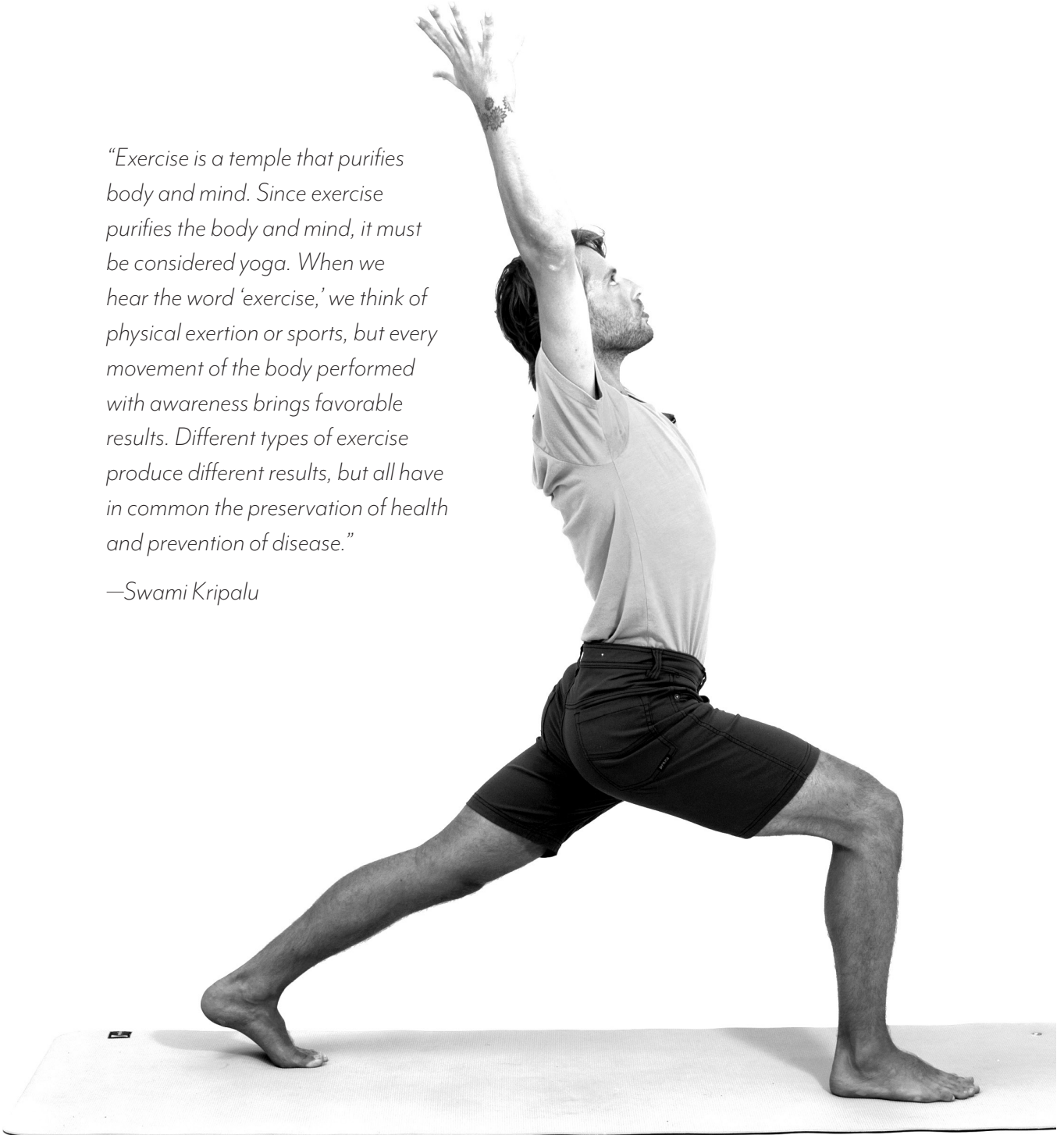


Warrior

Virabhadrasana

“Exercise is a temple that purifies body and mind. Since exercise purifies the body and mind, it must be considered yoga. When we hear the word ‘exercise,’ we think of physical exertion or sports, but every movement of the body performed with awareness brings favorable results. Different types of exercise produce different results, but all have in common the preservation of health and prevention of disease.”

—Swami Kripalu



Warrior

Virabhadrasana

vira: bravery, courage; bhadra: blessed, auspicious | (veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)

Muscular Anatomy

In this wide-legged position with the back heel lifted, the muscles crossing the hip joint, as well as some abdominal and back muscles, engage to hold the pelvis stable and maintain balance.

- Both calves stabilize the ankle joints. The quadriceps control the bend in the front knee. Other thigh muscles help to align the knee laterally over the ankle. The hamstrings might be contracting to extend the back leg against the pull of gravity. The erector spinae and the quadratus lumborum contract to arch the back, and the latissimus dorsi and the lower and middle trapezius work to pull the shoulders back and down. The deltoids lift the arms. If the neck extends, the sternocleidomastoids strengthen.
- The hip flexors of the back leg are stretched as the hips lower, even as the quadriceps contract to keep the back knee from flexing. Arching the spine might stretch the abdominal and intercostal muscles. Pulling the arms back and up stretches the pectorals and the latissimus dorsi.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Heart conditions: practice carefully, without long holding, and keep the hands on the hips

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure
- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, hip, or shoulder injury, inflammation, or pain
- Recent surgery or injury to any affected joint

Key Principles

- Feet hip-width apart
- Front knee remains directly over or behind the ankle
- Hips square to the front
- Back leg is straight

Preparation and Warm-ups

- Neck and shoulders with Head Lift and Tilt, Upper-Back Cat and Dog, Sun Breaths, Reclining Arm Circles
- Spine with Pelvic Tilt, Table Cat and Dog, Torso Circles, and Side Stretch Arm Circles
- Hips and legs with Hamstring Stretch, Runner's Lunge, and Reclining Knee Circles
- Strengthen the legs with Standing Squat.
- Lunge is a good preparatory posture because the legs are in the same alignment as Warrior, but with the hands or back knee on the floor for additional support.

Benefits, Scientific and Traditional

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms
 - Stretches the legs, abdomen, and chest
 - Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips
 - Stimulates digestion and circulation and relieves constipation and sciatica
 - Builds concentration, confidence, and strength
-
-
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Essential Cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana at the front of your mat, with your arms by your sides.
2. Bring your hands to your hips. Inhale, and as you exhale, step back with your left foot, about one leg's length. Bend your right knee and lower your hips. Press back through your left heel and lengthen your leg. Bring your right thigh as close to horizontal as possible, keeping your knee over your ankle. Align your feet so that they are hip-width apart. If your right knee is past your ankle, step the left foot back farther.
3. Square your hips. Tilt your pelvis to lengthen your low back, and reach through your left heel to keep the left leg straight.
4. On an inhalation, lengthen your waist and raise your arms out to the sides and overhead into a V position. Roll your shoulders back and down and arch your upper back slightly. Keep your neck in line with the rest of your spine. Draw your arms back to frame your ears.
5. To release, exhale as you lower your arms down to your front thigh and lean forward. Press your hands into your right thigh and step your left foot forward into Tadasana.
6. Rest, and repeat on the other side.





Posture Options

Modifications

- Feet closer
- Hands on hips
- Knee-Down Lunge
- Knee-Down Lunge with hands on the lower back

Prop

- Belt between the hands



Assists

Verbal

- Adjust feet for stability
- Lengthen the spine
- Draw the shoulder blades back and down

Press points

- Front knee inward
- Back heel
- Hand on hip, hand on heel
- Hands on hips to stabilize
- Sternum
- Crown
- Hands on elbows to provide resistance
- Fingertips



Teacher Observations

Awareness

Warrior stretches and strengthens the legs, hips, shoulders, arms, and chest. If you have knee problems, proceed carefully and make sure the front knee is aligned directly over the ankle. If the front knee extends beyond the ankle, lengthen the stance by sliding the back foot farther back.

If you want less challenge, practice with the hands on the front knee. This makes the posture more stable and easier to hold. Over time, you will build the strength required to raise the arms overhead. You can also lower the back knee to rest on the floor, which improves balance and reduces the effort required to hold the posture.

Warrior is a good posture to hold, although its intensity makes prolonged holding quite challenging.

As you hold, you can explore small and subtle movements of the hips, and larger movements of the arms and hands. Keep the spine elongated and the breath flowing.

Common misalignments

- *The bent knee should not be past the ankle in order to protect the ligaments from undue stress. If the knee is past the ankle, lengthen the stance or shift your weight back toward the extended leg.*
- *Feet in one straight line, as on a balance beam. This affects not only balance, but also the alignment of the hips.*
- *Feet too wide*
- *Shoulders up around the ears*



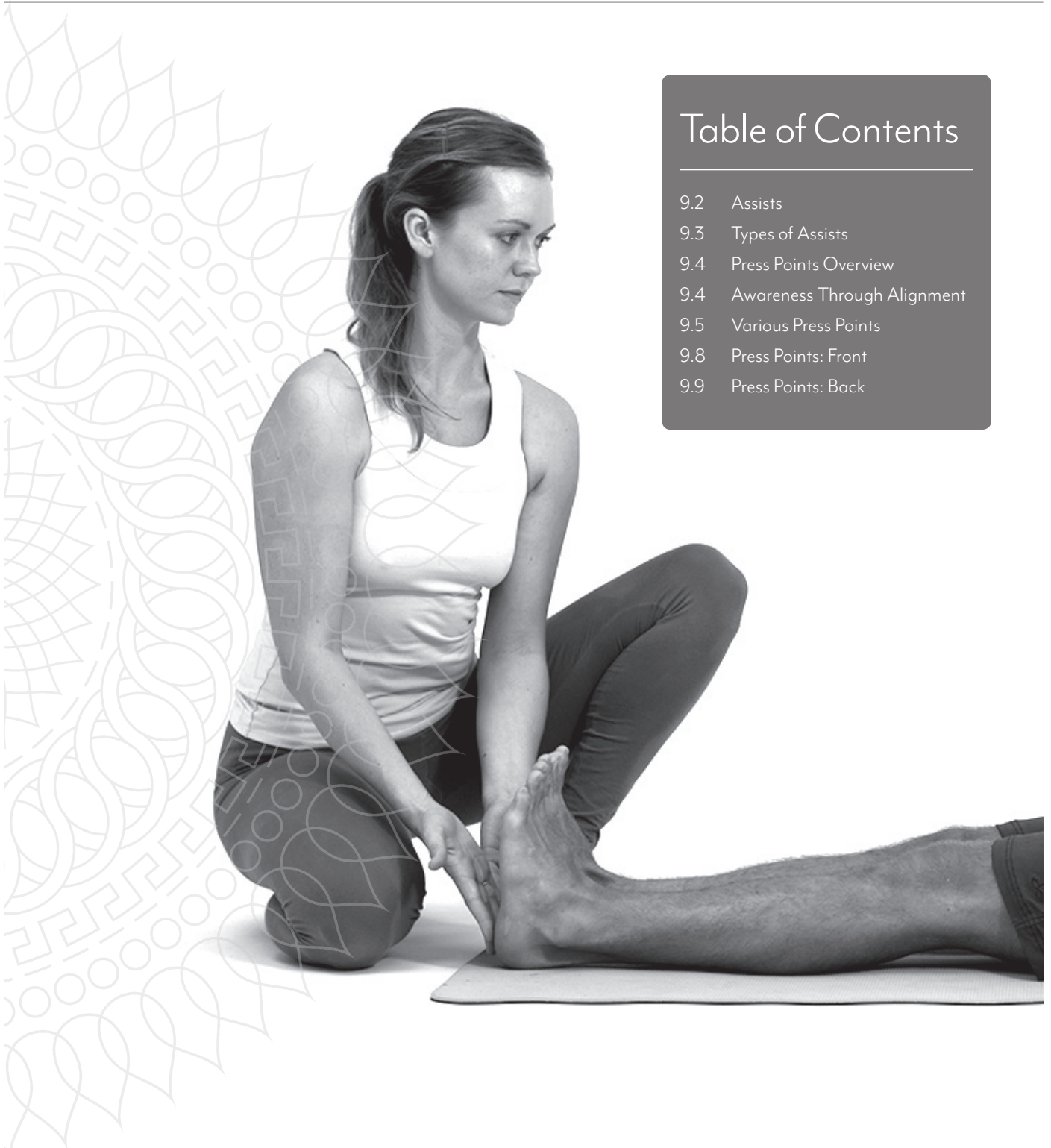
Part Nine

Assists

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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- 9.3 Types of Assists
- 9.4 Press Points Overview
- 9.4 Awareness Through Alignment
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- 9.8 Press Points: Front
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Assists

Assists provide a wonderful opportunity to support your students, facilitate attunement to their body's wisdom, and affirm their efforts. Assists are not "corrections"; rather, they're designed to help deepen a student's embodiment of the posture.

It is important to make your presence known as you approach students to assist them so that they are not startled. This is especially true if they are deep into their experience and have their eyes closed.

Be aware of the tendency to assist in a habitual way. Each student has unique needs and may require different types of assists for different reasons. Take a moment to observe a student before assisting. Look at the whole person: face, breath, balance, and alignment. Consider options for modifying or variation. Do they need an assist? If so, would a verbal or press-point assist serve them best?

As you begin to explore the various techniques of assisting, remember to move slowly. Avoid assisting students when they are in the midst of a transitional movement. Be aware of limitations, contemplating whether an assist would truly enhance their experience. Be mindful during balancing postures, as sudden movements can disturb a student's equilibrium.

What are you communicating?

Observe the body for areas that seem tight and blocked. Always ask the student for permission before touching them. It is usually a good idea to combine a touch assist with a verbal assist. Let your suggestions be simple and concise, communicating clearly how they should respond to your assist, i.e., "Press (reach) into my touch." Use simple words such as "press," "breathe," or "relax." You may also ask, "Where do you feel discomfort?" or "Let me know if you need more or less pressure." Dialogue with them to make sure they are comfortable; for example, "Press into my touch. Do you feel a difference?" Affirm them after they have made an adjustment to give positive reinforcement: "That's it," "There," or "Yes."

Assisting by touch is a powerful way to learn, for it speaks directly to the body. It communicates sound alignment, deeper physical awareness, and more focused concentration. Assists also convey a sense of caring and reassurance. Used skillfully they can instill confidence and a feeling of being attended to. Giving assists does not need to be reserved only for students who look as though they need them. Everyone has the potential to stretch more, expand more, or relax deeper into the posture. Advanced students especially need to be challenged. Your touch can help bring them into a greater outer attentiveness and inner awareness while they receive your support. Attempt to offer press-point assists at least once, to every student during the class.

Types of Assists

1. **Verbal** assists are alignment directions spoken to a specific student. They may be used alone or in combination with any other type of assist. Example: You lead a group of students to raise their arms overhead in Virabhadrasana. You then ask them to straighten their arms by reaching out through their fingers. A student has raised her arms but her elbows are bent and she is not exerting any effort to straighten them. You come in close and give her a verbal assist, "Reach your fingertips up and pull your shoulders down to straighten your arms."
2. **Modeling** is placing yourself where your student can see you and showing, through the position or movement of your own body, what you want the student to do. Example: A student in Virabhadrasana has her hips twisted in the direction of her back leg. You stand in front of the student with your hands on your hips and twist your hips into the same misalignment. With your student watching, you rotate your hips forward in the optimal position. The visual instruction combined with your verbal guidance will help the student understand how their hips should be aligned.
3. **Props.** Providing students with a strap or blocks may keep them from needing to overextend and compromise their balance. Having the student practice balancing postures against a wall may also provide the necessary support. A student holding a strap stretched taut between her hands in Virabhadrasana will probably feel more stable in her upper body.
4. **Stabilization** assists are used in balance postures to help the student experience proper alignment. Example: A student's arms are wobbling in Tree pose. You stand behind the student and place your hands between their forearms. Ask them to press their arms into your hands. This will give them more stability. In some situations you will be able to release the assist and the student can maintain the posture. More often you will release the assist as the student comes out of the posture.
5. **Press points.** Touching a student on a part of their body and asking them to press into the touch, in a way that draws them deeper into the posture, is using a press-point assist. Example: A student standing in Tadasana is rounding through their upper back. Stand in front of the student but slightly to the side and press the top of their head with three fingers or the flat palm of one of your hands. As you press down lightly, ask the student to press up through their crown into your touch.
6. **Physical adjustments.** If you physically maneuver a student to guide them into a deeper expression of a posture, you are using a physical adjustment. Example: A student in Supta Matsyendrasana has both the twisting knee and opposite shoulder off the mat. You kneel by the student's hip and press their shoulder down with the palm of one hand. You place your other hand on their bent knee. Ask them to breath deeply, and as they exhale you press both hands down, taking them deeper into the twist.

Press Points Overview

Awareness Through Alignment

Kripalu Yoga's press-point method for moving into the postures aids in attuning to the body. Press points are both internal directions of focus and specific external structural locations. Because the press points are simple, the mind can relax and let go of any need to have the posture be "picture-perfect."

At the same time, the press points, in conjunction with the details of the posture, can assure proper physical alignment, allowing for a maximum stretch in the safest, most supported way possible. In KSY200 the focus is on verbal, modeling, props and press point assists. Limiting our assists to these techniques will allow us to learn posture alignment and body mechanics with little risk of injuring students. In KSY300 modules the beginner level techniques of KSY200 will be reviewed and the more advanced assisting technique of physical adjustment may be introduced.

The diagrams in this chapter can be used to locate various press points.

Categories of press points

- Some press points assist in creating alignment. They elongate the body, as well as trigger the unfolding of the body's natural flexibility. When the mind is absorbed in the press points, the body is freed to express that natural flexibility.
- Grounding points are the structural areas that are the foundation of the posture and establish its form. The mind focuses on the direction of the press and the body moves in response to the pressing.
- Press points counterbalance tightness in specific areas, reestablishing sound alignment by inviting the tight muscles to relax and lengthen. They can give the posture the next level of refinement and body awareness.
- Another subtle press point is an internal point of focus and direction that creates dynamic engagement within a posture, such as the use of core lift or pressing into lines of energy.

Various Press Points

ASIS bones

The ASIS (anterior superior iliac spine) bones are the front-facing points of the ilium, or pelvic bowl. Pressing into these points helps keep the gluteus folds firm, which, in combination with core stabilization, supports the entire body—especially the lower back—during backbends.

Crown of the head

The crown of the head is the top center of the skull, the fontanel. When the crown is pressed upward, away from the shoulders, the entire spine lengthens. The back of the neck elongates, while the chin remains parallel to the ground. To assist, place your entire palm on the crown and press firmly. You may continue to press with pressure equal to the pressure with which the student is reaching up. If the chin lifts, remind the student to lengthen the back of the neck. A manipulative alternative is to place your fingertips under the occipital ridge and actually lift it upward.

Elbow

The elbow press point is located on the inside of the elbow joint. Pressing into these points helps to keep the arms tucked in toward the body, the back lengthened, and the shoulder blades in alignment.

Fingertips

Useful for lengthening in the arms, as in Warrior.

Inside of the knees

Effective for helping people bring their knees closer together, as in Bridge.

Greater trochanter

The greater trochanter is the point at the top of the thigh where the femur (thighbone) connects into the pelvis. Pressing into the greater trochanter provides a side stretch and helps balance the work being done in the muscle groups on the opposite side. For example, in Half Moon, pressing into the right trochanter allows the torso to bend deeper to the left side. (Pressing through the right trochanter will create elongation on the right side and shortening on the left side.)

Sternum

The sternum is located in the center of the chest, about three inches below the throat. Pressing into the sternum lifts the chest, allowing the lungs to expand more fully with breath. The sternum also helps keep the spine erect, the torso engaged, and the shoulder blades in their proper place. It takes a little more sensitivity to touch the sternum, especially with women, so proceed with extra awareness.

Toes and heels

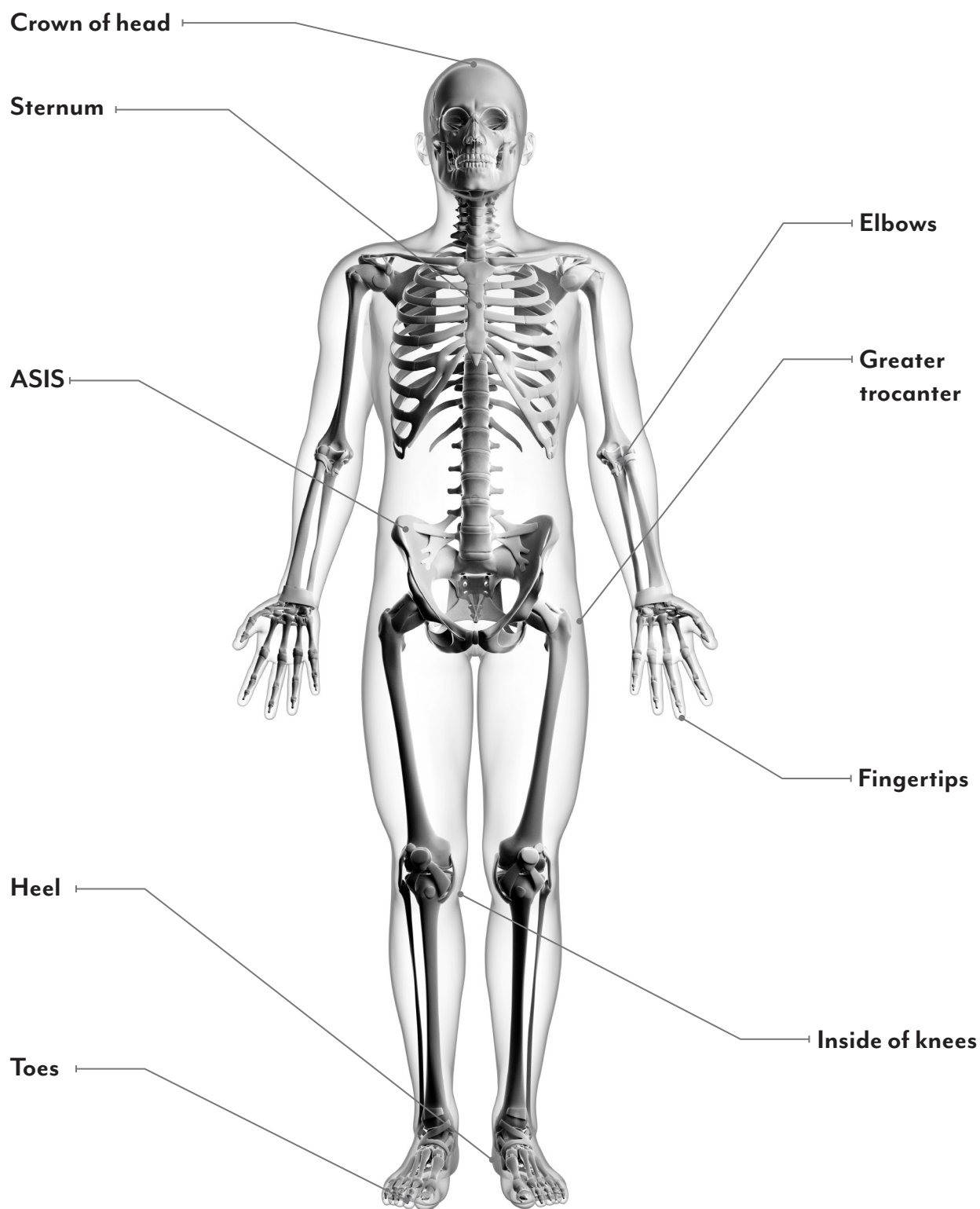
Press into the toes and/or heels to create length and lift as appropriate.

Wing points of the scapulae

The wing points are located on the lower inside edges (closest to the spine) of the scapulae. They are used most often in rotating the spine, as in Spinal Twist. If you press one of the wing points, the torso will rotate in that direction.

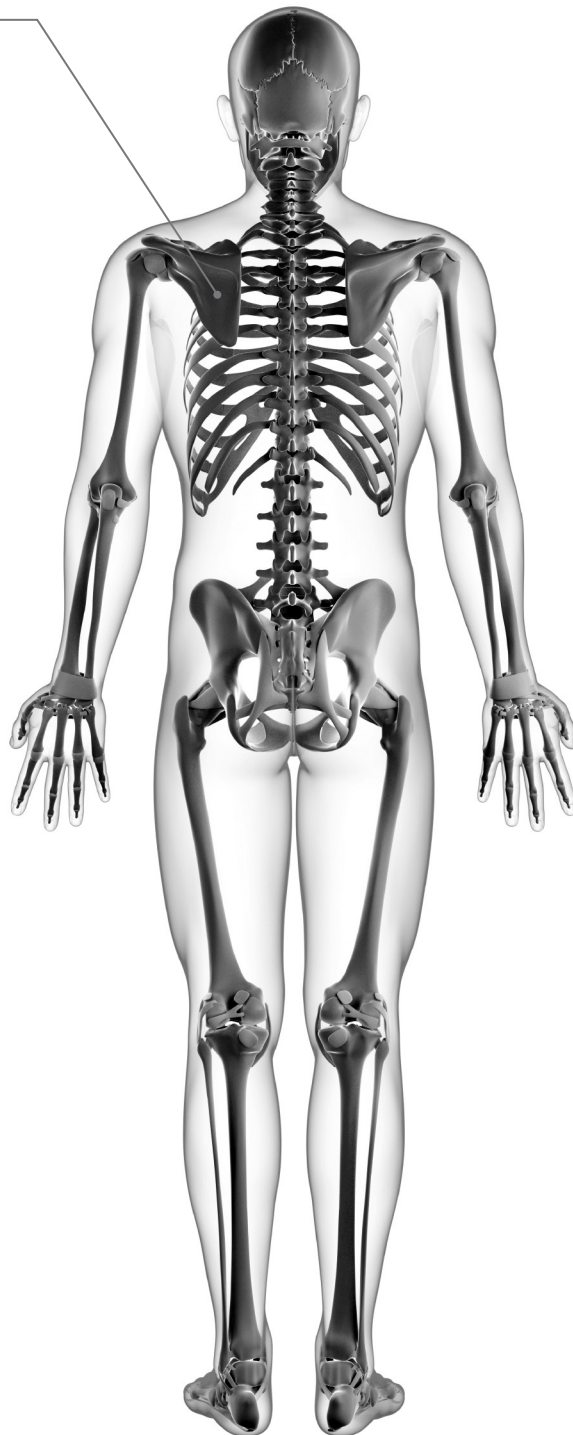
Notes

Press Points: Front



Press Points: Back

Wing points of
scapula



Teaching Pranayama

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Pranayama: Yogic Breathing

The Sanskrit compound pranayama is composed of two words, “prana” and “yama.” Prana translates as both “air” and “life force.” As air, prana is our breath, and as life force, it is the energy behind all of life’s expressions (moving, thinking, feeling). Yama means “to restrain or hold back,” and is the same root word in yama and niyama. Pranayama can also be divided as prana and ayama. Ayama means “to lengthen or increase.” Together yama and ayama can be interpreted as “to increase by restraining.” Just as hunger will increase if the urge to eat is not satiated, so too will the urge for breath increase during breath retentions. Hence, pranayama means “to restrain or enhance the breath and the life force.”

Swami Kripalu taught that most people expend their life force unconsciously through indulgence and stress, so that it becomes weak and is barely felt. Yogis traditionally lived a simple life that minimized the expenditure of prana, and did asanas and pranayama to raise the level of prana. Through a practice of simple living, asana, and pranayama, their prana became so strong that it could be easily felt. Once the yogis were able to experience and feel prana, they found they were more in touch with their emotions, physical sensations, and needs. With strong prana, it became easier to connect with inner knowing and live in attunement with spirit.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is a 14th-century yoga text that was influential in the development of Kripalu Yoga. This text states that there are two reasons to practice pranayama. First, pranayama purifies the nadis. Second, it makes prana flow in the sushumna. Let’s examine these effects more closely.

Purifying nadis

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* explains that our body is full of tubes or channels called nadis. Our life experience is comprised of the flow of substances and energies through these tubes. Our health is dependent on these tubes remaining unblocked. On the physical level, the tubes make up the circulatory, digestive, respiratory, lymphatic, and nervous systems. If any of the tubes in these systems are blocked, there will be numbness, a lack of perception, and our health or well-being will be impaired.

On the subtle level, nadis carry nerve impulses, thoughts, and feelings. If we look at the sankhya chart, each element has many nadis connecting them with each other. Between manas and ahamkara, for example, there are many possible nadis. A particular thought produced in the mind travels by nadi to the ahankara, which in turn produces a particular feeling or emotion.

That feeling or emotion flows through the nadis and has an effect on the senses and on the body. Nadis are continually opening and closing. When some nadis are blocked, the flow is limited. For example, the mind may only be able to send certain thoughts to the ahankara, or the ahankara may only be able to respond in certain ways, regardless of the stimulus. For a particular person, no matter what they experience, their only response may be fear. For an addict, any thought or experience may only elicit one response: the desire for alcohol or drugs.

When these channels become blocked, we lose our ability to connect with our environment or with ourselves. Painful experiences, or even the fear of painful experiences, can cause us to consciously or unconsciously restrict the flow of life force to some part of ourselves, resulting in numbness or disassociation. The ability to do this is built in as a protective mechanism when life gets too painful or stressful, but for many people it becomes a way of life.

To say that pranayama purifies the nadis means that pranayama removes numbness and helps us to feel what is really happening inside us on all the different levels. In other words, pranayama makes us more sensitive to and aware of ourselves and of the influences governing our actions and choices.

Prana to flow in the sushumna

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says that we have thousands of nadis. One of the most important ones is the sushumna. Unlike the other nadis, which flow from one element to another, the sushumna is said to flow from the elements directly into the soul. A goal of hatha yoga is to cause our prana to flow strongly in this nadi. When prana is flowing in the sushumna, we experience a profound state of introversion; the world fades into the background as our inner world unfolds. Deep meditation and absorption happen in this place. Such an experience can occur as we practice any of the disciplines of yoga, and the introspective effects of any yoga practice may be enhanced when we add conscious breathing.

In a beginning Kripalu Yoga class, we open the nadis through pranayama. The sensitivity generated by pranayama enhances the benefits of the postures, and help students avoid injury by increasing their body awareness. We use pranayama before and during the postures to cultivate the experience of prana flowing in the sushumna, gradually leading the students to deeper stages of absorption.

Using Pranayama in a Beginner-Level Yoga Class

There are many different pranayama techniques used in Kripalu Yoga, and we will learn the following ones in our program. These are breathing exercises that communicate the essence of pranayama practice, provide a foundation to build upon if students choose to move on to a more advanced practice, and are safe for most beginning students.

Dirgha pranayama. Full yogic breathing—the foundational breathing technique for all pranayamas.

Ujjayi pranayama. The Ocean-Sounding Breath—a strong, soothing pranayama that may be used in meditation and when doing postures.

Kapalabhati. A vigorous pranayama that releases tension in the abdomen and increases the amount of prana in the nadis.

Nadi Shodhana. Dirgha breathing channeled through single alternating nostrils.

Breath retention

Traditionally, most pranayamas were practiced with breath retention, or kumbhakas. Holding the breath during or after pranayamas deepens their effects. Experienced practitioners may feel that something is missing if they don't include kumbhaka. A novice student may have a very different experience of breath retention. If they cannot relax into the kumbhaka, they may have a panic response. If they do not know how long the led holding will last, they may become tense or fearful, imagining how they will feel if the retention extends beyond their capacity. Students may also feel stress if they think they have to hold as long as everyone else in the class. As a rule of thumb, pranayamas should be taught without breath retention. When the students are comfortable with the basic pranayamas, the teacher can guide breath retention and slowly add it to their practice. In our program, we practice kumbhaka in our morning and afternoon classes, but we don't learn to teach it to our students.

Teaching Basic Pranayama

- Introduce only one pranayama technique per class.
- Review and build on techniques taught in previous classes.
- Review previously taught techniques by including them, as appropriate, in centering, postures, or relaxation.

Methodology for teaching pranayama

The methodology we use for teaching pranayama is based on the one we use to teach postures. Some differences exist, however, because pranayamas are more internal practices, with less for the students to observe.

Methodology:

- Give a context
- Demonstrate and teach the pranayama
- Benefits, precautions, and contraindications
- Lead the pranayama
- Questions and clarifications
- Lead the pranayama again

Methodology explained

1. *Give a context.* Have the students start in a seated position. Pranayama can be taught after centering, warm-ups, or postures. It works better to teach pranayama earlier in the class, when the students are more alert. For this reason, we do not recommend teaching a new pranayama after relaxation. Use the Sanskrit name of the pranayama if appropriate. You may want to weave in the benefits to help students understand the importance of what they're learning.
2. *Demonstrate and teach.* Demonstrations should be brief, followed by an explanation of the technique.
3. *Benefits, precautions, and contraindications.* It's important that students know precautions and contraindications before they practice. If a student should not do the pranayama, or does not feel comfortable doing it, have them observe. If appropriate, offer another breathing technique that is safer for them to do instead.
4. *Lead the pranayama.* Lead a few rounds slowly. You can let students keep their eyes open at first, and then gradually close them. You may do the breathing with them, but keep your eyes open to observe each student. If you have a large group, you will need to move around. Guide the group based on what you notice. If you see anyone attempting the breathing in a way that is unsafe, stop the group, address the concern, and lead the pranayama again.
5. *Questions and clarifications.* Use this time to address any misalignments you observed or to illustrate or describe common misalignments.
6. *Lead the pranayama again.* You may lead a longer set this time, or a faster round. You can also explain it in a way that draws attention to the more subtle aspects of the pranayama.

Notes

Proper sitting position for pranayama

For pranayama to be most effective, sit erect with your back straight. (Refer to pages 1.8 and 1.9 for instructions on how to sit.) For most students, this is easiest in a kneeling position (Vajrasana). If kneeling is uncomfortable, you could place a folded towel, block, or cushion between your ankles and hips to ease any pressure on your knees. You can also release pressure on your ankles by placing a folded towel under them.

Traditionally, pranayama was practiced in a cross-legged seated posture. If you wish to use this position for your pranayama, sit toward the front edge of a folded blanket or a cushion to make it easier to hold your back straight. If your knees don't reach the ground, place a folded blanket under them for added stability and to help your thighs relax.

All the pranayamas taught in our program may be practiced sitting in a chair. If you use a chair, it's important not to lean back, as this will compress your abdomen and make deep breathing more difficult. Use a cushion behind your lower back if you need additional support.

(See pages 1.8 and 1.9)

Chapter Learning Outcomes

- Understand the role of pranayama in Kripalu Yoga.
- Understand how pranayama relates to and enhances an asana practice.
- Enhance facility with introducing and teaching a pranayama in classes.
- Create a safe, supportive context within which to teach pranayama to new students.

Notes

Basic Pranayama Techniques

Dirgha

Three-Part Breath, Full Yogic Breath, the Complete Yogic Breath

Dirgha, the Complete Yogic Breath, utilizes full lung capacity. By consciously breathing into each of the separate areas of the lungs, we take in more air than we do habitually, invigorating the body. It is more than our lungs that breathe; every cell in our body needs to be supplied with oxygen. When we breathe freely and fully in yoga practice, the respiratory process is stimulated throughout the body, increasing metabolism.

Dirgha is done with long, slow, deep breaths, bringing the breath into the three regions of the lungs. When the diaphragm contracts, it moves downward, causing air to enter the lungs, and displacing the contents of the abdomen. This pushes the abdomen out and is often referred to as belly breathing, even though no air actually enters the belly. Many of us have learned not to let the belly expand as we breathe. This tendency has to be unlearned in order to perform dirgha pranayama. In the mid-lung, or thoracic, region, inhalation is assisted by the intercostal muscles, which, when engaged, lift and spread the ribs, causing more air to flow into the lungs. Finally, to fill the upper region of the lungs, inhale fully and feel your clavicles rise slightly. Movement in this area is more subtle.

Potential Effects

- Calms the mind and enhances introversion
- Cycles exchange of air in the lungs
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen
- Provides a gentle massage to the abdominal organs, improving digestion
- Facilitates a deeper experience of postures and increases holding time

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Close your mouth and relax the face and jaw.
3. Place your palms on your belly and breathe into your lower lungs, feeling the diaphragm drop and the belly expand into your palms. Repeat several times.

4. Move your palms to the sides of your torso and breathe into the chest, feeling the rib cage expand. Repeat several times.
5. Place your fingertips just below your collarbones. Breathe into the upper part of your chest and feel your hands lifting. Repeat several times.
6. Combine all three in-breaths to make a complete and full inhalation.
7. Exhale completely, gently contracting the abdomen to squeeze out residual air.
8. Repeat this cycle several times, moving your hands to different parts of the body. Focus on filling and emptying the lungs completely.
9. Rest your hands on your lap and continue this breathing pattern for several minutes.
10. Release the breath practice. Sit quietly and notice the effects.

Precaution

- Irritation of the throat or sinuses

Contraindications

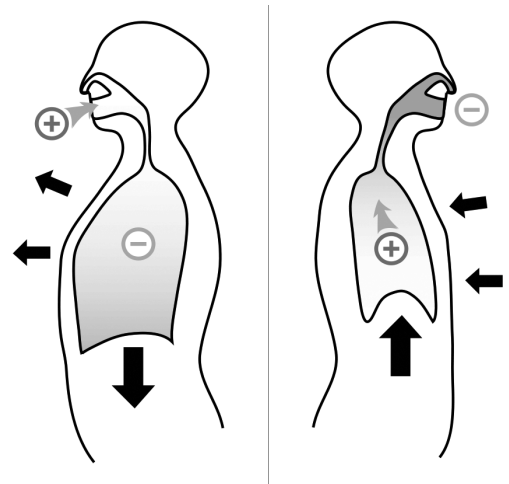
- None

Teaching Tools

- Have students lie on the floor and do the three-part inhalation. Make the breath more pronounced by having them elevate their chest by lying over a pillow or a rolled-up mat. Be sure that the head is still resting on the floor or on a cushion so as not to compress the vertebrae in the neck.
- Invite students to place their hands on each particular breath chamber (abdominals, ribs, and upper chest/collarbones) to feel the movement of breath.
- Ask students to place a cushion, book, or light sandbag on the belly to feel the contrast of this first part of the breath.

Awareness

Dirgha may be challenging to learn for beginners who are reverse breathers. Reverse breathing means that the habitual way of breathing is to contract the belly on the inhalation. Assist students with this by having them breathe just into the lower lungs, allowing the belly to expand on each inhalation, until this action becomes familiar and comfortable.



Ujjayi

Ocean-Sounding Breath

Ujjayi, the Ocean-Sounding Breath, is performed by taking long, slow, deep breaths while slightly contracting the glottis, the back of the throat. This subtle muscular contraction creates a sound like the rising and falling of ocean waves.

Potential Effects

- Calms the mind
- Creates a complete exchange of air in the lungs
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen
- Strengthens the breathing muscles
- Facilitates a deeper experience of postures and increases holding time
- Generates introversion
- Increases concentration

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Begin with Dirgha pranayama and repeat several times.
3. With your mouth closed and face soft, gently contract the glottis, at the back of throat, making a soft, continuous hissing sound like the reverberation heard in a seashell. Engage this hiss on both the inhalation and exhalation.
4. Continue deep breathing and explore a louder sound without strain; then explore a quieter sound.
5. Focus your attention on the oceanlike sound.
6. Continue to breathe like this for several minutes.
7. Release the breath practice. Sit quietly and notice the effects.

Precaution

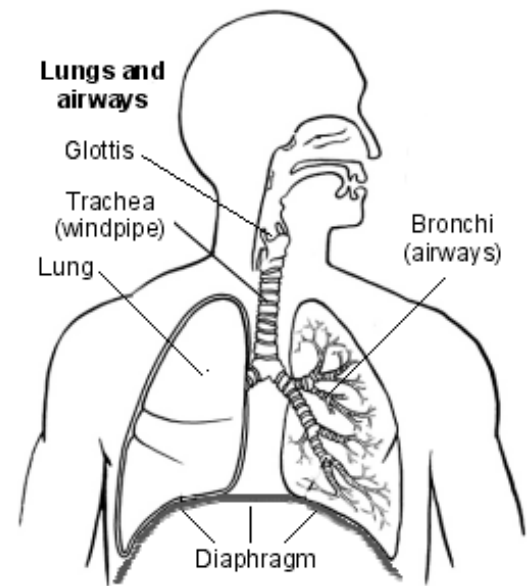
- Any irritation of the throat or sinuses

Contraindications

- None

Teaching Tools

- Have students hold their hand out in front of them and visualize that they are fogging a mirror as they exhale through their open mouths. On the inhalation, have them visualize the mirror in the back of their throats. Once they can make the sound with their mouths open, invite them to close their mouths and continue the breath.
- Guide students to say the word “home” several times, drawing out the “hhhaoooo” sound. Next, have them say it on the inhalation, and then have them close their mouths as they make the sound.
- Instruct students to plug their ears with their thumbs for a few rounds of breath. This will help them absorb into the Ujjayi sound.



Awareness

- To produce more focus, hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of the inhalation and/or at the end of the exhalation.
- Connect the inhalations and the exhalations, leaving as little space between them as possible. Allow the inhalations and the exhalations to follow a continuous circular flow.
- Ujjayi pranayama can be done with any full, deep breath.

Notes

Kapalabhati

Skull-Polishing Breath

Kapala means “skull.” Bhati means “to make shiny” or “to clean.” Through the rapid succession of sharp expulsions of the breath, the nasal passages (referenced as the skull) are cleaned and purified. Because of the use of the abdominal muscles to expel air rapidly from the lungs, this pranayama is conducive to having a responsive abdomen. In addition to the physical effects, this breath can illuminate or churn our current emotional state.

Potential Effects

- Cleans the nasal passages and opens the sinuses
- Complete exchange of air in the lungs
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen
- Tones the abdominals
- Generates introversion

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Begin with Dirgha or Ujjayi pranayama for several minutes to center and connect.
3. Place one hand on your solar plexus.
4. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, lips sealed.
5. Strongly contract your abdomen and exhale sharply through your nose.
6. Keep your abdomen relaxed and receive the naturally occurring passive inhalation.
7. Continue exhalations at a steady pace. If the breath shortens, a feeling of lightheadedness or extreme fatigue occurs, or rhythm is lost, slow down and make sure to take in enough air on each inhalation, or discontinue the breath. (Start with 20 expulsions and increase as comfort and familiarity with this technique grows.)
8. Release and return to a soft, natural breath. Notice the effects.
9. Repeat one or two more rounds, or sit in meditation before moving on.



Precautions

- Any irritation of the throat
- Any sinus irritation, inflammation, or swelling
- Any digestive or abdominal irritation or inflammation
- With menstruation, experiment with how kapalabhati makes you feel. For some women, it makes the cramping sensations worse, as it brings more energy to the pelvic region. For others, because it creates a responsive abdomen, it can decrease cramping.

Contraindications

- Pregnancy
- Recent surgery, injury, or inflammation in the abdominal or thoracic region (colitis, cancer, hernia, active stomach ulcer, emphysema or other severe lung conditions, heart conditions)
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure

Teaching Tools

- Have students place their hands onto the belly and apply a gentle pressure inward and upward as they exhale. Guide students to notice their belly move in toward the spine, and on the inhalation, invite them to relax as the belly expands and air pushes the diaphragm down.
- Guide students to imagine holding a candle in front of their mouths and extinguishing it with a sharp exhalation through the mouth. To add to the technique, ask them to place one hand on their abdomen to feel the contraction. After exhaling several times through the mouth, instruct them to close the mouth and shift the exhalation to the nose.
- Have students practice kapalabhati lying on their backs. This technique is helpful for reverse breathers, or for students who move their hips or shoulders too much when they exhale.

Awareness

- It takes some practice to coordinate the breathing with the movement of the abdomen. And due to the fast pace, it can be especially challenging for reverse breathers. Students might be contracting the chest and shoulders (and actually expanding the belly) to force air out. This causes a lot of movement in the torso and destabilizes the seated posture. Slowing the breath down can help the students learn the optimal rhythm.
- The emphasis is on a strong exhalation. The key to getting the expulsion to happen is in the contraction of the belly, which forces the air out of the lungs. The inhalation is completely relaxed.
- When teaching first-time students, lead fewer expulsions to avoid abdominal muscle fatigue.

Nadi Shodhana

Channel-Purifying Breath



Potential Effects

- Calms the mind
- Creates a complete exchange of air in the lungs
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen
- Generates introversion

Essential Cues

- Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
- Begin with dirgha or ujjayi pranayama for several minutes to center and connect.
- Bring the hand up to nose in Vishnu mudra (or another hand position) in preparation.
- Close your right nostril with your thumb and slowly inhale through your left nostril.
- At the end of the inhalation, close your left nostril with your ring finger and exhale through your right nostril.
- Inhale through your right nostril. Close your right nostril and exhale left. Continue this pattern (exhale, inhale, switch).
- After several minutes, gradually slow down the inhalations and exhalations. Allow a meditative quality to emerge as your breath continues to slow.
- To complete, exhale through your left nostril and release your hand to your lap.
- Sit quietly for several minutes and notice the effects.

- Any irritation of the throat or sinuses
- Any respiratory infection, especially if contagious

- None

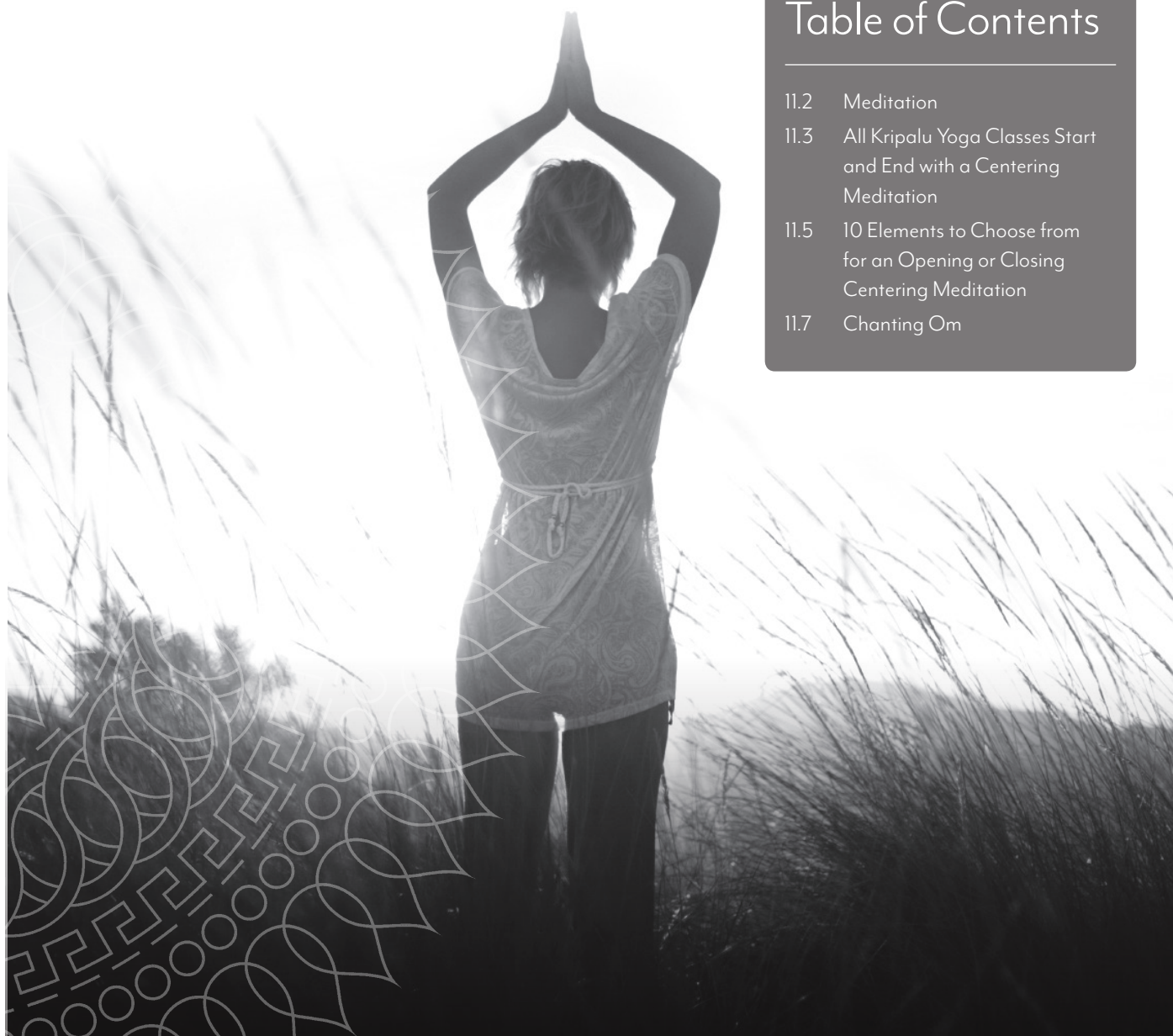
- Many traditions teach a ratio of inhalation time to exhalation time. In Kripalu Yoga, we find that counting can create tension in the body. Relaxing into the pranayama allows a natural ratio to develop over time, in a more organic way. As the in-breath and the out-breath flow at their own pace, the breath will slow down.
- Explore a combination of Ujjayi and Nadi Shodhana to create even more introversion. If using Ujjayi causes tension, let it go.
- If the pattern of inhalations and exhalations through opposite nostrils causes tension, release the pranayama and relax for a few minutes before resuming.
- A round is an inhalation and an exhalation through each nostril once.

Guiding Centering Meditation

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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Meditation

The word meditation, which is used in various spiritual and religious traditions, has a number of meanings: reflection, contemplation, prayer, stilling the mind, attuning to spirit. For many, meditation is a simple practice or set of practices aimed at strengthening the ability to focus attention. Meditation may be used to cultivate sattva, promoting a sense of centeredness while also serving to deepen meaningful and healthy connections to both oneself and others.

Depending on the skill set and interest in engagement of the beginner student, meditation may be practiced as often as twice each day for brief periods up to 20 minutes. More frequent meditation, and for longer periods of time, may be appropriate for seasoned practitioners looking to deepen their inquiry.

According to ashtanga, or the Eight-Limbed Path as outlined in the Yoga Sutras, meditation is more than a single phase; rather, it is a graduated and potentially transformative process, whereby consciousness may become transformed toward its fullest potential. This approach to meditation is described by Patanjali as the three stages of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

In Kripalu Yoga, meditation may be practiced both to return to peace and as a vehicle for transformation. For the benefit of providing a solid foundation for beginners, Centering Meditations are taught in this training.

Centering meditations are intended to focus the practitioner's attention for brief periods, three-to-10 minutes. As a teaching tool, centering meditations help frame the personal exploration and journey into Kripalu Yoga and can be guided both at the start and end of class. Centering meditations have the following benefits:

- Allow the teacher to relax and focus
- Start the class on a positive, peaceful note
- Promote a sense of safety and connection between everyone in the class, drawing them into the present moment
- Help students disconnect from external sense activity and shift their attention inward
- Help dissolve preoccupation with past or future events that might be attracting the students' attention
- Help students become aware of emotions or sensations that might keep them from being fully present

All Kripalu Yoga Classes Start and End with a Centering Meditation

Opening

A centering meditation at the start of a Kripalu Yoga class helps set the tone for the session. Its length will depend on the length of the class and needs of the students and teacher. A short class will have a brief centering, and a longer or more meditative class will have a longer or deeper centering. A good rule of thumb is that an opening centering meditation should not be so long that the students become restless, or takes away time from the class at hand. It should not be so short that the students never really settle into a receptive state of mind. The intention of the opening centering is to help students slow down and connect to their inner experience. Cultivating receptivity also reduces restlessness and competition, which may lead to injuries.

Closing

A centering meditation at the end of a Kripalu Yoga class helps the students and teacher to digest their experience by reflecting upon and noticing the impact of their practice. It also helps them transition or integrate from the class. A closing centering meditation should not feel drawn out or rushed. If the class was deep, the closing centering meditation must allow time to honor that with a smooth return to consciousness. For a less internal class, the closing centering allows the students to appreciate what they have received and prepare for their next activity. Either way, the purpose of this phase of the class is to include appreciation and ensure resolution to empower participants to take the benefits of their practice out into the rest of their lives.

There are many ways an effective centering meditation may be led. The outline below is an example of an opening centering meditation and illustrates several of the recommended elements.

1. Engage in casual conversation with the group to create rapport. Take a light, cheerful tone and set a context for the class by briefly describing what you will cover. “Today we will review all the postures we have learned so far and I will answer any questions that come up. We will then learn a new breathing exercise and a new balancing posture.”
2. Ask the group to call out some information about how they feel. This can be done in a variety of ways. “How is your energy? Call out your number between one and 10, with one being exhausted and 10 being alert and energized.”

3. Turn your attention to your body by stretching, moving, shaking, or making sounds. “Inhale your arms overhead and then exhale them down with an audible sigh. Scrunch up your face and shoulders, holding the breath for a moment and release.”
4. Lead them into a comfortable seated position. Use lots of detail to draw them inward.
5. Have them close their eyes or focus their gaze softly on the ground in front of them.
6. Lead them slowly into Dirgha pranayama and add Ujjayi. Visualize the sound as white light flooding the body, mind, and heart that dissolves any tension. Lead a brief breath retention, if appropriate, and have the students exhale with a sigh.
7. Guide them to attune to their body or to explore it in some way. “Let the breath flow freely and scan your body. Let there be compassionate acceptance of everything that you feel. Invite all tensions to release and then accept whatever happens.”
8. Allow a moment of silence, or intention setting if appropriate.
9. Begin to lead them back to external awareness. “Now slowly deepen your breath and prepare to open your eyes.”
10. Transition to warm-ups. Lead simple movements, encouraging the students to keep their attention inside. “Feel your face, shoulders, and hands. Lift your hands to your face and gently massage your face. When you have finished, slowly lower your hands to your lap and lift yourself into Table position.”

10 Elements to Choose from for an Opening or Closing Centering Meditation

Annamaya Kosha

- Body scan
- Simple warm-ups or micromovements
- Self-massage

Pranamaya Kosha

- Breath awareness or led breathing
- Making sounds such as long, audible exhales

Manomaya Kosha

- Set an intention, or sankalpa
- Visualizations
- Chanting mantra such as om
- Share a poem or reading
- Feel gratitude

Notes

Example of Setting an Intention for the Body

“As I enter into this sadhana, I honor and respect you. As I enter and hold these postures, I open to encounter all my feelings and sensations. I align with you to be in my experience fully. I feel the light of consciousness flowing through you. Through this sadhana, I listen to you. Even as I move into a difficult pose, I am fully attentive to whatever you have to say in the process, and I will remain conscious.”

Example of Setting an Intention for Practice

“I open my heart to explore the wisdom inherent within my body. I recognize that I am not just this body, but the embodiment of aliveness itself. During this sadhana, I will be totally present in my body and in the light of consciousness.”

Notes

Chanting Om

Chanting om is an ancient ritual in yoga, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Because of its religious associations, many students may not feel comfortable doing it. Whenever there is doubt, give the students the option of joining you as you chant om. Sometimes students will hesitate to chant om because they do not understand why it is being done. There isn't a universal reason. Find your own reasons and share them with your students. They may be more open to trying it if they have a reason that they can relate to.

Chanting om is similar to the process of deep breathing. The sound is constructed out of three different sounds. “Ahhh” is related to beginnings, and invites contentment as the belly relaxes. “Ooo” is related to sustenance, and invites us to open and vocalize the throat. “Mmm” is related to endings, and allows us to relax the chest. Putting these three syllables together creates the sound of “Ahhhhoommm.” After chanting om, there is a moment of silence to absorb, reflect, and receive the vibration. After chanting, consider saying shanti, which means “peace.”

A few simple guidelines will make chanting om more comfortable for you and your students.

- Practice beforehand. Choose a pitch that is in a comfortable range for you and your students.
- Tell your students to wait until you have started and then join you. This way you set the pitch and the group will try to match you.
- Practice acceptance of students who are off-key. It is the intention that is important.

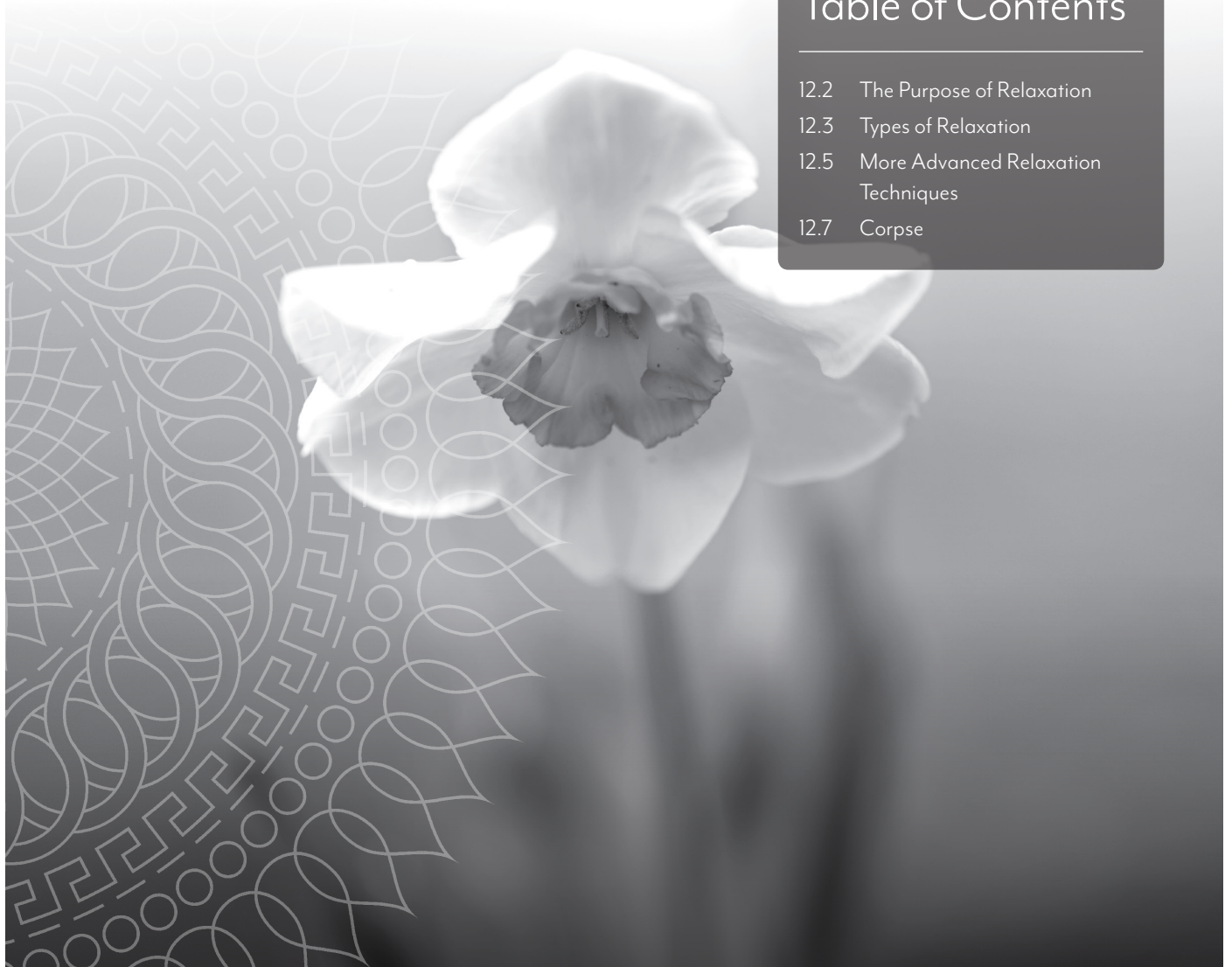
Notes

Guiding Relaxation

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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The Purpose of Relaxation

When the body and mind are relaxed, prana can flow freely throughout all systems. By consciously choosing to relax, we give ourselves the gift of renewal. This promotes sattva and the qualities of harmony and balance.

Learning how to relax is an important aspect of Kripalu Yoga. As our skills develop we often deepen our exploration of integration throughout the physical body, as well as the other sheaths of experience—the koshas—including our energy, emotion, and intuition layers.

Notes

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Types of Relaxation

Basic Relaxation

1. Let your students take as much time as they need to find a comfortable Shavasana. Suggest that they cover up as the body tends to cool during relaxation.
2. Have your students take five to 10 Dirgha breaths, with the intention of releasing tension and relaxing completely.
3. Tell the students to release the Dirgha breath and simply watch the body breathe. They can allow their attention to drift throughout their body.
4. Allow two or three minutes of silence. You might need to give more detail with less-experienced students. If you sense that your students are restless, offering details can help focus their minds.
5. Begin to bring them back by guiding their attention to the breath. Ask them to gradually deepen their breath. Have them wiggle their fingers and toes, then to stretch their arms and legs.
6. Tell them to bend their knees and roll to one side, resting briefly in a fetal position.
7. Guide them up to a seated position and transition to the closing centering.

Contraction Release

1. Start with the feet and move up toward the face and head.
2. Tell your students to tense and squeeze their right foot and toes, and lift their right leg an inch off the ground as they inhale. Tell them to hold their breath in for approximately a count of five. Tell them to exhale with an audible sigh, dropping the foot and leg to the ground and softening the contraction. Have them feel the heaviness of the leg and the effects of letting go.
3. Have them repeat on the left side.
4. Tell your students to tense and lift their buttocks, hips, and pelvis off the ground. Have them inhale and hold, then exhale and relax.
5. Ask them to follow this pattern with their chest and the shoulders, squeezing them up to the ears and then softening them down.
6. Have them squeeze their right hand into a fist while lifting the whole right arm. Then release.
7. Have them contract the throat and neck, then the face, wrinkling it up like a prune. Then relax.

8. Finally, tell them to stick out their tongue as far as they can and open their eyes wide. Release.
9. Keep in mind that you can guide the contraction-and-release exercise by moving up the body on one side and then the other side, or balance out the right leg, then the left; right buttocks, hips, pelvis, then the left, etc.

Body Scan

1. Let your students take as much time as they need to find a comfortable Shavasana.
2. Have your students take five to 10 Dirgha breaths, with the intention of releasing tension and relaxing completely. After the Dirgha breaths they can breathe normally.
3. Tell the students to bring their attention to their feet. They can try to feel their toes and soles, then the heels and ankles. Take your time guiding them. Allow this be an exploration that focuses the mind. You could ask the students to discern their pinkie toes, asking them to feel the shapes of their feet.
4. Progress throughout the body: calves and thighs, hips and buttocks, belly and low back, chest, shoulders, hands, arms, neck, and face. Progress more slowly as you approach the head. Ask them to relax their jaw, tongue, eyes, and forehead.
5. Allow a few moments of silence and begin to bring them back. Guide their attention to the breath and ask them to gradually deepen it. Tell them to wiggle their fingers and toes, then stretch their arms and legs.
6. Tell them to bend their knees and roll to one side, resting briefly in a fetal position.
7. Guide them up to a seated position and transition to the closing centering.

Notes

More Advanced Relaxation Techniques

Kosha Scan

1. Let your students take as much time as they need to find a comfortable Shavasana.
2. Have your students take five to 10 Dirgha breaths, with the intention of releasing tension and relaxing completely. After the Dirgha breaths they can breathe normally.
3. Below is a sample script you can use to guide your students through the kosha scan:

“Bring your attention to your physical body and feel every sensation. Relax any tension that you find. Now bring your attention to your breathing body. Become aware of the energy that is present within you. Allow your attention to move to your feeling body. Become aware of every feeling and emotion that is present within you. Allow yourself to accept all that you are feeling. Lastly, turn your attention to your mind. Observe the thoughts as if they were clouds moving across the sky. Drift into buddhi, the observing self beneath all the sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Let yourself rest in the non-doing self.”
4. Allow a few moments of silence and begin to bring them back. Guide their attention to the breath and ask them to gradually deepen it. Tell them to wiggle their fingers and toes, then stretch their arms and legs.
5. Tell them to bend their knees and roll to one side, resting briefly in a fetal position.
6. Guide them up to a seated position and transition to the closing centering.

Visualization

1. After the students are deeply relaxed, guide them to visualize and sense a warm, luminous liquid light flowing into the soles of their feet.
2. Let this imaginary light fill up the feet with healing energy. Allow the liquid light to flow slowly up through the legs, creating a radiant, relaxing hue all around and through the legs.
3. Continue to guide the students through each body part as described above.
4. Instruct them to “visualize this light streaming and relaxing you on all levels of your being. Allow yourself to simply bathe in a pool of luminous liquid prana.”
5. Be as descriptive as you wish, and allow your description to come from your own experience.

Affirmations

Affirmations are statements or a summoning of consciousness you want to manifest and experience. Our minds can be suggestible and influenced when we are relaxed and open.

1. Invite your students to formulate or repeat an affirmation you create as they drift into relaxation, or weave an affirmation into the moments right after relaxation.
2. Use the first person (“I” instead of “you”).
3. Use positive words when offering affirmations to your students. Avoid using negative words. For example, change “I am not tense” to “I am relaxed.” Weed out the negative words before releasing the affirmation into the subconscious. Word the affirmation as simply as possible.
4. Use the present tense, unless the affirmation is for a specific future event. Let your students know that the quality they want to manifest is already true for them now.
5. A mantra can be used as an affirmation. Offer a phrase that strikes you as powerful and meaningful, or ask your students to use one that resonates within them.
6. Have your students visualize in their mind’s eye a situation as they would like to see it unfold, or see themselves in their mind’s eye as they would like to be. Then have them construct their affirmation.

Yoga Nidra

Yoga nidra translates as “yogic sleep.” This practice promotes a state where the body is tension-free and filled with energy. Without the armor of tension, prana can move freely, bringing aliveness and awareness to every part of the body. In a yoga nidra experience, the mind is open and expanded, producing a dreamy state of disconnected thoughts. The mind is detached from the body as in sleep, but the energy in the body produces sensations that the mind picks up.

Notes



Corpse

shavasana

shava: corpse | (shah-VAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Calms a restless mind, relieves distress, and helps alleviate fatigue
- Relaxes the muscles and organs
- Relieves mild depression, headaches, and insomnia
- Helps lower blood pressure
- Accelerates the healing process
- Increases the ability to remain calm
- Releases unconscious tensions in the bodymind
- Provides the opportunity to experience the flow of prana in the body

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Recent back injury or major discomfort: support slightly bent knees with a prop
- Pregnancy: raise the head and chest on a bolster or lie on the left side in the fetal position to avoid pressure on the vena cava (large vein) that runs along the right side of the abdomen and can sometimes get compressed by the baby's weight

Essential Cues

- Lie on your back with your feet at least hip-width distance apart
- Extend your arms down by sides, palms up or down



To Release

- Draw both knees to center
- Roll to one side
- Press up to seated



Posture Option

- Bent knees, feet wide, heels out, knees toward each other



Props

- Blanket over the body
- Cushion under the knees
- Rolled blanket under the neck
- Belt wrapped around the upper thighs



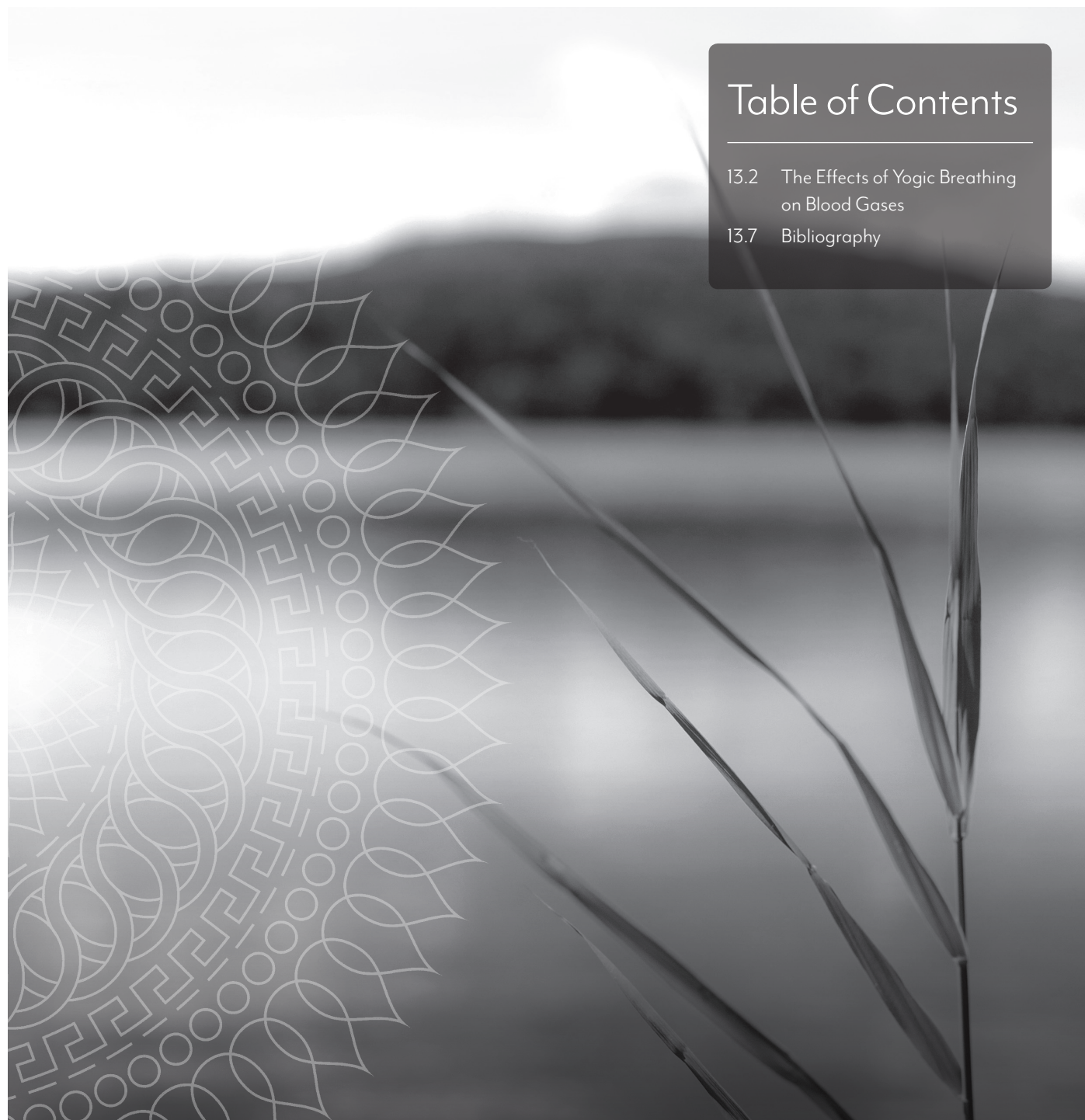
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Appendix

KRIPALU YOGA TEACHER TRAINING 200-HOUR TRAINING

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- 13.2 The Effects of Yogic Breathing on Blood Gases
- 13.7 Bibliography



The Effects of Yogic Breathing on Blood Gases

Over the last 200 years there has been limited research to reflect the scientific benefits of pranayama, also known as yogic breathing techniques. Anecdotal evidence has shown some of the intuitive benefits of pranayama, which include heightened awareness, a greater sense of serenity, euphoria, and alertness. According to traditional yogic philosophy, it was believed that these qualities were the result of increased oxygenation of the blood. Modern science and research, however, has made clear that this hypothesis was incorrect. Current research suggests that blood oxygen levels fluctuate minimally; rather, it is carbon dioxide levels that fluctuate the most with breathing techniques. Though additional studies are still needed to fully understand the effects of pranayama on blood gases and on the body more generally, the contemporary yoga community is beginning to better understand the physiological impact of said techniques.

Below are different subtopics to support your understanding of current research on pranayama. First, there's an overview of blood gases to ensure a clear understanding of which blood gases play a role in respiration and are therefore important to understand in relation to pranayama. Research on the effects of pranayama on blood gases is still scarce, and the studies that do exist have had limited participants. Thus, to better understand how oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the blood are impacted by different intensities of respiration, a discussion on the data that has been collected on the effects of physical exercise on blood gases is presented. Lastly, is an overview of research that has looked specifically at a variety of breathing techniques and their impact on blood gases, among other things.

Overview of Blood Gases

According to the National Library of Medicine, blood gases can be defined as a measurement of how much oxygen (O₂) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) are in the blood, in addition to determining blood acidity (pH) (NLM). The exchange of these gases is essential for human respiration, the act of breathing. Respiration involves the movement of oxygen from the outside air to the cells within tissues and the transport of carbon dioxide to outside the body (The Free Dictionary). Oxygen is a vital chemical element for cellular respiration and carbon dioxide is the waste product of cellular respiration that we exhale (Broad 21).

Normal blood oxygen saturation levels for humans at sea level are considered 94–100 percent. Oxygen saturation refers to the percentage of hemoglobin-bound oxygen in the blood compared to maximum binding capacity (The Free Dictionary). The normal range of bicarbonate (HCO₃),

which makes up more than 90 percent of carbon dioxide in the bloodstream, is 22–28 mEq/L (milliequivalents per liter) (NLM). It is important to note that at higher altitudes baseline blood gas levels can vary due to the decreased amounts oxygen available in the air. This normal oxygen level range indicates that at baseline—during day-to-day activities such as sitting or walking—blood oxygen levels are already near saturation, which illustrates that there is little room for levels to increase with physical exercise or pranayama.

Changes in blood gas levels can affect the body in different ways. Hypoxemia, which is caused by insufficient concentration of oxygen in the blood, can occur when oxygen saturation levels fall below 90 percent. This can lead to a variety of symptoms, such as increased heart work, shortness of breath, wheezing, confusion, headaches, and clumsiness (News Medical). Hyperventilation, on the other hand, can occur when the lungs excessively ventilate beyond what is needed to maintain or achieve normal blood gas levels (Patient). Hyperventilation has little effect on oxygen saturation but can significantly lower carbon dioxide levels in the blood. Some of the symptoms of hyperventilation include dizziness, palpitations, feeling of suffocation, sweating, and loss of consciousness (Patient). Additional symptoms of low carbon dioxide blood levels include numbness, lightheadedness, and chest pain (Seattle PI). Acidosis describes when there is an excessive amount of carbon dioxide in the body. This can occur for a number of reasons that leave the body unable to rid itself of enough CO₂ (Health Line). Symptoms of acidosis include drowsiness, headaches, and deep and fast breathing.

Blood Gas Levels During Physical Exercise

The research on the effects of pranayama on blood gases is still fairly limited. Nonetheless, a significant amount of research has been conducted on the effects of exercise on blood gas levels. To understand the effects of different breathing techniques on blood gases, it can be useful to first investigate what larger research studies have revealed about the effects of physical exercise on oxygen and carbon dioxide blood levels.

According to the University of Mississippi Medical Center, during moderate exercise arterial oxygen concentration remains unchanged and may increase slightly with strenuous exercise. Venous oxygen levels, however, decrease in proportion to exercise intensity levels as a result of increased extraction by working muscles (UMMC). On the other hand, carbon dioxide may increase slightly in the bloodstream during mild exercise, while CO₂ tends to decline during intense exercise. Nonetheless, during aerobic exercise, carbon dioxide increases in proportion to exercise intensity (UMMC).

A number of studies have been conducted over the years to understand human oxygen intake capacity, which is different than oxygen saturation. Oxygen intake capacity refers to the maximum rate of oxygen consumption into the body. One study conducted in the 1920s by Archibald V. Hill revealed that after reaching a certain intensity of effort, runners were no longer able to increase their oxygen uptake. This uncovered intrinsic limits that no level of effort could seemingly overcome. This limit was eventually coined “maximal oxygen uptake,” which eventually

became known as “VO2 max.” Maximal oxygen uptake is defined as the peak consumption of oxygen that gets incrementally harder during exercise (Broad 52). VO2 max has since become an important indicator of how efficiently the heart can pump oxygen into the body, and how much athletic effort a person can sustain, and for how long (Running for Fitness).

Though it was first believed that lung size, depth of breathing, and lung elasticity might determine peak uptake levels, it was discovered that it was actually determined by the size of the heart and its ability to send blood rushing through the lungs and blood vessels to the muscles. (Broad 52). Research eventually emerged to show that maximum oxygen uptake could, in fact, increase. Regular aerobic exercise was shown to increase the size of the heart, particularly the left ventricle, which pumps oxygenated blood into the arteries and body (Broad 53). Continued studies revealed that three months of endurance training could raise VO2 max between 15–30 percent and two years could raise it as high as 50 percent (Broad 53). This demonstrates that although the blood oxygen levels have little room to increase, the heart has the potential to become much more efficient at pumping oxygen into the body.

Studies that analyzed the effects of yoga on cardiovascular health, however, have shown that oxygen levels demanded by the muscles during yoga represent low physical activity similar to walking on a treadmill. These studies imply that yoga is unsuitable for increasing oxygen uptake levels (Broad 72). However, it’s important to indicate that these studies did not look specifically at breathing techniques. In a 2016 study conducted in India, participants showed an increase in peak respiratory flow rate and maximum voluntary ventilation after practicing pranayama for eight weeks. Because there are so many types of yoga postures and breathing exercises available—and many studies do not detail out what types of posture and yoga are being practiced—it would seem that more research is needed to identify what impact different pranayamas can have on peak respiratory flow rates and maximum voluntary ventilation.

Effects of Pranayama on Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide Levels

For much of yoga’s history it was taught that yoga increases oxygen in the lungs and bloodstream, which results in rejuvenation and feelings of calmness, tingling, and euphoria. As early as the 1820s, however, N.C. Paul, a medical doctor in India, realized that some pranayama worked to bottle up carbon dioxide in the body. His research showed significant shifts over a large range of breathing rates, which demonstrated how slow breathing resulted in large drops in the body’s expulsion of carbon dioxide (Broad 21). Over the last couple of centuries, researchers have slowly begun studying the effects of pranayama on blood gases in an effort to better understand what specifically results in the energizing or soothing effects of the breathing techniques.

In the 1920s, in what is considered the world’s first major experiential investigation of yoga, Juagannath Gune conducted a study that further proved N.C. Paul’s findings. His study found that faster-paced breathing did little to change the amount of oxygen in the bloodstream and determined that “such vigorous efforts actually made their biggest impact by blowing off clouds

of carbon dioxide” (Broad 28). Though his findings were counterintuitive to beliefs of that day and age, they have since been proven to be scientifically accurate. Although I have not come across any studies that have looked specifically at the effects of Bhastrika and Kapalabhati, Gune’s discovery would seem to be aligned with the effects of these techniques, which have been described anecdotally by many practitioners.

Since then, other studies have been conducted to look at the relationship between pranayama and blood gases. In 1978 a study was conducted to determine whether the mental effects of pranayama, specifically Alternate-Nostril Breath, were accompanied by changes in the arterial blood gases. The findings of this study showed no significant changes in arterial blood gases after practicing Alternate-Nostril Breathing (Pratap, Smith, Berretini 1978). A more recent study conducted in 2016 did conclude that slow breathing techniques change the body’s physiology by controlling the autonomic nervous system. In this study, slow breathing was shown to reduce stress and help control the autonomic system. (Adhana 1029)

The results of a 2008 study that measured the effects of breathing exercises and meditation on cardiorespiratory and metabolic systems of nine individuals indicated that pranayama—specifically a technique that involves a 1:4:2 ratio of inhaling, retention, and exhaling—caused a significant increase in VO₂ compared to rest and meditation (Danucalov, Simoes, Kozasa, Leite 2008 p.2). As the study explains, this is likely due to the respiratory muscles being more activated. A number of experiments were also conducted in the 20th century to better understand what physiological factors lead to the breath breaking point, which refers to the moment during breath retention when it becomes impossible for an individual to resist gasping for air (Parkes 77). An initial hypothesized explanation was that specialized sensors (those that watch the expansions of the lungs and chest or that detect levels of O₂ or elevated levels of CO₂) note physiological changes in the body during breath retention and trigger a breath before the brain shuts down. Research does not seem to support this hypothesis, however. The combined results of various experiments reveal that people typically need to gasp for air long before their brain or body runs out of oxygen, or before too much carbon dioxide could hurt the brain (Parkes 77). This is counter to what was initially expected, since an absence of oxygen seems like an obvious limitation.

The experiments involving breath-holding techniques suggest that the need to take in a breath relates to the muscular act itself, specifically the contraction of the diaphragm (other muscles involved in breathing have been ruled out through previous studies), and not directly to the gas-exchange functions (Parkes 78). One study revealed that the central respiratory rhythm persists throughout breath holding, which would indicate that breath holding involves a suppression of the diaphragm’s expression of said rhythm. The break point may therefore depend on the brain receiving unusual stimuli from the diaphragm that may reflect how expanded or unusually overworked it may be (Parkes 79). Given this data, one could expect that relaxing the diaphragm slightly and exhaling a small amount would delay the break point by relieving signals from the diaphragm to the brain.

Conclusion

Modern science continues to teach us more and more about the physiological effects of asana, meditation, and pranayama. Although a good deal of research has now proven the benefits of slow breathing, there is still a need for more research on different types of breathing techniques and their impact on blood gases and maximal uptake capacity.

Notes

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