

Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha



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प्रार्थना

ॐ

१. योगेन चित्तस्य पदेन वाचां

मलं शरीरस्य तु बन्धकेन ।

योऽपाकरोत् प्रवरं मुनीनां

पतञ्जलिं प्राञ्जलिरामतोऽस्मि ॥

योगशास्त्राने अंत.करणाचे, ध्याकरणशास्त्राने वाणीचे (भाणि) बंधकणाशास्त्राने शरीराचे दोष ज्यांनी दूर केले, त्या ऋषींमध्ये श्रेष्ठ असलेल्या (भगवान्) पतञ्जलींना मी हात जोडून बंदन करीत आहे।

२. गुरुब्रह्मा गुरुब्रह्मणुगुरुदेवो महेश्वरः ।

गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

सद्गुरू हा ब्रह्मदेव आहे, सद्गुरू विष्णू आहे आणि सद्गुरू म्हणजे देव शंकर आहे. सद्गुरू म्हणजे प्रत्यक्ष सर्वश्रेष्ठ ब्रह्म आहे ! त्या ऐश्वर्यसंगद सद्गुरूला (माझा) नमस्कार असो.

३. ॐ तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गोः देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ।

सूर्यदेवाच्या त्या प्रार्थनीय तेजाचे आम्ही चित्त करतो ; तो आमच्या बुद्धीस (सत्कर्माची) प्रेरणा देवो

४. असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।

मृत्योर्मा मृतं गमय सर्वेषां स्वस्तिर्भवतु ।

सर्वेषां शान्तिर्भवतु सर्वेषां पूर्णमर्भवतु ।

सर्वेषां मङ्गलं भवतु ।

(हे परमेश्वरा) मला असत्याकडून सत्याकडे घेऊन जा अंधारा-कडून प्रकाश कडे घेऊन जा ; (आणि) मृत्याकडून अमरत्वाकडे घेऊन जा

मर्नांचे कल्याण होवो. सर्वांस शांतता प्राप्त होवो. सर्वांस पूर्णत्व येवो. सर्वांचे शुभ होवो.

५. ॐ । त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगंधि पुष्टिर्धनम् ।

उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

(सद्गुणांचा) सुगंध असलेल्या (आणि) अधिकाधिक पोषण करणाऱ्या शकराचे आम्ही पूजन करतो. (कारण) ज्याप्रमाणे बाळू (आपल्या) आहारस्थानापासून वेगळी होते, त्याप्रमाणे माझी मृत्यू पासून मुक्तता व्हावी (पण) अमरत्वापासून मुक्तात होऊ नये

६. नाहं कर्ता, हरिः कर्ता, हरिः कर्ता हि केवलः ।

मी (क्रिया) करणारा नाही ; परमेश्वर कर्ताकरविता आहे ; सरोक्षर प.दत्त परमेश्वर कर्ताकरविता आहे.

सूर्यनमस्कार मंत्र

ध्येयः सदा सवितृ-मण्डल-मध्यवर्ती ।

नारायणः सरसिजासन-सन्निविष्टः ॥

केयूरवान् मकर-कुण्डलवान् किरीटी ।

हारी हिरण्यबपुर्धृत-शंख-चक्रः ॥

सूर्यमण्डलाच्या मध्यभागी रहाणाऱ्या

कमलासनावर वसलेल्या नारायणाचे सदोदित ध्यान करावे.

केयूर (बाहु भूषण) धारण करणारा, मकराकार कुण्डल,

किरीट (मुकुट) व हार धारण करणारा

स्वर्णमय (सोने) शरीर असणारा आणि ज्याने

शंखचक्र हातात धरलेले आहेत त्या नारायणाचे ध्यान करावे.

भादित्यस्य नमस्कारान ये कुर्वन्ति दिने दिने ।

जन्मान्तर सहस्रेषु दारिद्र्यं नोपजायते ॥

अकाल-मृत्युहरणं सर्व-व्याधिविनाशनम् ।

सूर्य-पादोदक तीर्थं जठरे धारयाम्यहम् ॥

जे कोणी सूर्यनमस्कार प्रतिदिनी चालतात,

त्यांना हजार जन्मात देखील दारिद्र्य येत नाही

अकालीमृत्यूचे निवारण करणारे, सर्वप्रकारचे रोग चालवणारे

सूर्य किरणांचे तीर्थ मी माझ्या पोटांत प्राशन करतो.

**Asana
Pranayama
Mudra
Bandha**

Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha

COMPILED FROM LECTURES GIVEN DURING THE NINE MONTH
TEACHER TRAINING COURSE, 1967-68, AND THE THREE YEAR
SANNYASA COURSE, 1970-73, AT THE BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA

By

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA, MUNGER, BIHAR 811 201, INDIA

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SWAMI SIVANANDA SARASWATI

- Born on 8th September, 1887 in Pattamadai, Tamil Nadu, South India.
- After education, served as a medical doctor in Malaya.
- Renounced his medical practice, hearing a call from the Divine, and came to Rishikesh.
- Initiated into the Dashnami (Saraswati) order of Sannyasa in March, 1924 by Swami Vishwananda Saraswati.
- Established the Satya Sevashram Dispensary in 1925.
- Toured extensively throughout India, inspiring people to practise yoga and lead a spiritual life.
- Founded the Divine Life Society at Rishikesh in 1936.
- Opened the Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy in 1945.
- Established the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy in 1948.
- Opened Yoga Forest Academy Press in 1951.
- Authoured over 200 books on yoga, health and spiritual life.
- Convened the World Parliament of Religions at Rishikesh in 1953.
- Established the Sivananda Eye Hospital in 1957.
- Formed the Sivananda Literature Research Institute in 1958.
- Formed the Sivananda Literature Dissemination Committee in 1959.
- Attained Mahasamadhi at Rishikesh in 1963.



PARAMAHAMSA SATYANANDA

- Foremost authority and inspirer of the modern yogic and tantric renaissance.
- Born in the foothills of the Himalayas in 1923.
- Left his home at the age of nineteen in search of spiritual truth.
- Joined his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, and adopted the sannyasa way of life in 1943.
- Served his Guru for twelve years, broadening his own understanding of the spiritual sciences.
- Travelled the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent for nine years as a wandering ascetic, to assess the needs of modern man.
- Founded the International Yoga Fellowship Movement at Rajnandgaon in 1956.
- Founded the Bihar School of Yoga at Munger in 1963.
- Conducted numerous programmes for training sannyasins and householders alike in the techniques of yoga; and toured internationally, propagating yoga among people of all countries, races and religions.
- Spiritual guide to thousands of aspirants and the guiding force behind the yoga training provided at hundreds of Satyananda Ashrams and Yoga Mitra Mandals in India and abroad.
- Authoured over eighty books on yoga and spirituality.
- Founded Sivananda Math, a social, charitable institution at Munger in 1984.
- Founded the Yoga Research Foundation, a medical and scientific research oriented institution, at Munger in 1984.
- Renounced all that he had created in 1988, and now leads the life of a Paramahansa sannyasin, not working for his flock and mission alone, but having a universal vision.



SWAMI NIRANJANANANDA SARASWATI

- Born at Rajnandgaon (M.P.) in 1960.
- Joined Bihar School of Yoga in 1964.
- Initiated into the Dashnami (Saraswati) order of sannyasa in 1971.
- Travelled overseas to help with the development of ashrams and yoga centres in Ireland, England and other European countries.
- Toured many countries for the next eleven years, including Australia, North and South America, directing ashrams, conducting yoga programmes and investigating the needs of the various world cultures.
- Appointed the President of Bihar School of Yoga in 1983.
- Guided the development of the Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and the Yoga Research Foundation for the next eleven years.
- Initiated into the Paramahansa tradition at the age of thirty.
- Authoured many classical books on Yoga, Tantra and the Upanishads.
- Conducted intensive yoga and sannyasa courses to spread the seeds of yoga in all directions.
- Organised a World Yoga Convention in 1993 in honour of his Guru's 50 years of dedication to sannyasa and the upliftment of humanity.
- Anointed Preceptor in succession to Paramahansa Satyananda by the leading luminaries of the sannyasa tradition during the World Yoga Convention in 1993.
- Founded Bihar Yoga Bharati (the first yoga university in the world) at Munger in 1994.
- At present divides his time between overseas visits, Indian tours and residence at Munger.

PREFACE

Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha is the refined essence of the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati to his sannyasin disciples at Bihar School of Yoga. It is intended to serve as the complete textbook for persons learning and teaching all levels of the basic yogic practices.

The first edition was printed in 1969 from notes taken during the nine month teachers' training course given in the previous year. In 1973 this edition was completely revised and much new matter was added from notes taken during the 1970-7 sannyasa training course, which more than doubled its contents.

This present edition has been slightly revised, updated and prepared by dedicated sannyasin disciples of Swami Satyananda in order that people throughout the world might benefit physically, mentally and spiritually from the yogic teaching of their guru.

Since the first edition, interest in yoga has exploded. Now APMB is used in ashrams, centers and schools in every country as the standard text for teachers and students alike, from beginner to adept. These yogic techniques have also been successfully incorporated into many professional fields such as medicine, education and business. Around the world the effects of yogic practices during and after performance are being carefully researched by eminent scientists and doctors. The results that they have come up with, show that asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas are a potent means of restoring and maintaining physical and mental health. In the near future we anticipate an ever-increasing application of yoga to all walks of life. APMB is dedicated to anyone with an interest in yoga, whether for personal fitness, spiritual enlightenment or the benefit of our future world.

CONTENTS

Section	Page
An Introduction to Asanas advice and precautions	1
THE BEGINNERS GROUP OF ASANAS	15
Pawanmuktasana Series (anti-rheumatic) toe bending & ankle bending, ankle rotation and ankle crank, knee bending and knee crank, dynamic spinal twist, half butterfly and knee rotation, full butterfly, crow walking, hand clenching and wrist bending, wrist rotation, elbow bending and shoulder socket rotation, neck movement.	17
Pawanmuktasana Series (anti-gastric) leg rotation, cycling, leg-lock posture, rocking and rolling, naukasana	35
Asanas for Shakti Bandha nauka sanchalana; chakki chalana, pulling the rope, chopping wood, namaskara, vayu nishkasana, udarakarshan asana	43
Exercises for the Eyes palming, sideways viewing, front and sideways viewing, rotational viewing, up and down viewing, distant and near viewing	51

Relaxation Postures	57
shavasana, advasana, jyestikasana, makarasana, matsya kridasana	
Pre-Meditative Poses	63
half butterfly, full butterfly, crow walking, animal relaxation pose, namaskara	
Meditative Poses	65
padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, swastikasana, sukhasana, ardha padmasana, yoni asana	
Asanas Performed in or from Vajrasana	78
vajrasana, simhasana, veerasana, ananda madirasana, padadirasana, bhadrasana, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, pranamasana, ushtrasana, sumeru asana, vyaghrasana	
Standing and Bending Asanas	105
hasta uttanasana, akarna dhanurasana, kati chakrasana, tadasana, tiryaka tadasana, utthita lolasana, meru prishthasana, utthanasana, samakonasana, dwi konasana, trikonasana, dolasana	
Surya Namaskara	131
THE MIDDLE GROUP OF ASANAS	147
Asanas Performed in or from Padmasana	149
yoga mudra, matsyasana, gupta padmasana, baddha padmasana, lolasana, kukkutasana, garbhasana, tolangulasana	
Backward Bending Asanas	162
bhujangasana, sphinx pose, sarpasana, tiryaka	

& poorna bhujangasana, shalabhasana, ardha shalabhasana, poorna shalabhasana, dhanurasana, saral dhanurasana, poorna dhanurasana, grivasana, kandharasana, setu asana, sirsha padmasana, ardha chandrasana, utthan prishthasana, chakrasana, prishthasana, gomukhasana

Forward Bending Asanas

189

paschimottanasana, dynamic paschimottanasana, pada prasar paschimottanasana, janu sirshasana, ardha padma paschimottanasana, sirsha angustha yogasana, pada hastasana, hasta pada angushthasana, meru akarshanasana, utthita janu sirshasana, eka pada padmottanasana

Spinal Twist Asanas

207

ardha matsyendrasana, parivritti janusirshasana, meru wakrasana, bhu namanasana

Inverted Asanas

213

rules for practising inverted asanas, bhumi pada mastakasana, moordhasana, sirshasana, salamba sirshasana, niralamba sirshasana, oordhwa padmasana, kapali asana, sarvangasana, vipareeta karani mudra, padma sarvangasana, poorwa halasana, halasana, druta halasana, ardha padma halasana, stambhanasana, dwi pada kandharasana

Balancing Asanas

237

eka pada pranamasana, garudasana, bakasana, eka padasana, baka dhyanasana, eka pada baka dhyanasana, ardha padma padottanasana, ardha baddha padmottanasana, santula-

nasana, parvatasana, merudandasana, santulanasana, parvatasana, merudandasana, utthita hasta merudandasana, ashwa sanchalanasana, vashishth asana, vatayanasana, natavara asana, natarajaasana, utthitahastapadangushthasana, dwi hastan hujangasana, eka hasta bhujangasana, santolanasana, pada angushthasana, niralamba paschimottanasana, hamasana.

THE ADVANCED GROUP OF ASANAS 272

poorna matsyendrasana, koormasana, dhanur akarshan asana, vrishikasana, mayurasana, padma mayurasana, hanumanasana, brahmacharyasana, moola bandhasana, gorakhshasana, astavakrasana, eka pada sirasana, utthan eka pada sirasana, dwi pada sirasana

PRANAYAMA 295

Introduction to Pranayama 296

pre-pranayama exercise, advice and precautions, nadishodhana pranayama, sheetali pranayama, sheetkari pranayama, bhramari pranayama, bhastrika pranayama, kapalbhati pranayama, ujjayi pranayama, surya bheda pranayama, moorchha pranayama

BANDHAS 323

Introduction to Bandhas 324

jalandhara bandha, standing jalandhara bandha, moola bandha, uddiyana bandha, standing uddiyana bandha, maha bandha

MUDRAS	337
Introduction to Mudras	338
gyana & chin mudra, shambhavi mudra, nasikagra drishti, bhoochari mudra, akashi mudra, tadagi mudra, bhujangini mudra, kaki mudra, ashwini mudra, khechari mudra, yoga mudra, prana mudra, vipareeta karani mudra, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, vajroli mudra, yoni mudra, naumukhi mudra, pashinee mudra, tadan kriya	
SHAT KARMA	367
Introduction to Hatha Yoga	368
jala neti, sutra neti, danta dhauti, vatsara dhauti, shankhaprakshalana, laghoo shankhaprakshalana, agnisar kriya, danda dhauti, vastra dhauti, kunjaj kriya, vyaghra kriya, nauli, basti, moola shodhanam, kapalbhati, tratika	
Yoga's Psychic Physiology	392
Man's Internal Environment	406
endocrine system, digestive system, respiratory system, heart and circulatory system, brain and nervous system.	
Recommended Yoga Programs	435
convalescents, invalids and elderly people, beginners, general intermediate courses advanced yoga courses	
Alphabetical Index of Disorders, Remedies and Parts of the Body	440
Alphabetical Index of Practices	458

AN INTRODUCTION TO ASANAS

Many people associate asanas with gymnastic exercises or body building techniques. This is a totally wrong concept, for asanas are neither designed specifically to make a person 'throw his body about' or to develop huge, unnecessary muscles.

Yoga means the experience of oneness or unity with your inner being. This unity comes after dissolving the duality of mind and matter into the supreme reality *Asana* means a state of being in which you can remain steady, calm, quiet and comfortable, physically and mentally.

In the ancient text on yoga by Patanjali, called the *Yoga Sutras*, there is a concise definition of yogasanas: *Sthiram sukham asanam* meaning 'that position which is comfortable and steady'. So we can see that yogasanas in this context are practised to develop the person's ability to sit in one position without discomfort for extended lengths of time, as this is necessary during meditation.

Asanas can also be performed for curative or health reasons. By gently stretching the muscles, massaging the internal organs and toning the nerves throughout the body, the health of the practitioner can be wonderfully improved and many diseases, even the so-called 'incurable' ones can be eliminated or eased.

Yogasanas and other health systems

Yogasanas have a deeper significance value in the development of the physical, mental and spiritual personality, whereas pure exercises only have a physical effect on the muscles and bones. Physical exercises are performed quickly and with a lot of heavy breathing. The acrobatic, gymnastic exercises and weight lifting systems are suitable for healthy people to develop large muscles or flexibility. Very large muscles, in particular, require more nutrition and a greater supply of blood. Consequently, the heart and respiratory system have to work much harder. In this way there is exhaustion of vital energy. After doing these exercises a young person may feel very fit and healthy. But as he grows older, the bodily functions slow down; problems of stiffness and rheumatism start to occur due to overuse of the cartilage in the bone joints. The overdeveloped muscles become flabby and lose their firmness; the muscle tissue turns into fat. Even a young person, if he discontinues his body building practices for a month or more, will rapidly accumulate fat in place of his bulging muscles.

Gymnastic exercises, weight lifting and other body cultures are not suitable for everyone. A sick or weak person, small children or old people certainly cannot do them. Furthermore, they do not provide the relaxation and rejuvenation which people need.

Are asanas different? Yes, they are completely different and far more comprehensive. Yogasanas are performed slowly with relaxation and concentration. In this way, both the external and internal systems are influenced, so that the nervous system, endocrine glands and internal organs as well as the muscles are encouraged to function properly. Thus asanas have a physical and psychosomatic effect which is helpful in

curing infirmities. They can be done by both healthy and unhealthy people, young and old. They are most useful for both concentration and meditation. Other systems of physical culture increase the toxins in the body, whereas asanas reduce the toxin level.

General benefits

Physical: the important endocrinal system is controlled and regulated so that the correct quantities of the different hormones are secreted from all the glands in the body. This has repercussions on our physical wellbeing as well as on our mental attitude towards life. Even if one gland is malfunctioning, a noticeable loss in health may be experienced. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that this system is maintained at peak condition. Diseased organs can be repaired, rejuvenated and encouraged to carry out their normal duty through regular practise of asanas.

The muscles and bones, nervous, glandular, respiratory, excretory and circulatory systems are coordinated so that they help one another. Asanas make the body flexible and able to adjust itself easily to changes of environment. The digestive functions are stimulated so that the correct amount of digestive juices (saliva; enzymes etc.) flow. The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are brought into a state of balance so that the internal organs they control are neither overactive nor underactive.

To summarize, we can say that asanas maintain the physical body at optimum condition and encourage an unhealthy body to become healthy.

Mental: asanas make the mind strong and able to endure pain and unhappiness. The power of determination and concentration are developed.

Equilibrium and vitality become the normal state of mind after regular practise of asanas. You will be able to face the sorrow, anxieties and problems of the world with peace, without being disturbed. Stability of mind is developed, life becomes easy and difficulties become stepping stones to perfect mental health. The practice of asanas releases the dormant potentialities, so that a man is able to radiate confidence and inspire others by his speech, behaviour and actions.

Spiritual: asanas are the third step in the eightfold path of raja yoga, their purpose being to make the body steady for the higher techniques of *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), leading to the culmination, *samadhi* (cosmic realization). In hatha yoga, which is more deeply concerned with preparing the body for higher spiritual techniques, great importance is attached to purifying the body by asanas. They are described in detail in such ancient texts as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gherand Samhita*. Although asanas in themselves may not give spiritual realization, they are a stage on the spiritual path. Some people have the mistaken idea that asanas are only physical and have no connection with or use in treading the spiritual path. This is a completely wrong concept. Asanas are almost a necessity for spiritual aspirants to awaken their psychic faculties.

Asanas should be regarded as forms of meditation and psychic purification. Yogasanas should be taught in the complete manner described in the tantras, with awareness of the corresponding centers integrated into the practice. Most books on yoga and most people who teach yoga are ignorant of this aspect of yogasanas.

Yogasanas for modern man

Modern man has numerous conveniences at his disposal to give physical comfort and sensual enjoyment. He works in an office, sleeps on a thick foam mattress, travels everywhere in a car, attends the cinema or nightclub for recreation. He uses sleeping pills and all kinds of medicine to get peace and rest and to counteract the negative influence of modern life, but instead of peace, rest and happiness he gets a lot of physical, mental and emotional tension. He can find no way to unburden himself of the frustration and anxieties of society. Is there a way for him to find relief? Yes, through yoga. By doing yogasanas he will be able to free himself from ailments associated with modern civilized life, such as constipation, rheumatism, stiffness, frustration and tension. Practitioners of asanas will have more strength and energy to face the problems and responsibilities of life. All family and social relations will automatically become harmonious.

In this modern age of scientific inventions, where there are countless aids to comfort in life, it seems a contradiction, yet it is true, that very few people are able to enjoy these luxuries. A great many people have wealth but they really live in poverty. They no longer have the strength or interest to enjoy life and only remember happiness in their childhood. Asanas will rectify this 'non-living' way of life. You can start a new life with more vitality than you have felt for years. You will develop a broader outlook on life, and be able to understand the problems of others more easily. As a result of your experiences you will slowly start to feel part of the universal brotherhood of all mankind.

Those people who do a lot of mental work will be able to increase their thinking power, have clearer minds

and develop more insight. Those people who do manual work can keep themselves in good condition and relieve their tensions and strains after a hard day of work.

Large numbers of people in recent years, especially young people, have turned to the use of drugs, LSD, hashish and so on, to find some order and meaning in their lives. Yoga in general, including asanas, is the perfect way for these people to find new meaning in life. Drugs are limited in their scope, whereas the systematic practice of yoga will take them to the ultimate goal, beyond which there is no other.

History and mythology

The history of yogasanas as a physical, mental and spiritual culture goes back into the depths of time. Its mention is found in the oldest known literature of mankind, the *Vedas*, which are full of spiritual wisdom, composed by realized rishis and sages of that time. It is believed by some that the science of yoga is much older than even the *Vedas*.

In archaeological excavations made at Harappa and Mohanjodaro in what is now Pakistan, many statues have been found depicting Lord Shiva and Parvati (his consort) performing different yogasanas. These ruins were once the dwelling place of people who lived in the pre-Vedic age, even before the Aryan civilization flourished in the Indus subcontinent.

According to tradition and the scriptures, Lord Shiva is the founder of yoga, including asanas. He created all the asanas and taught them to his first disciple, Parvati. It is said that there were originally 8,400,000 asanas, which represent the 8,400,000 incarnations every individual must pass through before attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death. These asanas represent

progressive evolution from the simplest form of life to fully realized man. It is believed that by doing them a person can bypass all these lives in one life and step out of the deterministic progress from one life to the next.

Throughout the centuries these asanas have been modified and reduced in number by the great rishis and yogis so that there are now no more than a few hundred known. Of these only eighty four are discussed in detail, and only thirty or so are commonly thought of as being useful to modern man.

Lord Shiva is supposed to be the symbol or embodiment of the supreme consciousness. When he individual soul is liberated from the bondage of the world, he achieves the state of pure consciousness. Parvati is regarded as the mother of the whole universe. She is the embodiment of supreme knowledge. By her grace a person becomes liberated (*mukta*) and is united with the supreme consciousness. It is said that out of love and compassion for all her children she imparted her secret knowledge in the form of the tantra shastras. She is the mother aspect representing the great energy which lies dormant in all of us. This great energy (*shakti*) is also known as the kundalini.

Tantra is a combination of two words, *tanoti* and *trayati* which mean respectively 'expansion' and 'liberation'. Therefore, tantra is the science of expanding the consciousness and freeing it from its limitations. Yoga is an offshoot of tantra. We cannot separate yoga from tantra; both come from Shiva and Shakti. Consciousness and matter cannot be separated; both supplement each other just like fire and its heat.

Tantra is the way for ordinary people to free themselves from the limitations and bondages of the world, while still being able to enjoy earthly things. In

tantra, first one must know the limitations and capacities of one's body and mind. After this, tantra prescribes techniques for expanding the worldly consciousness into divine consciousness, and then into pure liberated consciousness. Various asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas are practised to purify the body, mind and consciousness. It is clear that the same techniques of yoga have their sources in tantra.

The first historically recorded exponent of yoga asanas was the great yogi Gorakhnath. In his time the science of yoga was not popular but Gorakhnath taught all the asanas to his close disciples. The yogis of that time tended to live far from society in the mountains and forests, where they led a life of seclusion and austerity, getting all their support from nature. Animals were the great teachers of these yogis, for they lived a natural life free from disease and worldly problems. Animals do not have a doctor or drugs to cure their ailments; nature is their only helper. Many yogic techniques were developed by studying the creatures of the forest. Is it any surprise that yoga is such a natural and effective system of curing disease?

Now, in this modern age, yoga is starting to spread all over the world; its knowledge is fast becoming the property of everyone. Many doctors and scientists are advocating the practice of yoga. Leading people are realizing that yoga is not only for sages and ascetics who have renounced the world and gone into seclusion; it is for everyone.

Asanas classified

In this book we have divided the asanas into different main groups. It is not necessary to practise all the asanas, nor is it possible for the modern busy man

who has a limited amount of spare time.

The asanas are classified into three groups: beginners, intermediate and advanced.

The beginners group should be practised by those who have never done yogasanas before, who are infirm in any way, or weak and sick and therefore unable to do the difficult practices. This group consists of elementary techniques designed to prepare the body and mind for asanas and meditative poses. These practices are in no way inferior to the advanced asanas and are very useful in improving the physical health. Included in this group are the pawanmuktasana series and premeditative and meditative poses.

The intermediate group consists of asanas which are reasonably difficult for people who can do the beginners group without the slightest discomfort or effort. Into these asanas a greater degree of steadiness, concentration and co-ordination with the breath is required. Included in this group are such asanas as yoga mudra, surya namaskara, etc.

The advanced group is intended for people with extensive control over their muscles and nervous system, who have already mastered the middle group of asanas. People should not be too eager to start these asanas. It is preferable to practise them under the guidance of an adept yoga teacher.

Asanas are also classified into dynamic and static practices.

Dynamic practices are the asanas which involve energetic movements of the body. These are really exercises but we will refer to them as asanas in this book, although to very meaning of the word asana is 'steady position'. They are not intended to develop muscles or to make a person gymnastic but to loosen the

muscles and joints and move stagnant blood from different parts of the body. They tighten the skin and muscles, strengthen the lungs and encourage movement in the digestive and excretory systems. They are particularly useful for beginners. Dynamic practices include surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana series, dynamic paschimottanasana, dynamic bhujangasana etc.

Static practices are performed with little or no movement, the body often remaining in one position for a few minutes or more. These are intended to gently massage the internal organs, glands and muscles as well as to relax the nerves throughout the body. They are specifically concerned with bringing tranquility to the mind and preparing the practitioner for the higher practices of yoga such as meditation. Some of them are particularly useful for inducing the state of sense withdrawal. Some prepare the body for meditation by making it steady and firm, In these practices the respiration rate is generally slowed down, and the practitioner directs his awareness to one particular part of the body, depending on the asana. Nearly all the asanas in this book are in this class, including sirshasana, sarvangasana, paschimottanasana, and so on.

ADVICE AND PRECAUTIONS

The following advice should be carefully studied before commencing to learn asanas. Though any person can start to practise asanas, they only become efficacious and really beneficial when performed in the proper manner after correct preparation.

Emptying the bowels: Before starting the practice of asanas, the bladder and intestines should preferably be empty. If you are constipated, drink two or three glasses of slightly salted water and then practise four asanas given in the section on shankhprakhshalana, namely tiryaka tadasana, kati chakrasana, tiryaka bhujangasana and udarakarshan asana. This should relieve your constipation. If not, then the practice of pawanmuktasana series should help. Also choose one time daily to go to the toilet before doing asanas. Do not strain; try to relax the whole body. After some weeks your bowels will automatically evacuate at the set time everyday. Try to avoid using laxative drugs.

Empty stomach: The stomach should be empty while doing asanas. To ensure this, one should not do asanas until at least three or four hours have elapsed after food. This is one reason why early morning practice is recommended; the stomach is sure to be empty.

Sun bathing: Never do asanas after a long period of sunbathing.

Breathing: Always breathe through the nose, unless

specific contrary instructions are given. Try to coordinate the respiration with the asana practice.

Blanket: Use a folded blanket for your practices. Do not use a mattress which is spongy or filled with air.

Place of practice: Do your asanas in a well ventilated room where it is calm and quiet. The air in the room should be fresh so that you can freely breathe oxygen. You can practise outdoors but the surroundings should be pleasant, say in a beautiful garden with trees and flowers. Do not practise in a strong wind, in the cold, or in air that is dirty, smoky or which smells.

Do not practise in the vicinity of furniture, a fire or anything that prevents free fall to the ground, especially during asanas such as sirshasana. Many accidents occur because people fall against an object. Do not practise under an electric fan.

Strain: Never exert undue force or strain while doing asanas. Beginners may find their muscles stiff at first but after several weeks of regular practice, they will be surprised to find that their muscles are more supple.

Age limitations: Asanas can be practised by people of all age groups, male and female.

Restrictions: People who have fractured bones and those who are suffering from any kind of chronic disease like ulcers, tuberculosis or hernia, should consult a yoga teacher or doctor before commencing asanas. If one feels there is any reason why one should not do asanas, expert advice should be sought.

Time of practice: Asanas can be practised any time of the day, except after meals. However, the best time is between 4 and 6 a.m. In Sanskrit this period of the day is known as *brahmamuhurta*. It is the time of day which is most conducive to the higher practices of yoga. The atmosphere is pure and quiet and is filled with solar

radiations. The activities of the stomach and intestines have stopped. The mind has no deep impressions on the conscious level; it is empty of thoughts in preparation for the long day ahead.

The practitioner will probably find that the muscles are most stiff at this time of day, compared to the late afternoon when they become more supple.

Sequence: Asanas should be done first, followed by pranayama and finally meditation.

Awareness of the body: When doing asanas always try to do them slowly and with full awareness of the body. If you feel pain or pleasure, try not to react to it but merely be aware of the feeling. In this way you will develop powers of concentration and endurance.

Clothes: During asanas it is better to wear loose, light and comfortable clothing. Before commencing any practices remove spectacles, wristwatches and ornaments from your body.

Bathing: Try to take a cold shower before starting. This will greatly improve the effect of the asanas.

Relaxation: Do shavasana before, during and after asana sessions, taking care to relax the body as much as possible. Shavasana looks very easy, yet to do it properly with complete relaxation is very difficult.

Diet: There are no special dietary rules for practitioners of asanas, though it is better if they eat natural food in reasonable moderation. Contrary to the popular opinion, yoga does not say you must become a vegetarian though in the higher stages a vegetarian diet is recommended. A yoga practitioner is advised to fill half his stomach with food, one quarter with water and to leave the remaining quarter empty. You should eat enough to satisfy your hunger but not so much that you feel heavy and lazy. Eat to live, rather than live to eat.

If asanas are done with a spiritual aim, then one should avoid eating food which causes acidity or gas.

If one is suffering from a particular disease then dietary restrictions should be imposed.

Termination of asana: If one experiences excessive pain in any part of the body, the asanas should be immediately terminated; if necessary, seek advice. Do not stay in an asana if excessive discomfort is felt.

Inverted asanas: Do not do any inverted asanas if there is gas or fermentation in the intestines or if the blood is excessively impure. This is important to ensure that toxins do not go to the brain and cause damage.

Beginners Group of Asanas

PAWANMUKTASANA SERIES

Pawan means 'wind'; *mukta* means 'release'; and *asana* means 'posture'. Pawanmuktasana, therefore, is a group of exercises that release wind and gases from the body. The pawanmuktasana series are very simple, yet they are most effective in regulating what are referred to in India as the humors : phlegm (*kapha*), wind (*vata*) and acid or bile (*pitta*).

According to the ancient medical science known as ayurveda, these three humors control all the functions of the body. If any irregularity arises in their functions, negative reactions take place in the metabolism of the body and disease results.

Wind (*vata*) not only refers to the gastric and intestinal gases but also to wind that is formed in every joint of the body, since due to incorrect chemical reactions rheumatic pains and stiffness occur. The acid and bile (*pitta*) refers to the juices necessary for digestion and such things as uric acid, which have to be regularly removed from the body. If there is excessive acid in the system, malfunctioning of certain organs occurs.

The practice of pawanmuktasana will help remove excessive wind and acid from the body, especially from the joints. The exercises are useful for convalescents,

invalids and people who have difficulty moving their limbs. After a long period of time in bed one can gently re-educate the muscles by these exercises. They are also effective in relieving muscular ailments.

The pawanmuktasana series of exercises is divided into two distinct groups: the anti-rheumatic group and the anti-gastric group. These two groups should be performed in the order given in the text.

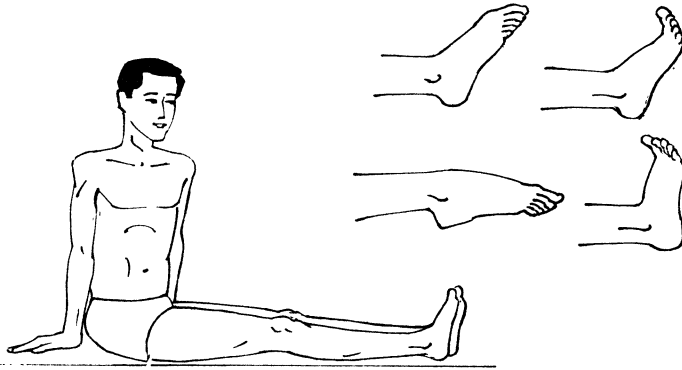
ANTI-RHEUMATIC EXERCISES

These exercises will beneficially influence the different joints and organs of the body. Though they seem very simple they have subtle effects on the practitioner. Therefore this group of exercise is *sukshma uyayama* in Sanskrit, meaning the 'subtle exercise'.

This series of exercises should be preformed at the beginning of the daily asana session to loosen the joints and make the muscles supple. They are also intended for beginners and for those who are weak or sick, as well as for people with heart problems or high blood pressure or stiffness in the body.

Before starting pawanmuktasana practise shavasana to relax physically and mentally. Lie flat on your back, legs separated with hands beside you, palms facing upwards. Try to loosen all your muscles and joints. Become free of every kind of tension. Feel your body; become aware of your breath. You are relaxing. Watch your breath; see that it is natural and spontaneous, unforced. Count your breaths. During the practice of counting the breaths do not suppress any thoughts. Watch them as a witness, without being emotionally involved with them. Your main concern is to relax the whole mind and body. For the time being forget all your worries, anxieties and worldly problems. After a few minutes slowly move your arms and feet and sit up. Now you are mentally and physically prepared to start pawanmuktasana.

TOE BENDING & ANKLE BENDING



base position

exercises 1 & 2

Exercise 1 : Toe bending

Assume the base posture with legs stretched directly in front of the body.

Place the hands on the floor by the side of the trunk. Lean backward taking support on the straight arms. Become aware of the toes.

Move the toes of both feet slowly backward and forward, keeping the feet rigid.

Repeat 10 times.

Exercise 2 : Ankle bending

Remain in the base position as in exercise 1.

Move both feet backward and forward as much as possible, bending them from the ankle joints.

Repeat 10 times.

ANKLE ROTATION



Exercise 3 : Ankle rotation

Remain in the base position as in exercise 1.

Separate the legs, keeping them straight.

Keep the heels in contact with the floor.

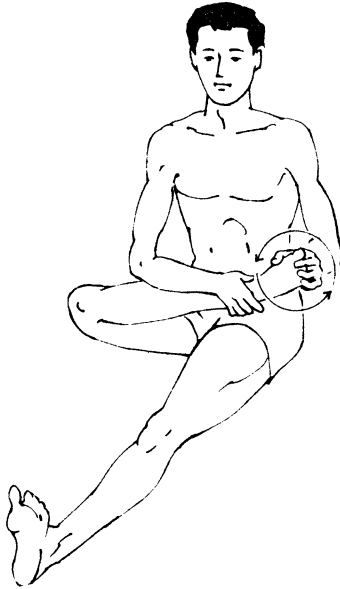
Rotate the right foot clockwise from the ankle 10 times.

Rotate the right foot in the same way but anticlockwise 10 times.

Repeat the same procedure with the left foot.

Then rotate both feet together.

ANKLE CRANK



Exercise 4 : Ankle crank

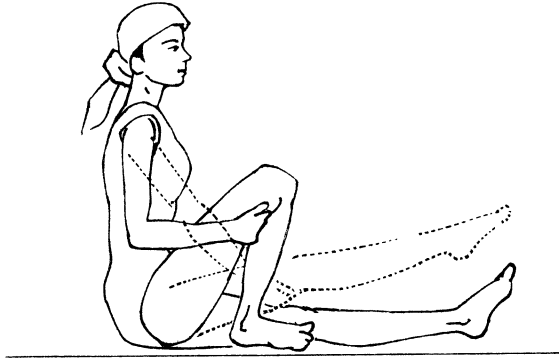
Assume the base position.

Place the right ankle on the left thigh.

With the assistance of the left hand, rotate the right foot clockwise 10 times, then anti-clockwise 10 times.

Repeat the same procedure with the left foot.

KNEE BENDING & KNEE CRANK



exercise 5 (i)

Exercise 5 - (i) Knee bending

Assume the base position.

Bend the right leg at the knee and clasp the hands under the right thigh.

Straighten the right leg without allowing the heel or toe to touch the ground.

Keep the hands under the right thigh but allow the arms to straighten.

Bend the right leg as much as possible at the knee, bringing the heel near the right buttock.

Repeat 10 times.

Now repeat the same procedure with the left leg.

Exercise 5 - (ii) Knee crank

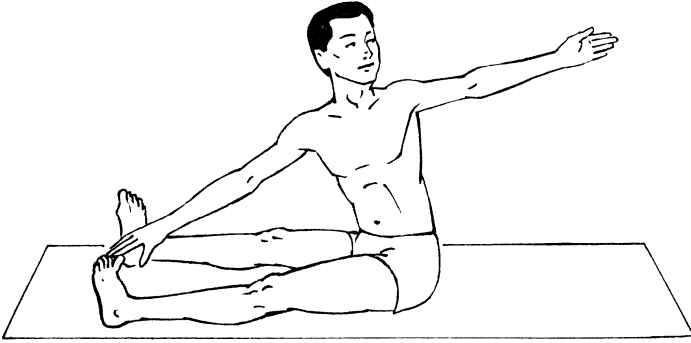
Assume the base position.

Instead of stretching the right leg, hold the thigh near the trunk and rotate the lower leg in a circular motion from the knee.

Do this 10 times clockwise, then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat the same procedure with the left leg.

DYNAMIC SPINAL TWIST



Exercise 6 : Dynamic spinal twist

Assume the base position.

Separate the legs as much as is comfortable.

Keeping the arms straight, bring the right hand to the left big toe and stretch the left arm behind the back.

Keep both arms in one straight line.

Turn the head and look backward directing the gaze to the left hand.

Turn the trunk in the opposite direction; bring the left hand to the right big toe and stretch the right arm behind you.

This is one round.

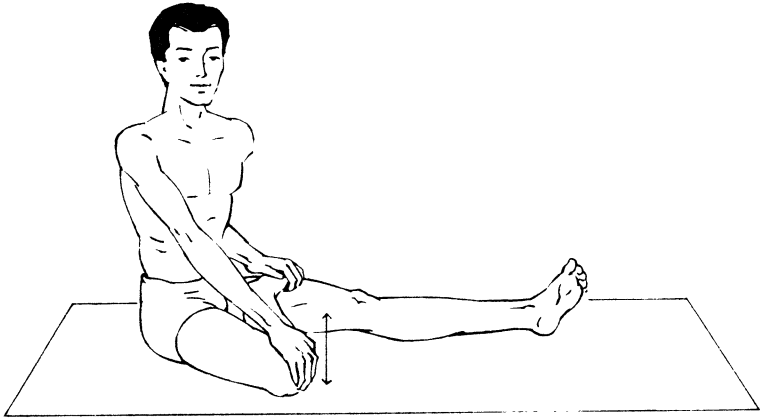
Repeat 10 or 20 times.

At the beginning do the exercise slowly, and then gradually increase the speed.

Variation

If the practitioner wishes, he can try to separate the legs further without bending them, and then repeat the entire exercise.

HALF BUTTERFLY



Exercise 7 : Half butterfly

Fold the right leg and place the right foot on the left thigh.

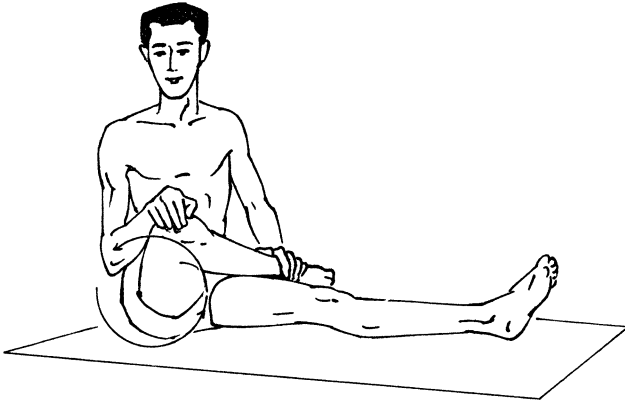
Place the left hand on the right foot and the right hand on the top of the bent right knee.

Gently move the bent leg up and down with the right hand allowing the muscles of the leg to relax as much as possible.

Repeat the same process with the left knee.

After some days or weeks of practice the knee should comfortably rest on the floor without effort.

KNEE ROTATION



Exercise 8 : Knee rotation

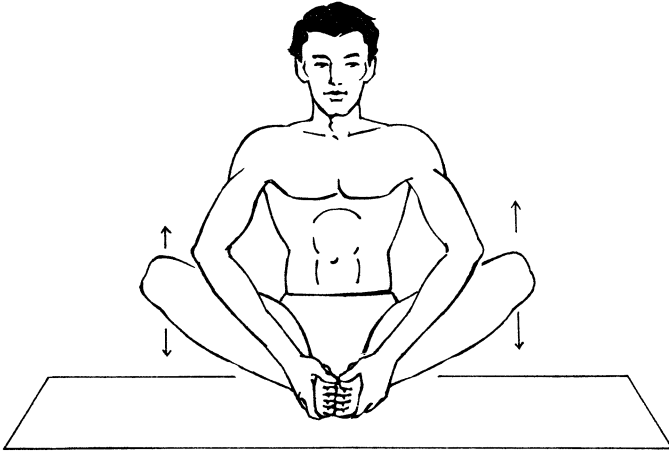
Remain in the same position as in exercise 7 but hold the right foot with the left hand.

Rotate the right knee in a circle, trying to gradually make the circle larger.

Does 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat the same procedure with the left knee.

FULL BUTTERFLY

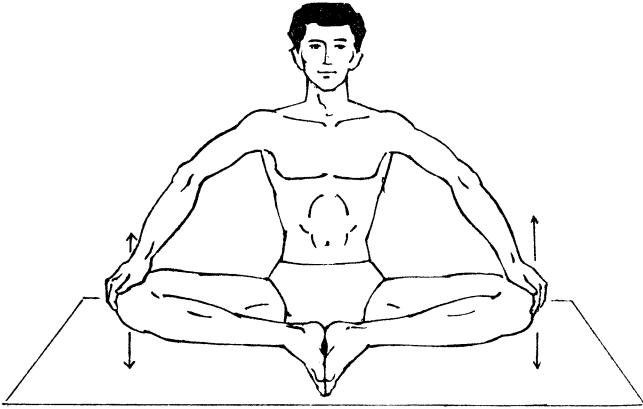


exercise 9 - (i)

Exercise 9 - (i) : Full butterfly

In the base position bring the soles of the feet together. Try to bring the heels as close to the body as possible. Interlock the fingers and place them under the feet. Gently push the knees towards the ground, utilizing the elbows, and bend the body forward. Try to touch the ground with the head; this will be difficult at first.

FULL BUTTERFLY



exercise 9 - (ii)

Exercise 9 - (ii) : Full butterfly

Keeping the soles of the feet together, place the hands on the knees.

Utilizing the arms, push the knees towards the ground, allowing them to bounce upward again.

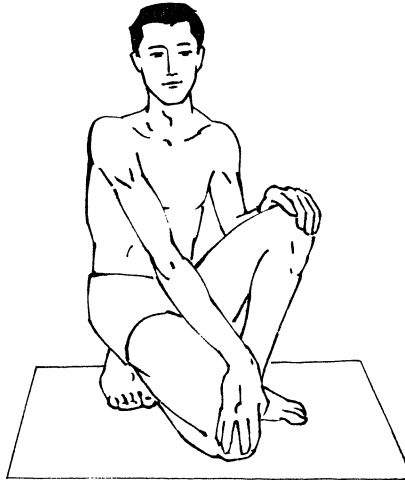
Repeat 20 or more times.

Exercise 9 - (iii) : Full butterfly

Maintain the same position but place the hands on the floor behind and to the side of the back, keeping the arms straight.

Move the knees up and down 20 or more times.

CROW WALKING



Exercise 10 : Crow walking

Squat on the floor.

Place the palms of the hands on the knees and begin to walk in the squatting position.

One can either walk on the toes or the feet; choose whichever is most difficult.

Do this exercise for a short time without strain.

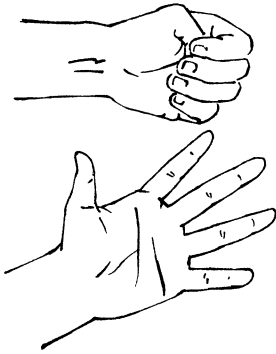
Crow walk touching the knee to the ground with each step.

This is a very good exercise to prepare the legs for meditation poses.

It is also recommended for people with poor blood circulation in the legs.

Constipation sufferers will find this exercise useful. They should drink 2 glasses of water and then crow walk for one minute. Drink 2 more glasses of water and crow walk again. Repeat this 3 or 4 times; this should remove the constipation.

HAND CLENCHING & WRIST BENDING



exercise 11



exercise 12

Exercise 11 : Hand clenching

Hold the arms straight out in front of the body, so they are on the same horizontal plane as the shoulders.

Stretch and tense the fingers of both hands.

Close the fingers over the thumbs to make a tight fist.

Again stretch and tense the fingers.

Repeat this movement 10 times.

Exercise 12 : Wrist bending

Maintain the same position as in exercise 11.

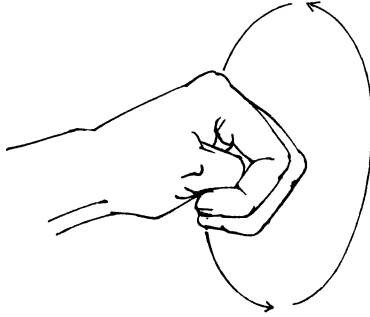
Bend the hands at the wrist, as if you are pressing the palms against a wall, with the fingers pointing upward.

Then bend the hands at the wrist and point the fingers downward.

Again point the fingers upward.

Repeat 10 times.

WRIST JOINT ROTATION



Exercise 13 : Wrist joint rotation

Stay in the same position as exercise 12 but with only the right hand extended.

Clench the right fist and rotate it clockwise 10 times from the wrist.

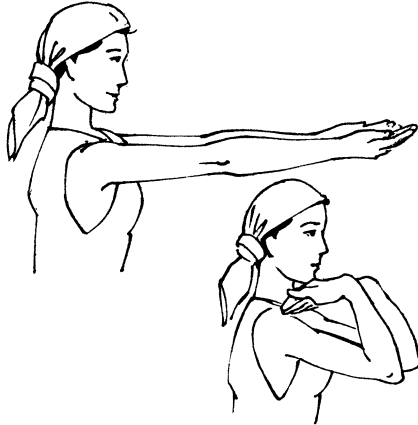
Then rotate the fist anti-clockwise 10 times.

Repeat the same movement with the left hand.

Extend both arms in front of the body with the fists clenched.

Rotate the fist together 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

ELBOW BENDING



exercise 14 (i)

Exercise 14 - (i) : Elbow bending

Maintain the same position as exercise 13 but hold both arms outstretched with the hands open and the palms uppermost.

Bend both arms at the elbows, touch the shoulders with the fingers, then straighten the arms again.

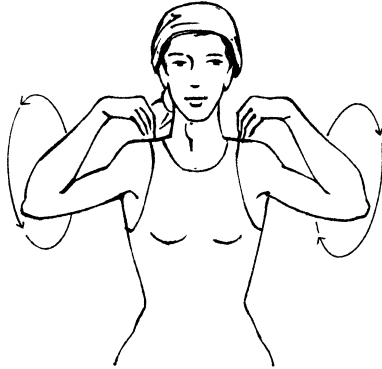
Repeat this exercise 10 times.

Exercise 14 - (ii) : Elbow bending

Perform the same exercise but with the arms extended sideways.

Do this 10 times.

SHOULDER SOCKET ROTATION



Exercise 15 : Shoulder socket rotation

Stay in the same position as exercise 14 - (ii).

Make a circular movement from the shoulder joints, keeping the fingers in contact with the shoulders. Do it 10 times clockwise, then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Try to make the circular movement of each elbow as large as possible, bringing the two elbows in contact with each other in front of the chest.

NECK MOVEMENT



exercise 16 - (i)

Exercise 16 - (i) : Neck movement

Assume the base position. Slowly move the head backwards and forwards 10 times.

Exercise 16 - (ii) : Neck movement

Slowly tilt the head to the right and to the left, first while facing directly forward and then while turning the head to the left and right.

Repeat both methods 10 times.

NECK MOVEMENT



exercise 16 - (iii)

Exercise 16 - (iii) Neck movement

Slowly rotate the head in as large a circle as possible 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise. Do not strain.

Benefits

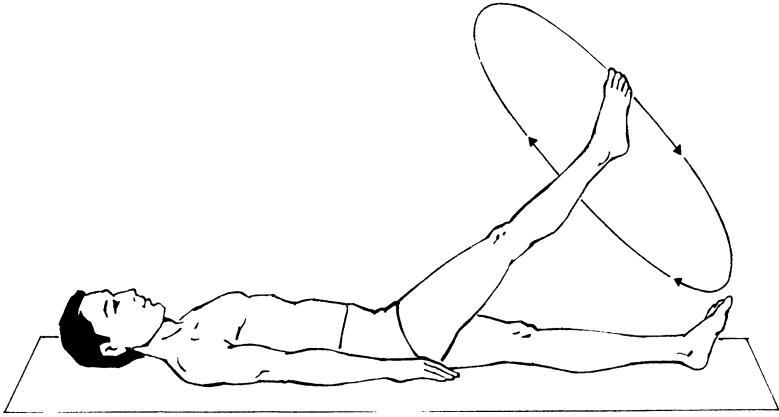
All the nerves connecting the different parts of the body with the brain must pass through the neck. This vital crossroad is exercised and toned by the above movements.

ANTI-GASTRIC EXERCISES

These exercises are most useful in removing wind and gas from the stomach and intestines. Those people who suffer from constipation and indigestion will find these exercises a panacea. This second part of pawanmuktasana is also a great help in preparing the body for the more difficult asanas given in this book, and is used as rehabilitation therapy for persons with all types of neuromuscular disorders, broken bones, etc.

Before starting these exercises, the body and mind should be calm and relaxed. The best way to attain this state is to practise shavasana as described at the beginning of the anti-rheumatic series of pawanmuktasana.

LEG ROTATION



Exercise 17 : Leg rotation

Lie flat on your back with the legs straight and the arms beside and in line with the body.

Keeping the right leg straight, raise it off the floor. Rotate it clockwise 10 times.

Then rotate it 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat the same procedure with the left leg.

After some rest, raise both legs, keeping them straight and together.

Rotate them 10 times clockwise and the 10 times anti-clockwise.

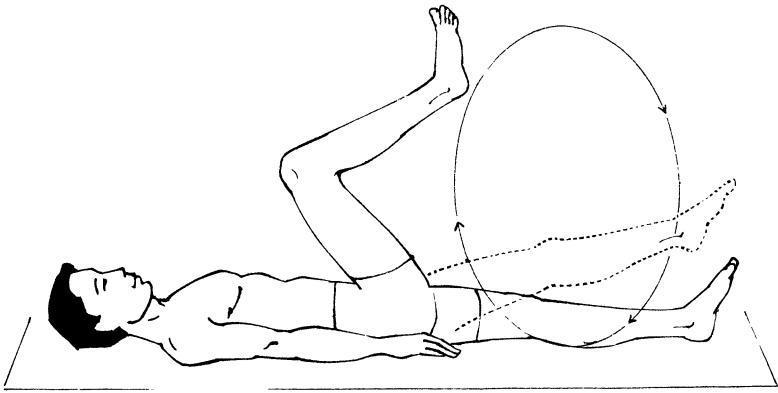
Note

Keep the rest of the body, including the head, flat on the floor.

After completion of the exercise, rest until the respiration returns to normal.

Do not strain.

CYCLING



exercise 18 - (i)

Exercise 18 - (i) : Cycling

Raise the right leg and make 10 forward cycling movements followed by 10 reverse cycling movements. Repeat the same procedure with the left leg.

Exercise 18 - (ii) : Cycling

Using both legs, make alternate cycling movements, 10 times forward and then 10 times in reverse.

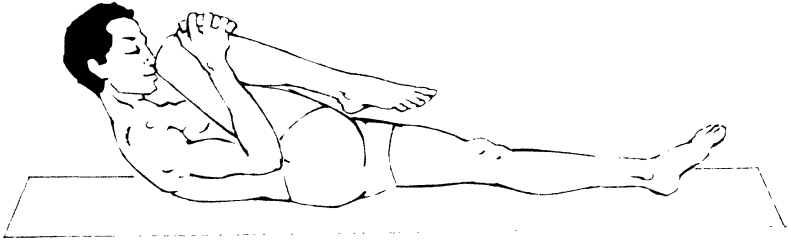
Exercise 18 - (iii) : Cycling

Now keep the legs locked together and do 10 forward cycling movements followed by 10 reverse movements.

Note

Keep the rest of the body flat on the floor.
After completion of the exercise, rest, lying flat on the back until respiration returns to normal.
Do not strain.

LEG LOCK POSTURE



exercise 19 - (i)

Exercise 19 - (i) : Leg lock posture

Lie flat on the back.

Bend the right leg and bring the thigh near the chest.

Interlock the fingers and place them over the knee.

Inhale deeply and exhale, emptying the lungs.

While retaining the breath outside, lift the head and upper portion of the chest and try to touch the knee with the nose.

While inhaling, slowly return to the supine position.

Relax the whole body.

Repeat 10 times with each leg.

Exercise 19 - (ii) : Leg lock posture

Fold both legs and wrap the arms around the knees.

Repeat the head and upper chest raising movement 10 times, taking great care that the respiration is coordinated with the physical movement.

Benefits

This exercise directly massages the abdomen.

It is very powerful in removing wind and constipation.

ROCKING AND ROLLING



exercise 20 - (i)

Exercise 20 - (i) : Rocking and rolling

Lie flat on the back.

Fold both legs up to the chest.

Interlock the fingers and place them behind the head.

Roll the body from side to side, keeping the elbows on the floor.

Do 10 complete rolls.

Exercise 20 - (ii) : Rocking and rolling

Remain in the same position; wrap the arms around the knees and rock the whole body along the spinal cord.

Try to come to a squatting position on the feet.

Note

Use a folded blanket for this practise so that no damage is done to the spine.

Be careful that the head does not hit the ground with force.

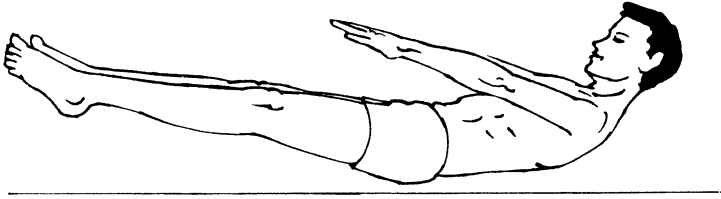
Limitations

Not to be done by persons with spinal problems.

Benefits

This exercise massages the back, buttocks and hips. It is most beneficial if done just after awakening in the morning.

NAUKASANA



Exercise 21 - (i) : Naukasana (the boat pose)

Lie flat on the back, arms at the side of the body, palms facing down.

Inhale and raise the legs, arms, head and trunk.

The head and feet should not be raised more than one foot off the ground.

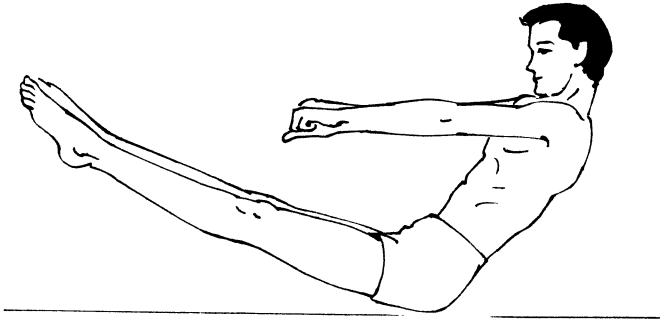
The arms should be held at the same level and in line with the toes.

Hold the raised position for a comfortable length of time then exhale and slowly return to the starting position.

Relax the whole body.

Do this asana 5 times.

NAUKASANA



Exercis 21 - (ii) : Naukasana

Repeat the same process but this time clench the fists and tense the whole body in the raised position as much as possible.

While exhaling return to the floor quickly without causing any injury.

Immediately relax the entire body.

Breath

Inhale while raising the body.

Exhale while lowering the body.

Internal kumbhaka (retention of the breath inside the lungs) while in the elevated position.

Note

The elevated position should be maintained until the abdominal muscles start to vibrate.

Benefits

This is very good for relaxing the muscles and joints. It should be done at the end of the pawanmuktasana series and when you wake up in the morning.

It is useful for nervous, tense persons as it brings immediate relaxation.

It helps to remove stomach or intestinal worms, and improves the digestive process by stimulating intestinal peristalsis.

ASANAS FOR SHAKTI BANDHA

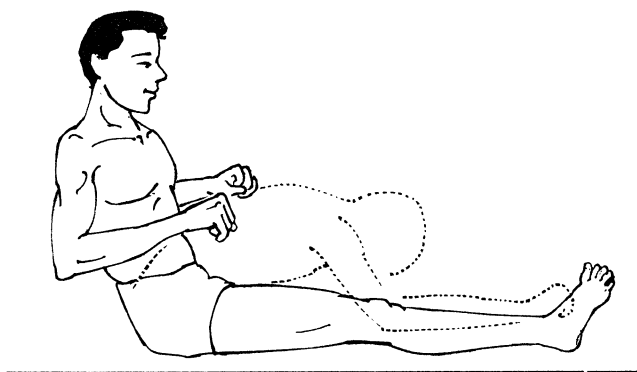
(Energy block exercises)

Many people, especially beginners, have stiff muscles and joints. For this reason they have much difficulty in doing classical asanas. Though the whole pawan-muktasana series is effective in loosening up the body, the following energy block exercises will greatly help the beginner to do asanas. Even people who regularly do asanas may occasionally feel stiff; these are ideal exercises to remove inflexibility in the body.

What is an energy block? Energy in the form of prana (life force) is in every part of the body. It should be in a state of free flow but due to faulty chemical reactions in the body free flow of this prana is impeded. This results in stiffness, rheumatism and muscular tension. These energy block exercises eliminate toxins in the body and ensure that the body's reactions are in balance with each other. One of the most common malfunctions in the body is faulty operation of the endocrine system. Scientific experiments carried out in various parts of the world, such as Russia, Poland, France, Germany and India have conclusively proved that asanas and the energy block exercises are very powerful in harmonizing the endocrine system.

So those people who cannot do asanas should do energy block exercises to prepare for the practice of asanas and to harmonize the activities of their body.

NAUKA SANCHALANA



Exercise I: Nauka sanchalana (Rowing the boat)

Assume a sitting position with the legs stretched in front of the body.

Make movements as though you are rowing a boat, keeping the legs together.

Make circular motions, bending the body forward and backward as far as possible.

Do this 10 times.

Reverse the rowing movement as though you are going in the opposite direction.

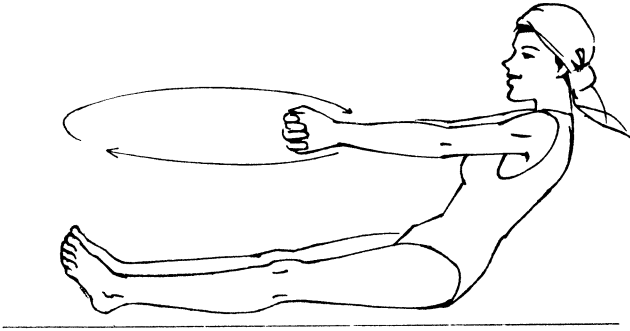
Do this 10 times.

Benefits

This is an excellent exercise for pregnant women, up to three months.

This practice massages all the abdominal organs and muscles.

CHAKKI CHALANA



Exercise 2: Chakki chalana (Churning the mill)

Stay in the sitting position with the legs outstretched. Make horizontal circular movements with the arms, keeping them straight and the fingers interlocked. Imagine you are grinding wheat between two stones as in the traditional mill.

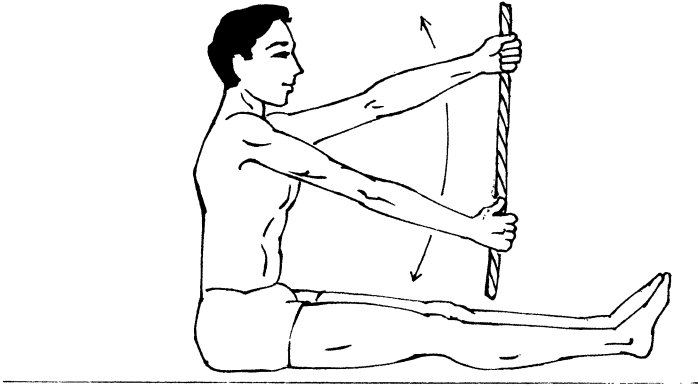
Move the body only from the waist.

Do the exercise 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Benefits

This is also a good exercise for pregnant women as it massages the uterine and abdominal muscles.

PULLING THE ROPE



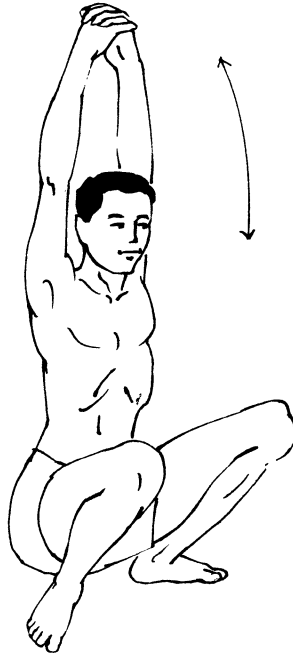
Exercise 3: Pulling the rope

In the sitting position, raise the arms alternately up and down as though pulling a vertical rope.

Benefits

This exercise is helpful in strengthening and loosening the arm and shoulder muscles, and in developing a firm bust in ladies.

CHOPPING WOOD



Exercise 4: Chopping wood

Assume a squatting pose with the feet flat on the floor and the knees fully bent and separated.

Clasp the hands and keep the arms straight, make chopping motions as if using an axe to cut wood.

Inhale while raising the arms above the head.

Exhale while bringing both arms down.

Repeat this process 10 or 20 times.

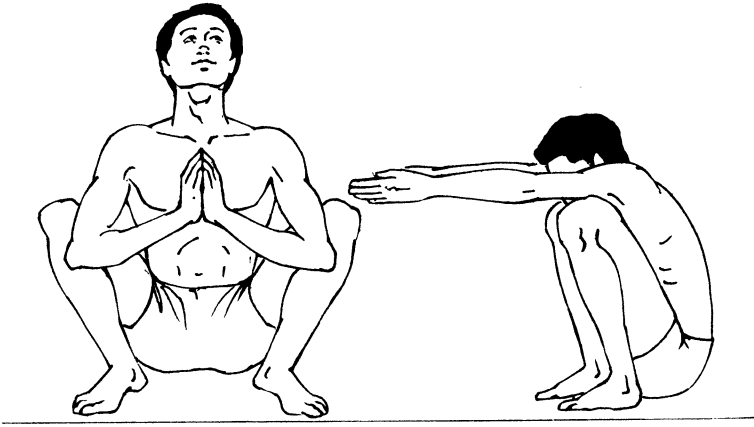
Note

If the squatting pose is too difficult, the chopping movement can be done from a standing position.

Benefits

This is an excellent exercise for the chest and exercising the sacral and vaginal muscles prior to childbirth.

NAMASKARA



Exercise 5 : Namaskara (the salutation)

Assume a squatting pose with the feet flat on the floor and the knees wide apart.

Place the hands together in a gesture of prayer.

Press the elbows against the inner sides of the knees.

Inhale, lift the head and push the knees out as far as possible.

Maintain this pose for a few seconds.

Exhale, straighten the arms so that they point horizontally forward.

Return to the starting position.

Repeat the practice 10 times.

Benefits

This practice has a very powerful effect on the nerves of the thighs, knees, shoulders and arms.

VAYU NISHKASANA



Exercise 6 : Vayu nishkasana (the gas releasing pose)

Assume a squatting pose.

Place the fingers under the feet from the inside so that the palms are under the arches, with the elbows pressing against the inner sides of the knees.

Inhale and raise the head.

Exhale, bring the head downward and straighten the legs.

Maintain this position for a few seconds.

Return to the starting position.

Repeat the same process 10 times.

Benefits

Helps to release gas from the digestive system.

Like the previous exercise, this practice is good for the nerves of the thighs, knees, shoulders and arms.

UDARAKARSHAN ASANA



Exercise 7 : Udarakarshan asana (the abdominal massage pose)

Assume a squatting pose, hands on the knees.
Bend the left knee to the ground while turning the trunk as much as possible to the right.
Keep the hands on the knees and look over the right shoulder.
Return the to the starting position.
Repeat the same procedure, twisting the body in the opposite direction.
Twist the body 10 times in each direction.

Benefits

This is a very useful asana for those people with abdominal ailments because it alternately compresses and stretches the digestive organs and muscles. It is one of the asanas practised in the hatha yoga technique called shankhprakashalana. Constipation sufferers should do this asana regularly.

EXERCISES FOR THE EYES

The following exercises can cure most eye diseases, both muscular and optical, if they are practised with patience and perseverance. Many people who have done them over a long period of time have discarded their spectacles.

After each of these exercises the eyes should be closed and rested for at least half a minute. The more often the exercises are done the better. However, if there is lack of time in the daily program, then the whole series performed once in the morning and once in the evening will suffice.

Exercise 1 : Palming

Sit, facing the sun and close the eyes.

Rub the palms of the hands together vigorously until they become hot. Place the palms over the eyes.

Feel that warmth and energy are being transmitted from the hands into the eyes.

After 2 to 3 minutes, remove the hands, keeping the eyes closed throughout.

Repeat the exercise at least 3 times.

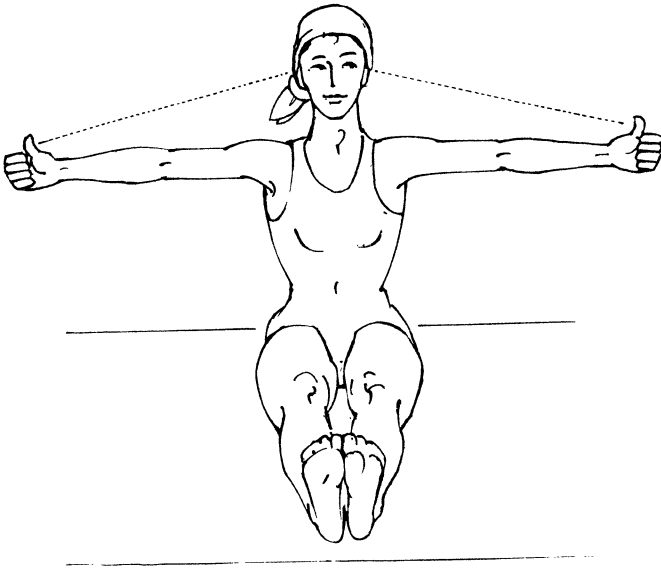
Note

This is best practised at sunrise.

Benefits

It relaxes, revitalizes and recharges the optic nerves.

SIDEWAYS VIEWING



Exercise 2 : Sideways viewing

Assume a sitting position with the legs straight in front of the body.

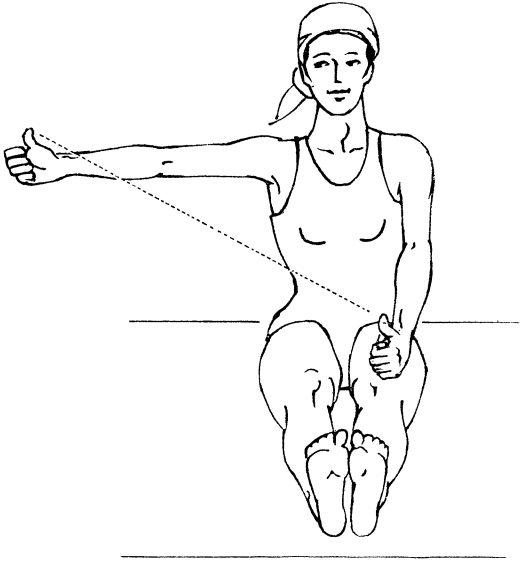
Hold the arms straight and out to the sides at shoulder level, with the thumbs pointing upward.

Without moving the head sideways, focus the eyes on the following, one after the other :

- a) Left thumb,
- b) Space between the eyebrows (bhrumadhya),
- c) Right thumb,
- d) Space between the eyebrows.

Repeat this cycle 15 to 20 times and then rest.

FRONT AND SIDEWAYS VIEWING



Exercise 3: Front and sideways viewing

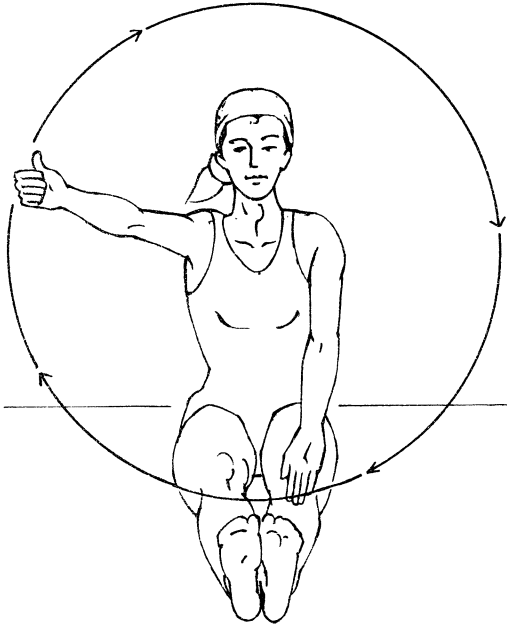
Maintain the same position as in exercise 2, but place the left thumb on the left knee so that it points upwards. Hold the right thumb to the right of the body so that it points upwards.

Without moving the head, focus the eyes on the left thumb, then on the right thumb and then return to the left thumb.

Repeat this process 15 to 20 times, then rest and close the eyes, practising the technique mentally.

Repeat the same procedure on the left side of the body.

ROTATIONAL VIEWING



Exercise 4 : Rotational viewing

Maintain the same body position as in exercise 3. Place the left hand on the left knee and hold the right fist above the right leg.

The right thumb should point upward and the arm must be straight.

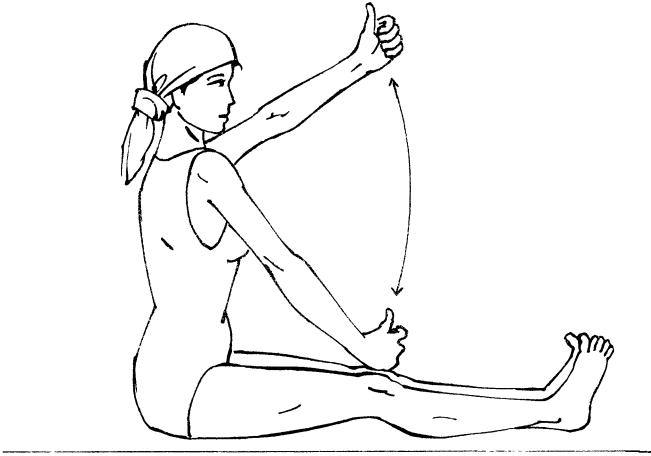
Make a large circular movement with the right thumb, moving to the left, then upward, curving to the right and finally returning to the starting position.

Keep the eyes focused on the thumb without moving the head.

Repeat this practice 5 time clockwise and anti-clockwise with each thumb.

Finally close the eyes and rest.

UP AND DOWN VIEWING



Exercise 5 : Up and down viewing

Maintain the same position as exercise 4. Place both fists on the knees, with both thumbs pointing upwards. Keeping the arms straight, slowly raise the right arm as high as possible, while following the movement of the thumb with the eyes.

Slowly return to the starting position, all the time keeping the eyes focused on the thumb without moving the head.

Practise the same movement with the left thumb.

Repeat 5 times with each thumb.

Finally close the eyes and rest.

DISTANT AND NEAR VIEWING

Exercise 6: Distant and near viewing

Sit the same position as exercise 5, relax the arms.

Focus the eyes on your nose.

Then focus on a distant object.

Focus on the nose again.

Repeat this process many times.

Afterwards close the eyes and relax.

Further practices :

The following yogic techniques are very beneficial for the eyes :

- a) sirshasana
- b) sarvangasana
- c) surya namaskara
- d) surya bheda pranayama
- e) neti kriya
- f) trataka

RELAXATION POSTURES

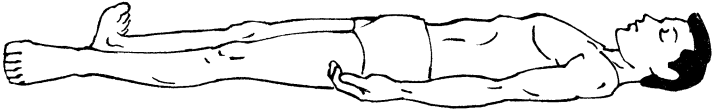
The importance of relaxation poses cannot be over-emphasized. They should be performed directly before the asana session and at any time when the body becomes tired. The asanas in this group at first appearance seem very easy, yet to do them properly is quite difficult, for all muscles in the body must be consciously relaxed. People often think that they have relaxed their muscles completely, when in fact tension still remains.

In this modern scientific age, people are subjected to numerous stresses and anxieties; they have great trouble relaxing even during sleep. The following asanas will be most useful for these people to give the body the rest it badly needs.

A particularly easy, yet powerful method of relaxing both the mind and body is the technique of yoga nidra. After a hard day's work or just before sleep, this practice can be done with great benefit. The method is to lie in shavasana and rotate the consciousness through the different parts of the body. Make sure you feel each part of the body become relaxed and merge with the floor. Repeat this process a few times and all the tensions will surely be removed.

This is a very brief description of yoga nidra. For more information contact a yoga teacher or read *Yoga Nidra*, a Bihar School of Yoga publication.

SHAVASANA



Shavasana : (The corpse pose)

Lie flat on the back with the arms beside and in line with the body, palms facing upward.

Move the feet slightly apart to a comfortable position and close the eyes.

Relax the whole body. Do not move any part even if discomfort occurs.

Let the breath become rhythmic and natural.

Become aware of the inhalation and exhalation.

Count the number of respirations: 1 in, 1 out, and so on, Continue to count for a few minutes. If the mind starts to wander bring it back to the counting. If you can keep the mind on the breath for a few minutes, the mind and body will relax.

Duration

The longer the better in general.

During asana practice a minute or two is sufficient.

Concentration

On the breath and counting.

Benefits

Relaxes the whole psychophysiological system. Ideally practised before sleep, before or during asana practice and particularly after dynamic exercises such as surya namaskara.

ADVASANA



Advasana : (the reversed corpse pose)

Lie on the stomach.

Stretch both arms forward on each side of the head.

Relax the whole body in the same way as described for shavasana.

Breath

Natural and rhythmic.

Duration

For the treatment of ailments, it should be done for as long as possible.

Before or during an asana session, a few minutes is sufficient.

Concentration

On the breath and the number of respirations.

Benefits

Recommended for people with slipped disc, stiff neck and stooping figure.

These people will find it not only a useful asana for their ailment but also an excellent sleeping pose.

JYESTIKASANA



Jyestikasana : (the best posture)

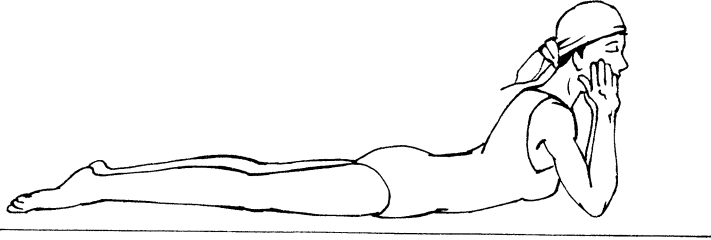
Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight.
Interlock the fingers and place the palms at the back of the head.

Relax the whole body and become aware of the breathing process as described for shavasana.

Breath

Natural and rhythmic.

MAKARASANA



Makarasana : (The crocodile pose)

Lie flat on the stomach.

Raise the head and shoulders and rest the head in the palms of the hands with the elbows on the ground.
Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Breath

Natural and rhythmic.

Duration

For as long as possible.

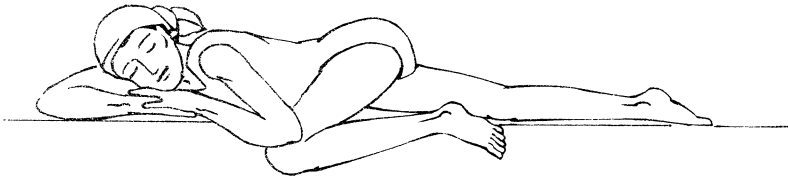
Concentration

On the breathing process or counting the breath.

Benefits

This asana is very effective for those persons suffering from *slipped disc or any spinal disorder; they should remain in this asana for extended periods of time.* Asthmatics and people suffering from any other lung ailments should do this simple asana.

MATSYA KRIDASANA



Matsya kridasana : (The flapping fish pose)

Lie on the stomach with the fingers interlocked under the head.

Fold the left leg sideways and bring the left knee close to the ribs.

Swivel the arms to the left and rest the left elbow on the left knee.

Rest the right side of the head on the crook of the right arm.

This position resembles a flapping fish.

Breath

Normal and relaxed in the static pose.

Duration

Practise this asana as much as possible on both sides. It can be used for sleeping.

Concentration

On the breath.

Benefits

This asana redistributes waistline fat deposits.

It stimulates digestive peristalsis by stretching the intestines and helps remove constipation.

It relieves sciatic pain by relaxing the nerves in the legs.

It is an excellent rest pose.

PRE-MEDITATIVE POSES

To be able to sit in one steady position for a long period is essential for higher yogic practices such as dhyana (meditation). The most commonly used meditative asanas are padmasana, ardha padmasana, siddhasana, sukhasana and vajrasana. The first three asanas, although not so difficult, require reasonably flexible leg muscles and a high degree of relaxation, if the asanas are to be maintained for a long time.

The following exercises are most useful in preparing the body for meditative asanas:

Exercise 1: Half butterfly

Do the exercise described in the pawanmuktasana series part I : exercise 7.

When the knee can touch the ground, try to slowly touch the forehead to the folded knee. Do not strain. Repeat this procedure 5 times with each leg.

Exercise 2: Full butterfly

Do the exercise described in the pawanmuktasana series part I : exercise 9.

Exercise 3: Crow walking

Do the exercise described in the pawanmuktasana series part I : exercise 10.

ANIMAL RELAXATION POSE



exercise 4

Exercise 4: Animal relaxation pose

Sitting on the floor, place the sole of the right foot against the left thigh and stretch the left leg backward, with the heel touching the buttocks.

Inhale and slowly raise both hands vertically.

Exhale and slowly bend forward over the right knee.

Remain in this position for about a minute, breathing rhythmically and slowly.

Inhale while returning to the raised-arm position.

Repeat the same process, bending over the left knee.

Exercise 5: Namaskara parts 1 & 2

Do exercises 5 & 6 described in the shakti bandha series.

MEDITATIVE POSES

The main purpose of all the meditative poses is to allow the practitioner to sit in one position for extended periods of time. In the advanced stages of meditation, one position must be maintained for a few hours without moving the body and also without physical discomfort.

It is, in fact, only when the body is quite steady and still, that one can meditate successfully. The asanas in this group can be maintained for a long time without strain and discomfort. Other asanas can be done for a long time, but they tend to become uncomfortable or need conscious attention to maintain them. A further factor is that deep meditation requires the spinal column to be straight, and very few asanas can satisfy this condition. Further, in high stages of meditation, the practitioner loses control over the muscles of the body. Thus, the meditative asana needs to automatically hold the body in a steady position.

Beginners can sit in sukhasana for their initial attempts to attain meditative experiences. It is very simple and does not require much flexibility of the body. They should, however, start to earnestly do the premeditative exercises (described in the previous chapter) to slowly prepare their body for the classical meditative asanas such as padmasana or siddhasana.

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh said the following:

You must be able to sit in one of the meditative asanas for a full three hours at a stretch without shaking the body. Then only will you gain mastery over the asana. (asana siddhi). Then you can practise the higher stages of pranayama (control of the breath) and dhyana (meditation). Without securing a steady asana, you cannot progress well in meditation. The more steady you are in your asana the more you will be able to concentrate with a one-pointed mind. If you can be steady in a posture even for one hour, you will be able to acquire a one-pointed mind and feel the infinite peace and soulful bliss inside you.

When sitting in the posture think, 'I am firm as a rock. Nothing can shake me.' Give these suggestions to the mind a dozen times. Then the asana will quickly become steady. You must become like a living statue when you sit for dhyana. Then only will your asana be steady. After one year of regular practice you will be able to sit for three hours at a stretch.

For most people it will be initially difficult to sit in one pose for a very long time. However, they should not despair but persevere with the premeditative exercises. They will find, much to their surprise, that even the meditative poses become possible to sit in for a short time. At this stage they should progressively prolong the duration by half a minute daily. Even people with stiff bodies should eventually be able to sit in padmasana, if they persevere and do not slacken their daily practice of premeditative exercises. The ability to sit in padmasana is not only dependent on the flexibility of the body but also on the state of mind. In other words, if the practitioner believes in his own mind that he will eventually be able to sit in padmasana then it is almost certain that he will. Such is the close relationship between

the mind and the body; the mind prepares the body for the role it suggests.

The classical meditative asanas are :

- a) padmasana
- b) siddhasana (for men)
- c) siddha yoni asana (for women)
- d) swastikasana

Simplified meditative asanas for beginners are :

- a) sukhasana
- b) ardha padmasana

Subsidiary asanas which can also be usefully employed :

- a) vajrasana
- b) ananda madirasana
- c) padadirasana

These last three will be discussed in the following chapter on asanas to be performed in or from vajrasana. Other asanas can also be used for meditational practices but not at a very high level.

Precautions

If there is severe pain in the legs after some time in a meditative asana, slowly unlock the legs and massage them. Again sit in the asana. Do not, on any account, use undue force or strain to sit in the asana.

Note

Some of these asanas, e.g. padmasana, may be more difficult than others in the beginners section. They have been included here as the ability to assume them easily is needed for many asanas in the middle group as well as for meditation.

PADMASANA



Padmasana (the lotus pose)

Sit with the legs extended forward.

Fold one leg and place its foot on the top of the opposite thigh.

The sole of the foot must be upward and the heel should touch the pelvic bone.

Fold the other leg and place its foot on top of the other thigh.

Note

Padmasana can be practised in conjunction with either gyana mudra or chin mudra (see the chapter on mudras for details).

When practising padmasana the spine must be steady and completely upright as though it is fixed to the ground. Many practitioners, especially beginners, find this asana is easier to maintain if they place a low cushion under their buttocks before assuming the pose.

Precautions

This asana should not be attempted until the practitioner has developed supple legs by doing the premeditative exercises.

Limitations

Not to be practised by persons with sciatica or sacral infections.

Benefits

When mastered, padmasana allows the practitioner to hold his body completely steady for long periods of time. As the body and mind are connected and control each other, steadiness of the body brings steadiness of mind. This steadiness is the first step towards productive meditation.

This asana directs the proper flow of prana from mooladhara chakra (in the perineum) to sahasrara (in the head).

Padmasana tones the coccygeal and sacral nerves by supplying them with an extra flow of blood. The normally large blood flow into the legs is redirected to the abdominal region.

Padmasana helps to clear up many physical, nervous and emotional problems.

It also stimulates the digestive process.

SIDDHASANA



Siddhasana (the accomplished pose)

Sit with the legs extended forward.

Fold the right leg and place the sole of its foot flat against the left thigh with the heel pressing the perineum, the area between the genitals and the anus. Fold the left leg and place its foot on top of the right calf.

Press the pelvic bone with the left heel directly above the genitals.

Push the toes and the outer edge of this foot into the space between the right calf and thigh muscles. It may be necessary to move and replace the right leg for this. Grasp the right toes, either from above or below the left calf, and pull them upward into the space between the left thigh and calf.

The legs should now be locked with the knees on the ground and the left heel directly above the right heel. Make the spine steady, straight and erect as though it were planted in the ground.

Note

Siddhasana can only be practised by men.

It can be practised with either leg upward and is always done in conjunction with gyana mudra or chin mudra (see chapter on mudras).

Many aspirants, especially beginners, find it easier to assume and maintain siddhasana for long periods if their buttocks are slightly elevated by a cushion.

Limitations

Siddhasana should not be practised by persons with sciatica or sacral infections.

Benefits

Siddhasana is a meditative pose in which one can maintain the spinal steadiness necessary for long, productive meditation.

It automatically activates the two sexually related psychomuscular locks (moola bandha and vajroli mudra) which redirect sexual nerve impulses back up the spinal cord to the brain. It gives the practitioner control over the sexual function, which he can use either to maintain brahmacharya and redirect the sexual energy upward for spiritual purposes, or to gain greater control over the sensory sexual function. Siddhasana has a calming effect on the entire nervous system.

SIDDHA YONI ASANA



Siddha yoni asana (the female accomplished pose)

Sit with the legs extended in front of you.

Fold the right leg and place the sole of the foot flat against the inner left thigh.

Place the heel inside the labia majora of the vagina.

Fold the left leg and place its foot on the top of the right calf and thigh, and pull the right toes up into the space between the calf and thigh.

Make the spine fully erect and straight as though it were planted solidly in the earth at the bottom.

Note

Siddha yoni asana is the hitherto unpublished female form of siddhasana.

It can be practised with either leg uppermost, and is best done without underwear.

It is always used in conjunction with gyana mudra. Many practitioners, especially beginners, find this

pose easiest to assume and to maintain for long periods of time if they place a low cushion under their buttocks.

Limitations

Siddha yoni asana should not be practised by any women with sciatica or sacral infections.

Benefits

Siddha yoni asana is an excellent meditative pose which allows the female aspirant to maintain the physical steadiness necessary for productive meditation. It has direct effects on the nerve plexuses which control the female reproductive system. It gives control over the neuropsychic impulses which are used by the yogi for spiritual, meditative accomplishment, and by the householder for sexual enjoyment.

SWASTIKASANA

Swastikasana (the auspicious pose)

Assume the base position, fold the left leg and place the foot near the right thigh muscles.

Similarly, bend the right leg and push it in the space between the left thigh and calf muscles.

The toes of both feet should lie between the thighs and calves of the two legs.

The hands can be placed on the knees in gyana or chin mudra (see chapter on mudras), or they can be placed on the lap.

For illustration, see siddhasana.

Note

This is the easiest classical meditative asana.

Limitations

Swastikasana should not be done by people with sciatica or sacral infections.

Benefits

The same as siddhasana and siddha yoni asana but at a lower level since moola bandha and vajroli mudra are not automatically performed. This is because the perineum is not pressed.

SUKHASANA



Sukhasana (the easy pose)

Sit with the legs stretched in front of the body.
Fold the right foot under the left thigh.
Fold the left foot under the right thigh.
Place the hands on the knees.
Keep the head, neck and back straight.

Variation

Sukhasana can be practised for longer periods of time if a cloth is tied around the back and knees.
This is the ideal meditative pose for beginners who have difficulty sitting in any of the classical meditative poses.

Note

Once the practitioner can comfortably do any of the other meditative asanas, sukhasana should be disregarded.

ARDHA PADMASANA



Ardha padmasana (the half lotus pose)

Sit with feet stretched in front of the body.

Fold the left leg and place the left foot beside the right thigh.

Fold the right leg and place the right foot on top of the left thigh.

Keep the back, neck and head straight.

Note

This pose is to be practised in preference to sukhasana. By alternately placing each foot in the elevated position, the practitioner will slowly prepare his legs for the practice of padmasana and the other classical meditative poses.

Limitations

Not to be done by sufferers of sciatica and sacral ailments.

Benefits

The same as for padmasana but at a reduced level.

BADDHA YONI ASANA



Baddha yoni asana (the source pose)

Sit in one of the meditative asanas.

Perform yoni mudra (see chapter on mudras).

Concentration

On bindu chakra (see appendix)

Benefits

This is an excellent asana for directing the mind inward and freeing it from distractions of the external world.

It is one of the most important asanas in nada yoga, the yoga of psychic sounds.

Physical benefits are the same as the meditative asana assumed, though this pose is also very effective in relieving diseases of the eyes, nose and brain.

ASANAS PERFORMED IN OR FROM VAJRASANA

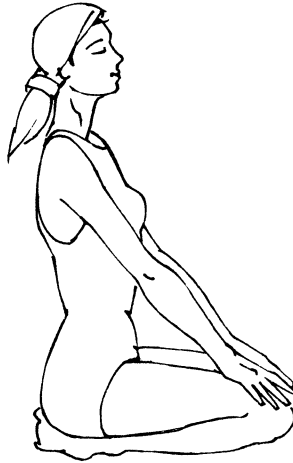
Vajra is the name of a major nadi (pranic channel) which is directly connected with the genito-urinary system. It is said that if you can consciously control this nadi at will you can become very powerful. It regulates the sexual energy in the body.

This nadi is the weapon of Indra, king of all the devas (gods). In the same way our mind is the king of all the senses. By controlling the vajra nadi, the mind is able to control the sexual energy.

Thus vajrasana and the asanas performed in or from vajrasana are very efficacious in many ways and are also reasonably easy to do.

Beginners may find that their feet ache after a short time in vajrasana. To remedy this, they should release vajrasana, sit with their legs stretched forward, hold the ankles and shake their feet vigorously one after the other, until the stiffness disappears. Then they can resume vajrasana.

VAJRASANA



Vajrasana (the thunderbolt pose)

Stand on the knees with the feet stretched backward and big toes crossed.

The knees should be together, heels apart.

Lower the buttocks onto the insides of the feet, the heels at the sides of the hips.

Place the hands on the knees, palms downward.

Duration

Practise vajrasana as much as possible, especially straight after meals for at least 5 minutes to enhance the digestive function.

Concentration

On the normal breathing process. This will bring tranquility to the mind if practised with the eyes closed.

Note

Vajrasana is the prayer pose of the Muslims and the meditation pose of the Japanese Buddhists.

Benefits

Vajrasana alters the flow of blood and nervous impulses in the pelvic and visceral regions.

This pose increases the efficiency of the entire digestive system. It is also useful as an after-meal posture, especially for persons who suffer from indigestion. It reduces the blood flow to the genitals and massages the nerve fibers which feed them. This makes it useful for men with dilated testicles.

It strengthens the pelvic muscles which helps to prevent hernia and aids women in childbirth.

It is the only meditative pose for persons with sciatica and sacral infections.

It is very useful in relieving stomach ailments such as peptic ulcer or hyperacidity.

SIMHASANA



Simhasana (the lion pose)

Sit in vajrasana with the knees apart, and if possible face the sun.

Place the hands between the knees with the fingers pointing towards the body.

Lean forward, resting the body on the straight arms.

Tilt the head backward, open the mouth and extend the tongue as much as possible.

Open the eyes wide and gaze at the eyebrow centre.

Inhale through the nose. While slowly exhaling, produce a clear, steady `ah´ sound from the throat.

Variation

Move the tongue slowly from side to side, while making a long `ah´ sound.

Breath

Inhale and exhale slowly in unison with the `ah´ sound.

Duration

To maintain general health do it 10 times.

For specific ailments practise it for extended periods of time.

Concentration

On the sound produced.

Benefits

This is an excellent asana for removing diseases of the throat, nose, ears and mouth.

It is useful for people who stutter.

Simhasana develops a strong and beautiful voice.

VEERASANA



Veerasana (the hero's pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Place the right foot beside the left knee.

Put the right elbow on the right knee, rest the head on the palm of the right hand.

Close the eyes and relax.

Practise alternately on the opposite side.

Breath

Normal.

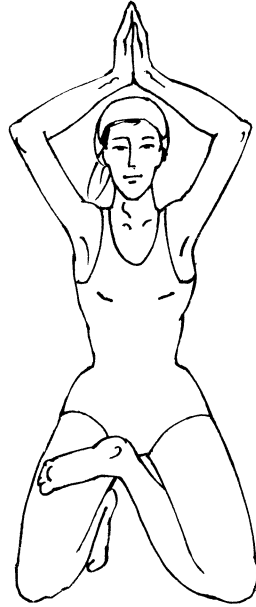
Concentration

On bhrumadhya or ajna chakra.

Benefits

This is a very good pose for concentration or deep thinking.

VEERASANA



Veerasana variation

Sit on the heels in vajrasana.

Place one foot on the top of the opposite thigh, in half lotus fashion.

Place the palms together in front of the chest in the prayer position. Close the eyes.

Rise onto the knees by using the free leg as a lever.

Place hands, with the palms still together, above the head with the fingers pointing upwards.

Practise this once with each leg for as long as balance can be maintained.

Breath

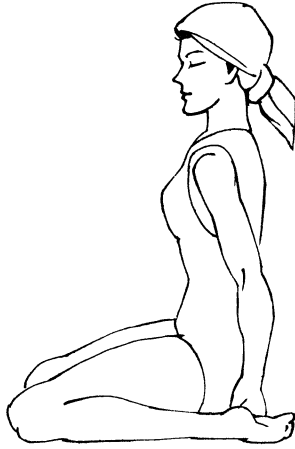
Retain the breath while rising onto the knees.

Practise normal breathing when steadied in the pose.

Benefits

This is a preliminary balancing pose which aids in stabilizing the nervous system.

ANANDA MADIRASANA



Ananda madirasana (the intoxicating bliss pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Place the hands on the heels, palms facing downward. Keep the trunk erect and fix the eyes on the trikuti (space between the eyebrows).

Breath

Slow and deep.

Duration

For spiritual benefits sit in this pose for extended periods.

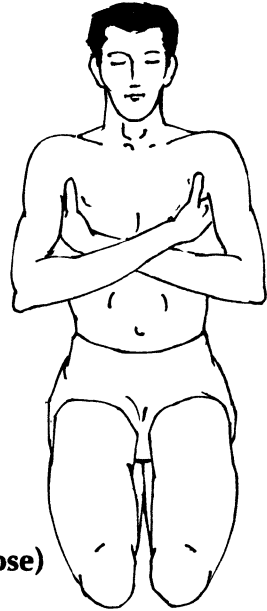
Concentration

In the early stages of the practice, concentration should be directed to the breathing process. When sufficient relaxation has been achieved, concentration should be transferred to ajna chakra.

Benefits

This asana is used primarily to awaken ajna chakra, though it also relaxes the nervous system and calms the mind.

PADADIRASANA



Padadirasana (the breath balancing pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Cross the arms in front of the chest, placing the hands under the armpits with the thumbs pointing upward in front.

Close the eyes and be aware of the breathing process.

Breath

Slow and rhythmic.

Duration

To prepare for pranayama, practise for 10 to 15 minutes. For spiritual purposes practise for extended periods of time.

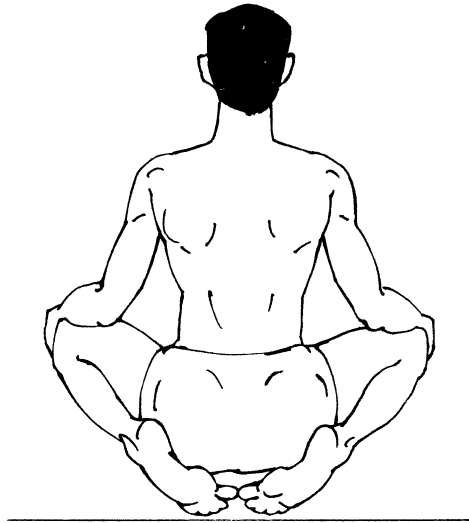
Concentration

On the breathing process.

Benefits

This simple asana prepares the respiration for pranayama. Putting the hands under the armpits tends to equalize the flow through each nostril.

BHADRASANA



Bhadrasana (the gentle pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Separate the knees as far as possible, while keeping the toes in contact with the ground.

Then separate the feet just enough to allow the buttocks to rest flat on the floor between the feet.

Try to separate the knees further, but without strain.

Place the hands on the knees, palms downward.

When the body is comfortable, practice nasikagra drishti (concentration on the nosetip).

Breath

Slow and rhythmic.

Duration

For extended periods of time, if done for spiritual

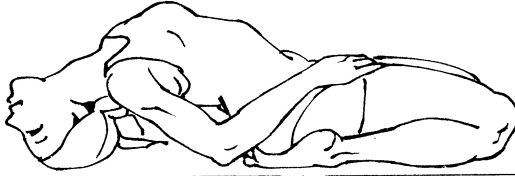
aims.

To loosen the legs, a few minutes daily is sufficient. If any strain is experienced, terminate the asana.

Benefits

This is predominantly a pose for spiritual practices, since its very position has a stimulating influence on mooladhara chakra.

SUPTA VAJRASANA



Supta vajrasana (the sleeping thunderbolt pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Bend backward, supported on the arms and elbows, the head touches the ground with the back arched. Place the hands on the thighs and make sure the knees stay fully on the ground.

Close the eyes and relax the body.

Breath

Slow and deep.

Duration

For physical benefits a few minutes is sufficient.

For spiritual benefits do for extended periods of time.

Concentration

Physical : on the back, abdomen or respiration.

Spiritual : on swadhisthana chakra at the coccyx.

Sequence

It is a good counterpose to forward bending asanas.

Precautions

Care should be taken not to strain the muscles and ligaments of the thighs and knees by forcing the knees to touch the ground.

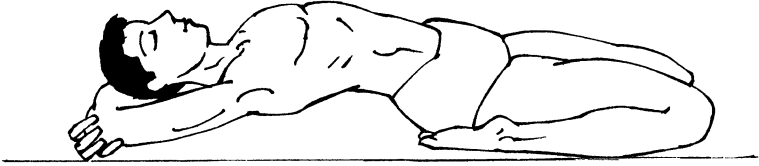
Limitations

Should not be practised by sufferers of sacral ailments.

Benefits

This is a good asana for abdominal ailments, especially constipation. It tones the spinal nerves.

SUPTA VAJRASANA



Supta vajrasana variation

The method is the same as described for the basic form, except the top of the head is not placed on the floor in the final pose.

The back of the head is lowered on to the folded arms as shown.

Try to keep the knees together and on the ground.
Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Benefits

This is an important variation which intensifies the stretch of the abdominal region, though it does not exercise the neck so much.

Note

The basic form and the variation should be performed one after the other, spending half your time in each pose.

SHASHANKASANA



Shashankasana (the pose of the hare)

Sit in vajrasana, placing the hands on the knees. While inhaling, raise the arms so that they are stretched vertically above the head.

Exhale while bending the trunk forward, keeping the arms in line with the trunk. At the end of the movement, the hands and forehead should rest on the floor in front of the body.

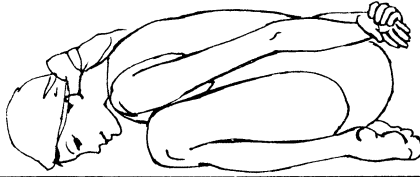
Retain the breath for a short time in the final position, and then while inhaling, return slowly to the position where the trunk and arms are vertical.

Slowly return to the starting position while exhaling. Repeat up to 10 times.

Note

Normal breathing or even slow deep breathing may be practised in the prostrate position to prolong the asana.

SHASHANKASANA



Shashankasana variation 1

Sit in vajrasana and close the eyes.

Hold the right wrist with the left hand behind the back. Inhale, and then while exhaling, slowly bend the trunk forward so that the forehead rests on the floor.

Remain in the final position for a comfortable length of time while breathing normally.

Return to the starting position while inhaling.

Shashankasana variation 2

Sit in vajrasana and place the fists in the lower portion of the abdomen.

Inhale, then exhale and slowly bend forward until the head touches the floor.

The fist will be exerting pressure on the lower abdomen and intestines.

Retain the breath outside for as long as possible.

Relax and inhale.

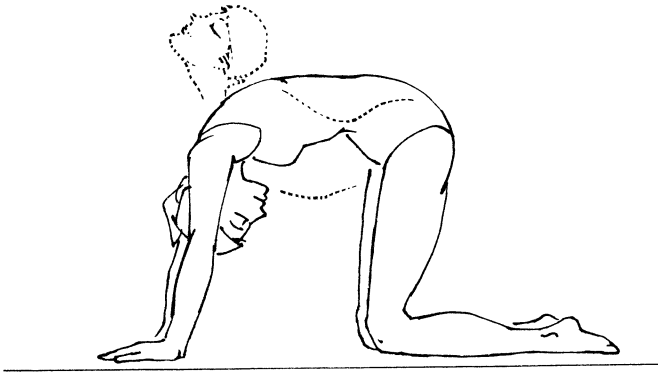
Concentration

On mooladhara or manipura chakra, or on the breath.

Benefits

This asana tones the pelvic muscles, relaxes the sciatic nerves and regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands, relieving constipation, sciatica and anger. It is beneficial for women who have an underdeveloped pelvis and is very effective for removing sexual disorders in general.

MARJARIASANA



Marjariasana (the cat stretch pose)

Sit in vajrasana.

Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees.

Simultaneously place both hands flat on the floor in front of the body, beneath the shoulders.

Inhale, depress the spine and raise the head.

Exhale, lower the head and arch the spine.

Again, depress the spine and raise the head.

Keep the arms straight and vertical.

Do 10 full rounds.

Benefits

This asana renders the neck, shoulders and spine very flexible.

It gently tones the female reproductive system and is excellent for pregnant women up to 3 months.

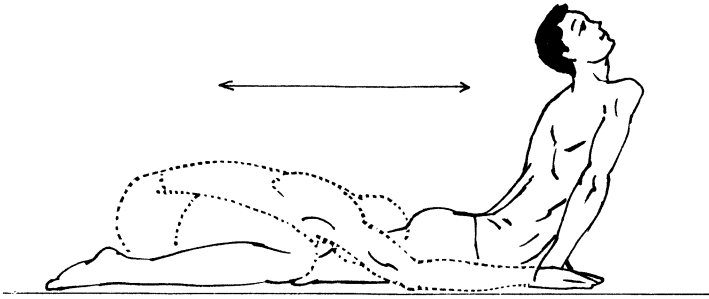
Women suffering from menstrual irregularities and leucorrhoea will find relief from this asana.

It may also be practised at the time of menstruation for relief from cramps.

Note

The benefits of this asana are greatly enhanced if the stomach is contracted during exhalation.

SHASHANK BHUJANGASANA



Shashank bhujangasana (the striking cobra pose)

Assume marjaryasana, placing the hands about 18 inches apart. Draw the buttocks backward into shashankasana. Without displacing the hands, move the chest forward, sliding it just above the ground until it is in line with the hands. Move the chest further forward and then upward as you straighten the arms and lower the abdomen to the ground. In this position the back should be arched and the head bent backward, as in the final position of bhujangasana. Slowly resume shashankasana, then return to marjaryasana. Resume shashankasana, then come forward into bhujangasana. Practice up to 10 times.

Breath

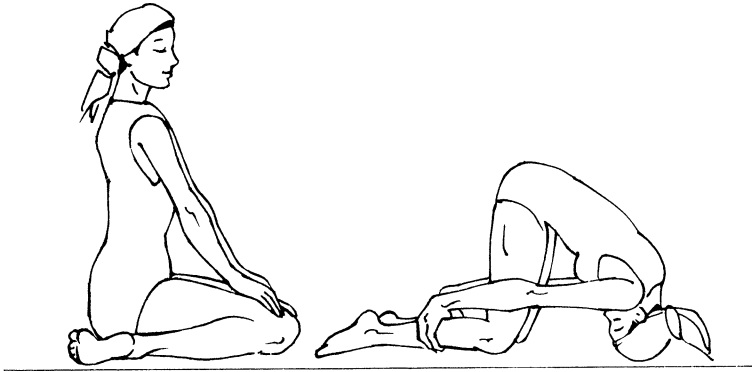
Breathe normally in marjaryasana. Inhale while moving the body forward to assume bhujangasana. Exhale while assuming shashankasana.

Benefits

This asana gently tones the female reproductive organs and is excellent for pregnant women. It is

also useful for women who suffer from menstrual disorders. It tones and improves the functioning of the liver and visceral organs. It relieves sciatica, slipped disc, general back pains and displaced ribs by gently stretching and massaging the entire back and the neck.

PRANAMASANA



Pranamasana (the bowing pose)

Sit in vajrasana, spine erect and hands on the knees. Grasp the lower calves from underneath. Bend forward and place the crown of the head on the ground. Raise the buttocks so that the thighs are vertical. Return to vajrasana. Repeat up to 10 times.

Breath

Inhale in vajrasana, and while rising. Exhale while bending. Practise normal breathing in the pranam position.

Sequence

This asana should not be practised at the beginning of a series.

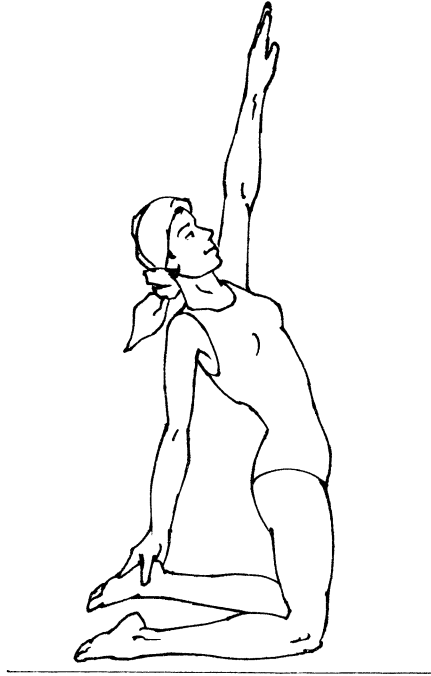
Limitations

Not for people with vertigo or high blood pressure.

Benefits

This asana provides a rich supply of blood to the head. As a preparatory pose for the headstand, it allows the brain to adapt to the increased blood flow and pressure encountered in sirshasana. It gives many of sirshasana's benefits to a lesser degree.

USHTRASANA



Ushtrasana (the camel pose)

Sit in vajrasana with the knees apart and ankles at the sides of the buttocks.

Inhale, rise onto the knees and stretch the arms to the sides.

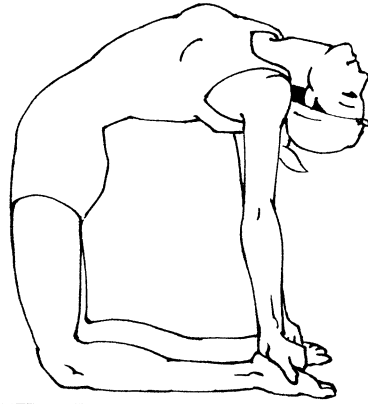
Exhale, twist the torso to the right, bend backward and grasp the left heel with the right hand. Look at the left arm, which should be vertically raised over the head with the palm facing forward.

Allow the upper body weight to rest on the left heel. Inhale, raise the torso and return to the centre kneeling position.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 10 times on each side as a dynamic pose, and up to 1 minute on each side as a static pose.

USHTRASANA



Ushtrasana variation

Sit in vajrasana with feet and knees slightly apart. Stand on your knees and stretch the arms to the sides. Lean backward and place the hands on the heels. Stretch the neck backward and let the body weight rest on the arms. Arch as far back as possible. Return to kneeling position, then back to vajrasana.

Breath

Inhale while assuming the kneeling position. Exhale while bending backward and while returning to vajrasana.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 10 times as a dynamic exercise. Hold up to 3 minutes as a static pose.

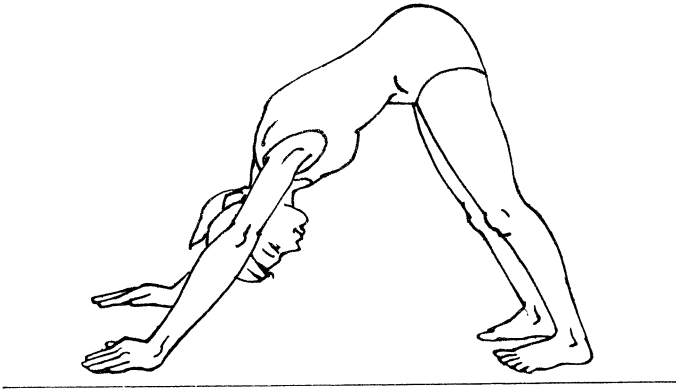
Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi or anahata chakra.
Physical: on the abdomen, thyroid gland or spine.

Benefits

This asana is beneficial for the digestive, excretory and reproductive systems. It stretches the stomach and intestines, eliminating constipation. It is useful for removing backache, lumbago and rounded back.

SUMERU ASANA



Sumeru asana (the summit pose)

Assume vajrasana.

Move into the cat pose (marjariasana).

Raise the buttocks and straighten the knees.

The back and arms should form a straight line with the head between the elbows. The body should be in the position of a triangle.

Place the heels on the ground. They may be repeatedly lowered and raised during the round if they cannot be kept down.

Raise the heels and return to the cat pose.

Then return to vajrasana.

Breath

Inhale while raising the buttocks.

Exhale while returning to the cat pose.

Practise normal breathing in the final position.

Duration

Practise up to 10 times.

Stay in the final pose up to 30 seconds.

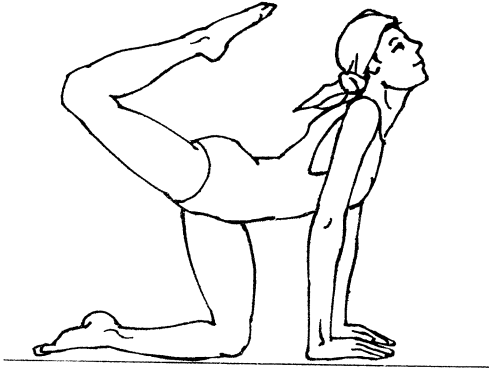
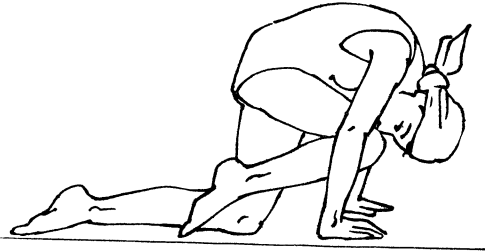
Limitations

This asana should not be practised by sufferers of vertigo or high blood pressure.

Benefits

This asana stretches the Achille's tendons, hamstring and calf muscles, and tones the sciatic nerves.

VYAGHRASANA



Vyaghrasana (the tiger pose)

Assume vajrasana.

Move into marjariasana and look forward.

Stretch the right leg back, parallel to the ground.

Bend the right knee and point the toes toward the head. Look upward.

Swing the bent leg under the hips and press the knee against the chest. Do not allow the toes to touch the ground.

Look down and touch the nose to the knee. The spine will be convex.

Move the foot straight out behind you and again stretch the leg.

Then bend the knee and repeat these movements.

Breath

Inhale while stretching the leg backwards.

Retain while bending the knee.

Exhale while swinging the knee to the chest.

Duration

Perform this asana 5 times with each leg.

Concentration

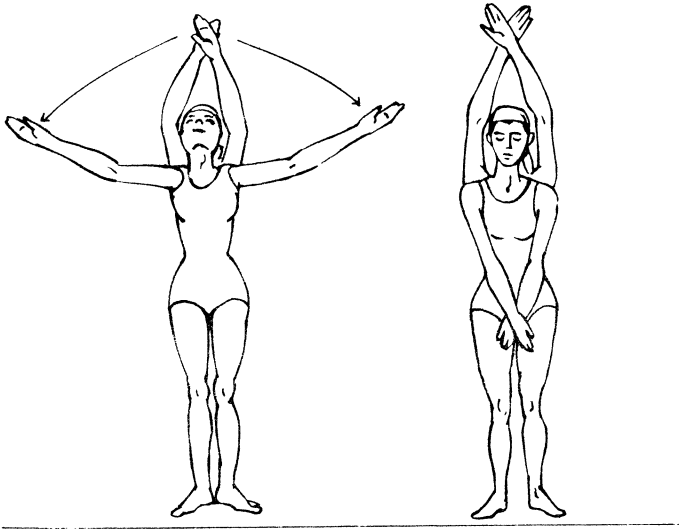
On relaxing the whole body and on the physical movement.

Benefits

This asana exercises the spine, relaxes the sciatic nerves and tones the female reproductive organs. It is especially beneficial for women after childbirth and those who have given birth to many children. It also relieves sciatica and reduces excess fat on the hips and thighs.

Standing and Bending Asanas

HASTA UTTANASANA



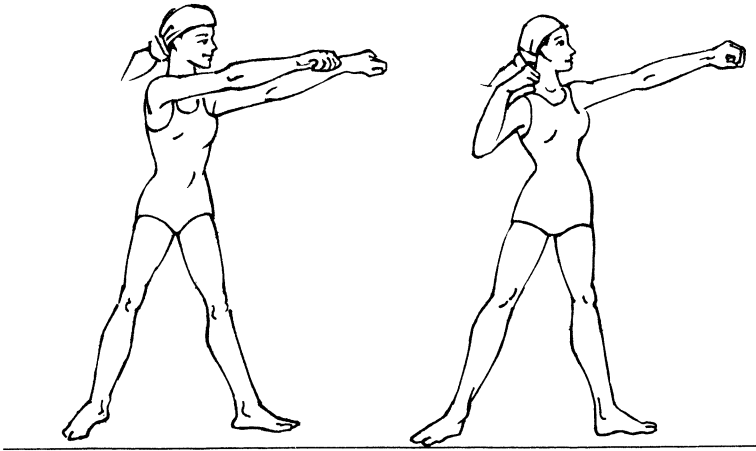
Hasta uttanasana (the hand stretching pose)

Stand erect with feet together and arms at the side. Cross the hands in front of the stomach. Inhale and raise the arms above and behind the head. Bend the neck backward. Spread the arms wide so that they form a straight line at shoulder level. Retain the breath while the hands are raised above the head. Recross the wrists and lower the arms as you exhale, so that they are once again in front of the stomach. Repeat the process 10 times.

Benefits

This asana rectifies round shoulders and loosens the shoulder joints. It stimulates the blood circulation and the conscious brain centers. It stretches the spine and tones the spinal nerves.

AKARNA DHANURASANA



Akarna dhanurasana (the bow and arrow pose)

Stand erect with the feet a shoulder's breadth apart and the arms at the sides.

Take a short step forward with the right leg.

Clench the right fist and stretch it upward and sideways so that it is over the right foot and slightly above eye level. Clench the left fist and bring it slightly behind the right fist. Gaze over the right fist as though you are holding a bow.

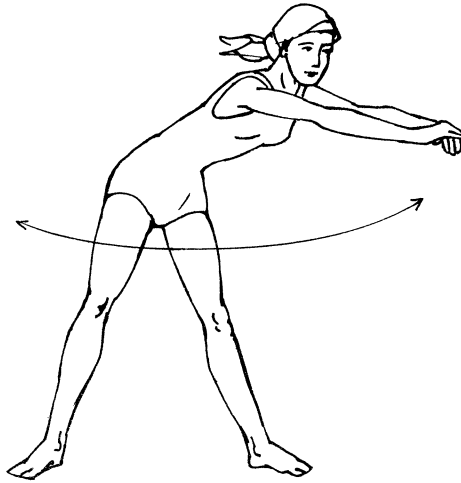
Inhale and pull the left fist back to the left ear, as if

drawing a bow. The head should move back slightly with this motion so the neck muscles become taut. Exhale and release the imaginary bow string. Relax the neck and bring the left fist forward to the right fist. Practise 5 times on each side.

Benefits

Develops the biceps, pectoral and neck muscles.

KATI CHAKRASANA



Kati chakrasana (the waist rotating pose)

Stand erect with the feet about 2 feet apart.

Interlock the fingers in front of the navel.

Raise the arms overhead, rotate the wrists, turning the palms upward.

Bend forward at the hips to form a right angle between the legs and back.

Watch the hands and keep the back straight.

Slowly swivel the trunk to the extreme right, then to the extreme left, and return to the right.

After the fifth movement to the right, center the trunk and then return to the erect position.

Lower the arms.

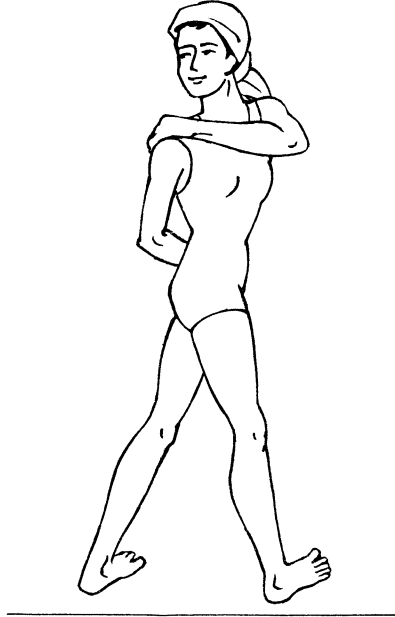
Practise 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms, swivelling to the right and resuming the erect position.

Exhale while bending the body, swivelling to the left and lowering the arms.

KATI CHAKRASANA



Kati chakrasana variation

Stand erect with the feet about 2 feet apart. Stretch the arms sideways at shoulder level. Twist the upper part of the body to the right, bringing the left hand to the right shoulder and wrapping the right arm around the trunk in a smooth motion. Repeat on the opposite side. Practise 10 times, breathing normally.

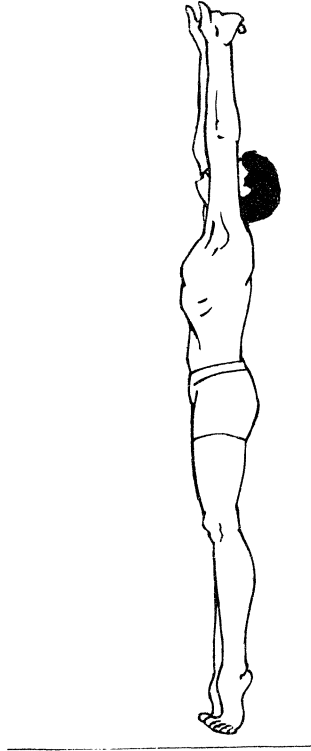
Note

This is one of the asanas used in the hatha yoga practice of shankhaprakshalana.

Benefits

This asana tones the waist, back and hip joints. It is useful for correcting spinal stiffness and postural defects. It helps to redistribute waistline fat.

TADASANA



Tadasana (the palm tree pose)

Stand erect with the feet 4 to 6 inches apart.

Raise the arms overhead with the palms facing upward, fingers interlocked and look up at the hands.

Lift the heels and feel as though you are being drawn upwards.

Completely stretch the body.

Slowly return the heels to the ground.

Practise 10 times.

Tadasana variation 1

Stand in tadasana with both arms overhead.

While balancing on the toes, lift one leg and extend it either forward or backward.

Repeat with the other leg.

Practise 10 times.

Breath

Keep the breath inside while on tiptoe.

Sequence

Tadasana is the standard counterpose to inverted asanas.

Benefits

Tadasana develops the rectus abdomini muscles and stretches the intestines.

It promotes proper spinal bone growth and clears up congestion of the spinal nerves at the points at which they emerge from the spinal column.

Walking 100 steps in tadasana after drinking 6 cups of water clears up non-chronic intestinal blockage.

Beneficial during the first six months of pregnancy.

Note

This asana is also used in shankhaprakshalana.

Tadasana variation 2

Stand erect with the wrists crossed over the head.

Bend the body at the waist so that the back is horizontal. In one movement rise up on the toes and stretch the spine upward. Spread the arms wide so that they form a straight line at shoulder level. Raise them above

the head and recross the wrists. Lower the heels and drop the arms back to the sides of the body. Practise 10 times.

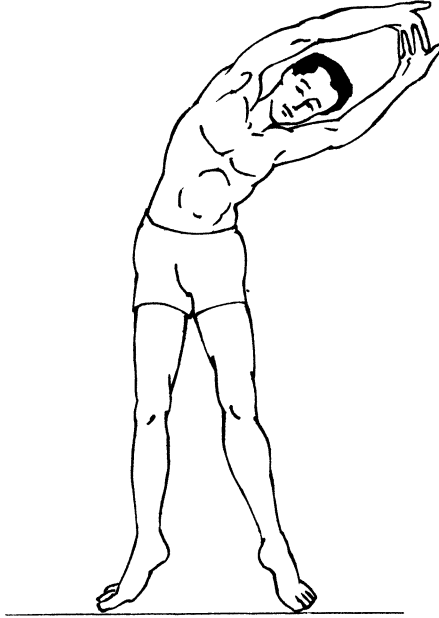
Breath

Inhale while erect, and while raising and stretching the trunk. Exhale while lowering and bending.

Benefits

Same as the basic pose and variation 1.

TIRYAKA TADASANA



Tiryaka Tadasana (the wind blown tree pose)

Assume tadasana.

Bend from the waist, first to the right and then to the left.

Bend 10 times to each side, then relax the body and stand with the feet flat on the ground.

Note

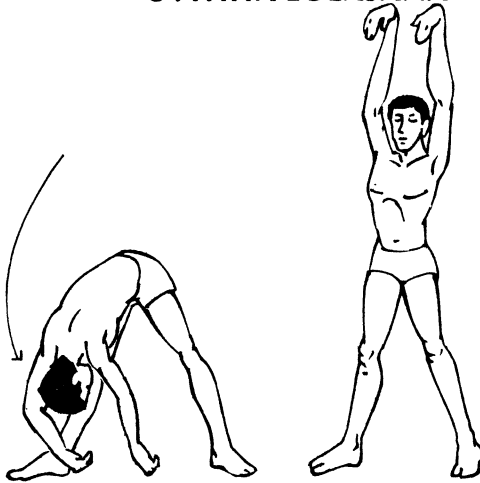
If you find it difficult to balance on the toes, you may do this asana standing flat on the feet until you develop a better sense of balance. You should still try to

balance on tiptoe every time you practise the asana, just for a few seconds, so that you slowly improve your sense of balance.

This is the second asana to be performed during shankhaprakshalana.

All other details as for tadasana.

UTTHITA LOLASANA



Utthita lolasana (The swinging while standing pose)

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart.

Raise the arms over the head with the elbows straight and wrists limply bent. Swing the trunk downward from the waist. Allow the arms and head to swing in and out of the space between the legs, without tension. After 5 complete swings, return to the erect position, with the arms raised.

Repeat up to 10 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms and on each of the 5 upswings. Exhale on each downswing and at the end of the round.

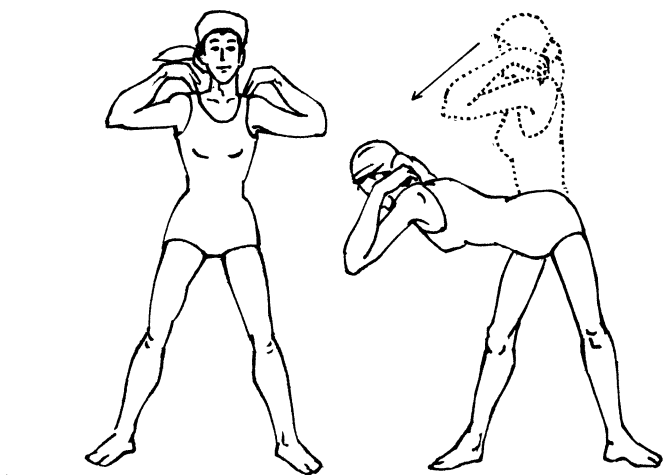
Precautions

Not to be practised by persons with vertigo or high blood pressure.

Benefits

This asana gets rid of tiredness by stimulating the circulation and the spinal nerves. It stretches the hamstring, hip and back muscles and visceral organs.

MERU PRISHTHASANA



meru prishthasana variation

Meru prishthasana (the spine and back posture)

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart.

Place the fingertips on the shoulders with the elbows pointing sideways.

Swing the upper torso as far as possible to the right and let it return to the center.

Do this 10 times.

Repeat on the left side.

Breath

Inhale while raising the fingertips and on each centering return swing.

Exhale while twisting to the sides.

Stress is on inhalation.

Exhalation should be automatic.

Meru prishthasana variation

Stand erect with the feet apart and fingertips on the shoulders.

Twist the body to the extreme right.

Bend at the waist to form a right angle.

Maintain the head and spine in a straight line.

Raise the trunk, recenter the body, and lower the arms.

Repeat on the opposite side.

Breath

Inhale while raising the fingertips and the trunk.

Retain the breath while twisting to the sides.

Exhale when lowering the torso and the arms.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 5 times.

Benefits

This asana stretches the spine and redistributes waist-line fat deposits.

It also tones the back muscles.

UTTHANASANA



Utthanasana (the squat and rise pose)

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart.

Interlock the fingers in front of the abdomen and allow the arms to hang freely. Slowly bend the knees and lower the trunk about 8 inches. Return to the erect position. Again descend, this time slightly lower, then return to the erect position. Sink once more until the hands are 1 foot above the floor and rise again. Lower yourself to the fourth position with the hands touching the floor. Rise and relax.

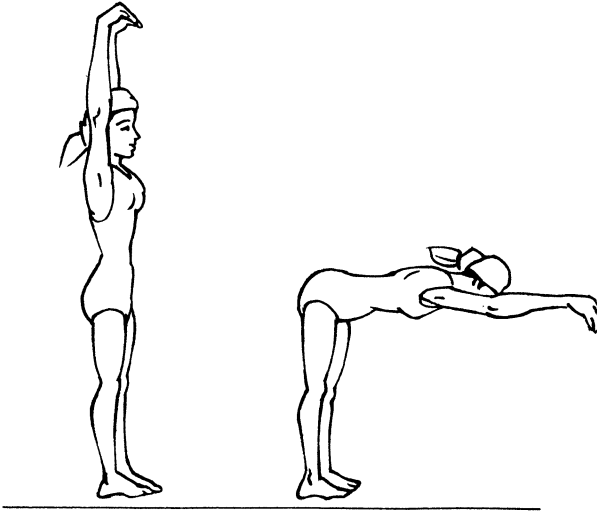
Repeat up to 10 times.

Benefits

This asana strengthens the uterine muscles, inner thighs, knees and ankles.

It is very beneficial for women during pregnancy.

SAMAKONASANA



Samakonasana (the right angle pose)

Stand with the feet together and arms at the sides. Raise the arms straight up with fingers pointing forward. Bend the body at the spinal base so that it forms a right angle.

Look forward but keep the spine straight.

Practise a maximum of 10 times.

Breath

Inhale while lifting the arms and raising trunk.

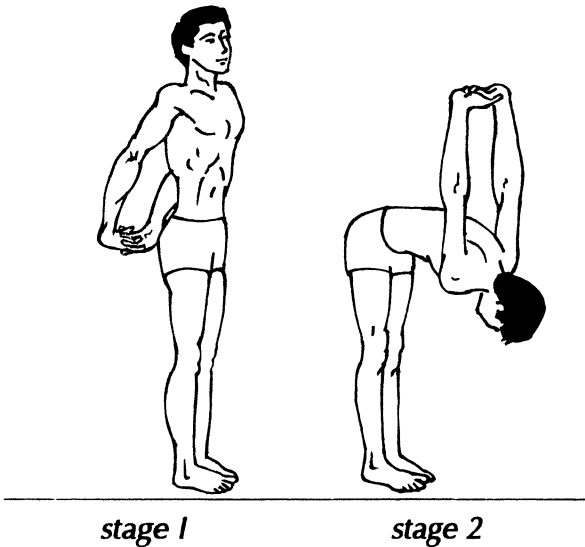
Exhale while bending forward.

Practise normal breathing in the right angle position.

Benefits

Rectifies spinal curvature and poor posture.

DWI KONASANA



Dwi konasana (the double angle pose)

Stand erect on a bare floor with the feet together. Extend the arms behind the back and interlock the fingers. Raise the hands as high as possible. Bend forward at the waist, stretch the arms upward and look as far forward as possible. Remain in the final pose for a short time and then return to an erect position. Repeat up to 10 times.

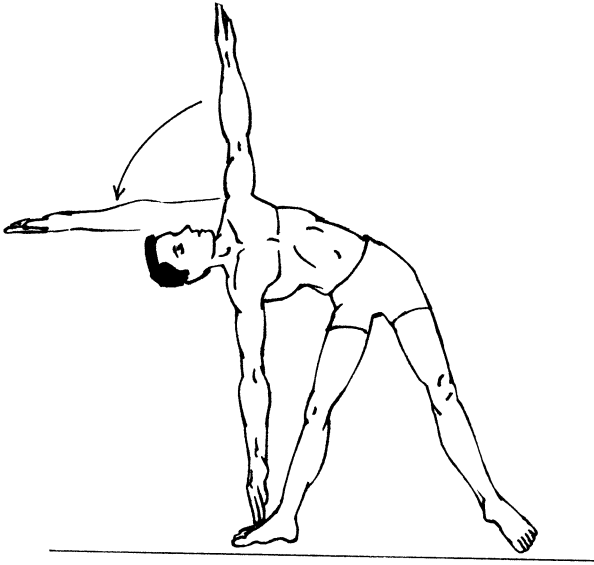
Breath

Inhale while the arms are forward and when returning to the erect position. Exhale while bending.

Benefits

This asana strengthens the intraspinal muscles between the upper spine and the shoulder blades, and develops the chest and neck. It is especially good for young, growing bodies.

TRIKONASANA



Trikonasana (the triangle stretch pose)

Stand erect with the feet about 3 feet apart.

Raise the arms sideways to form one straight line.

Turn the body to the right while bending the knees slightly. Bring the right hand to the right foot, keeping the two arms in line with each other. Look up at the left hand. Return to the standing position, keeping the arms in a straight line. Repeat to the opposite side.

Practise 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms. Exhale while bending.

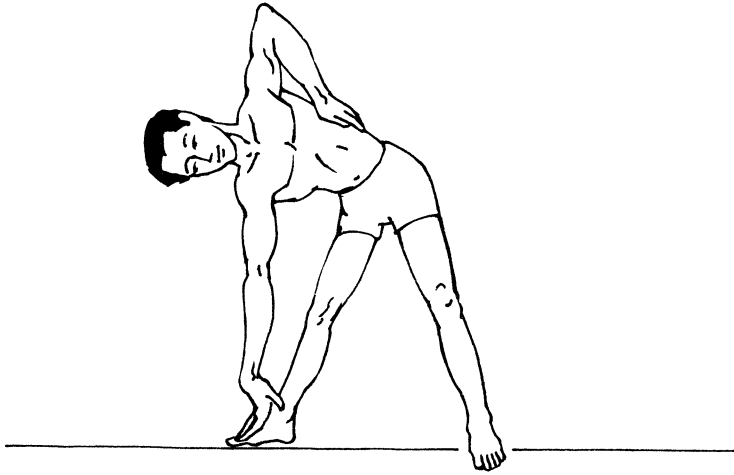
Inhale while straightening to the vertical position.

TRIKONASANA

Trikonasana variation 1

Repeat the basic form but instead of keeping the upper arm vertical in the final position, lower it over the ear and bring it parallel to the floor. In the final position turn the head upward and breathe as in the basic form. Practise 5 times.

TRIKONASANA



Trikonasana variation 2

Stand with the feet 3 feet apart.

Place the left palm on the side of the waist.

Bend slowly to the right side while sliding the right hand down the right leg towards the foot.

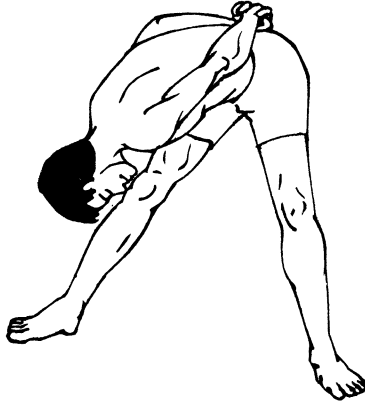
If you cannot touch the foot, do not use force.

Raise the body to the vertical position, sliding the right hand slowly up the leg. Repeat on the other side.

Breathe as in the basic form.

Practise 5 times.

TRIKONASANA



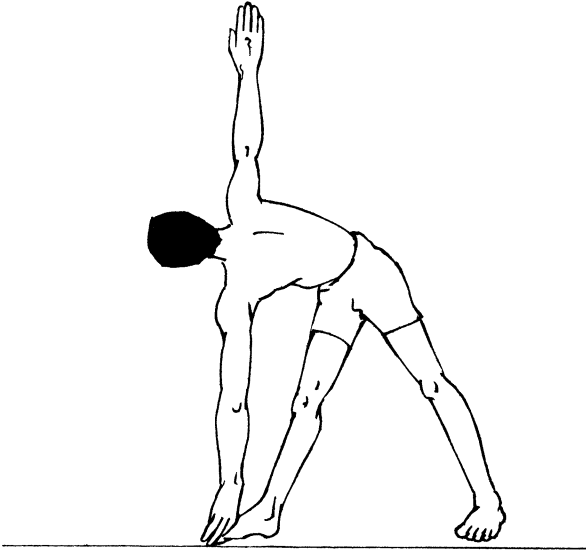
Trikonasana variation 3

Stand with the feet 3 feet apart.
Hold the wrist of the left hand behind the back.
Bend the body from the waist and try to touch the right knee with nose. Bend the right leg slightly if necessary.
Repeat on the other side.
Practise 5 times.

Breath

Inhale before bending the body and slowly exhale while the body is bent. Retain the breath for a short time in the final position. Inhale while returning to the upright position.

TRIKONASANA



Trikonasana variation 4

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart. Extend the arms horizontally to the sides. Bend the body at the hips to form a right angle. Look forward (a). Swivel the trunk and touch the right toes with the left hand (b). Watch the straight arm with the palm facing right. Swivel the trunk and assume a similar position on the other side (c). Center the trunk, return to an erect position and lower the arms. Practise each stage 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms and the trunk.

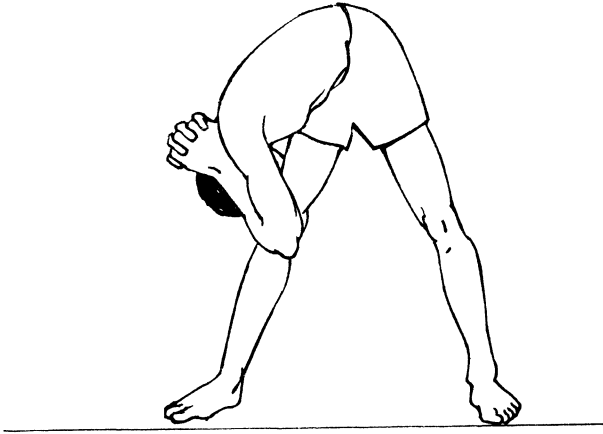
Retain while swivelling.

Exhale while bending the trunk and lowering the arms.

Benefits for all variations

Stimulates the nervous system and relieves nervous depression. Stimulates the appetite, improves digestion and removes constipation. Massages the spinal nerves, muscles of the lower back and abdominal organs.

DOLASANA



Dolasana (the pendulum pose)

Stand with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart.

Raise the arms and interlock the fingers behind the neck with the elbows pointing sideways.

Turn the upper part of the body slightly to the right.

Exhale and bend forward, bringing the head to the right knee.

Holding the breath outside, swing the head and upper trunk from the right knee to the left knee and back.

Repeat 3 times, and then return to the upright position and center the body.

Repeat the process but this time bend the trunk to the left knee from the upright position.

Practise 5 times to each side.

Note

Keep the legs straight throughout the whole asana.

Benefits

This is an excellent asana for making the arms, shoulders and back strong and supple.

It makes the waistline slim and strong and tones the spinal nerves in the lower back.

SURYA NAMASKARA

(Salutation to the sun)

This dynamic exercise is not traditionally regarded as part of yoga practices but it is such a good method of loosening up all the joints and muscles in the body, as well as massaging all the internal organs, that it has been included in this book. It is an excellent exercise to do in the mornings after taking a bath and before doing any other yogic techniques. If one feels tired at any time of the day, this exercise will restore lost vitality, both physically and mentally.

Surya namaskara is comprised of 12 positions, each of which corresponds to one of the 12 signs of the zodiac. One complete round of surya namaskara consists of these 12 positions performed in succession twice. Associated with each of the 12 positions is a mantra, which for optimum benefit should be repeated verbally or mentally.

PRANAMASANA



Position I : Pranamasana (the prayer pose)

Stand erect with the feet together.

Place the palms together in front of the chest.

Relax the whole body.

Breath

Normal.

Concentration

On anahata chakra.

Mantra

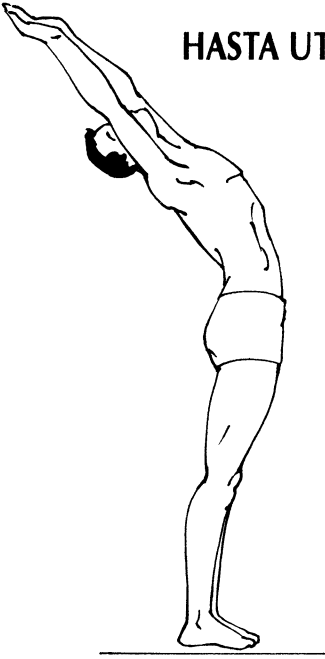
Om Mitraya Namaha

(Salutations to the friend of all)

Benefits

Establishes a state of concentration and calmness in preparation for the exercise to be done.

HASTA UTTANASANA



Position 2 : Hasta uttanasana (the raised arms pose)

Raise both arms above the head.

Keep the arms separated by one shoulder's width.

Bend the head and upper trunk backward.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms.

Concentration

On vishuddhi chakra.

Mantra

Om Ravaye Namaha

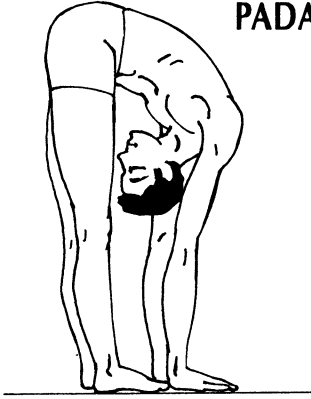
(Salutations to the shining one)

Benefits

Stretches the abdominal viscera, removing excess fat and improving digestion.

Exercises the arm and shoulder muscles, tones the spinal nerves and opens all the lung compartments.

PADAHASTASANA



Position 3 : Padahasthasana (the hand to foot pose)

Bend forward until the fingers or hands touch the ground on either side or in front of the feet.

Try to touch the knees with the forehead.

Do not strain.

Keep the legs straight.

Breath

Exhale as you bend forward.

Try to contract the abdomen in the final position to expel the maximum amount of air.

Concentration

On swadhisthana chakra.

Mantra

Om Suryāya Namaha

(Salutations to he who induces activity)

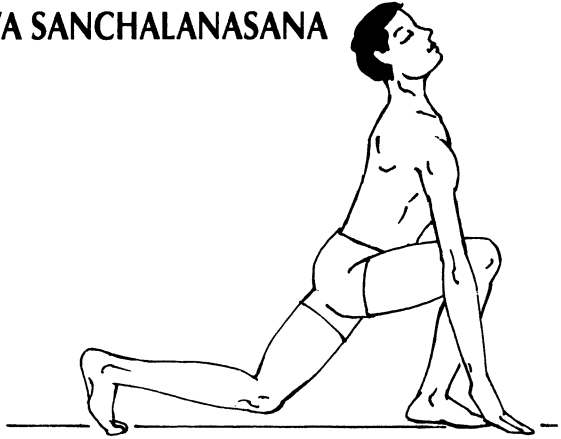
Benefits

Useful in eliminating or preventing stomach or abdominal ailments.

Reduces surplus fat in the abdominal region, improves digestion and helps to remove constipation.

Improves blood circulation, makes the spine supple and tones the spinal nerves.

ASHWA SANCHALANASANA



Position 4 : Ashwa sanchalanasana (the equestrian pose)

Stretch the right leg back as far as possible.

At the same time bend the left knee but keep the left foot in the same position. The arms should remain straight and in the same position.

In the final position, the weight of the body should be supported on the two hands, the left foot, the right knee and the toes of the right foot. The head should be tilted backward, the back arched and the gaze directed upward.

Breath

Inhale while stretching the right leg backward.

Concentration

On ajna chakra.

Mantra

Om Bhānave Namaha

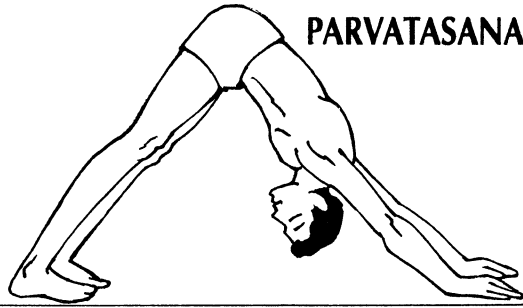
(Salutations to he who illumines)

Benefits

Massages the abdominal organs and improves their functioning.

The muscles of the legs are strengthened.

Nervous balance is attained.



Position 5: Parvatasana (the mountain pose)

Straighten the left leg and place the left foot beside the right foot.

Raise the buttocks in the air and lower the head so that it lies between the two arms; the body should form two sides of a triangle.

The legs and arms should be straight in the final position.

Try to keep the heels in contact with the ground in this pose.

Breath

Exhale as you straighten the left leg and bend the trunk.

Concentration

On vishuddhi chakra.

Mantra

Om Khagāya Namaha

(Salutations to he who moves quickly in the sky)

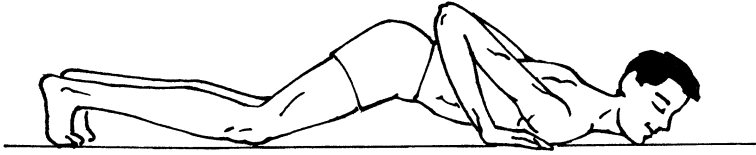
Benefits

Strengthens the nerves and muscles in the arms and legs.

Bends the spine in the opposite direction to the previous pose and so further helps to make it supple.

Tones the spinal nerves and supplies them with a fresh flow of blood.

ASHTANGANAMASKARA



Position 6: Ashtanga namaskara (the salute with 8 limbs)

Lower the body to the ground so that in the final position only the toes of both feet, the two knees, the chest, the hands and the chin touch the ground.

The hips and abdomen should be raised slightly off the ground.

Breath

The breath should be held outside. No respiration.

Concentration

On manipura chakra.

Mantra

Om pushne namaha

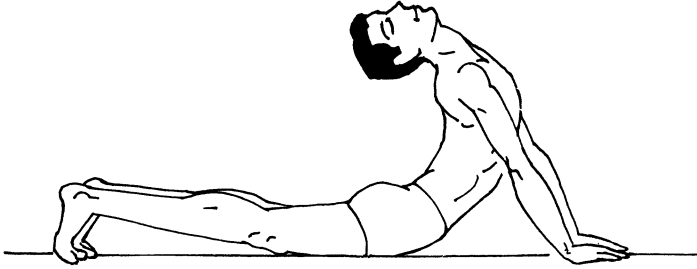
(Salutations to the giver of strength)

Benefits

Strengthens the leg and arm muscles.

Develops the chest.

BHUJANGASANA



Position 7 : Bhujangasana (the cobra pose)

Raise the body from the waist by straightening the arms.

Bend the head backward.

This stage is the same as the final position of bhujangasana.

Breath

Inhale while raising the body and arching the back.

Concentration

On sawadhisthana chakra.

Mantra

Om Hiranya Garbhāya Namaha

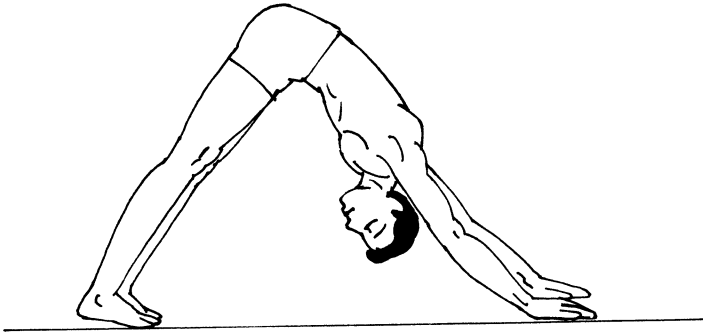
(Salutations to the golden cosmic self)

Benefits

The abdomen is compressed, helping to squeeze stagnant blood from the abdominal organs and encouraging a flow of fresh blood. This pose is very useful for all stomach ailments, including indigestion and constipation.

Arching the back exercises the spine, making the muscles supple and revitalizing the most important spinal nerves.

PARVATASANA



Position 8 : Parvatasana (the mountain pose)

This stage is a repeat of position 5.

From the arched back position assume the mountain pose as described in position 5.

Breath

Exhale as you raise the buttocks.

Concentration

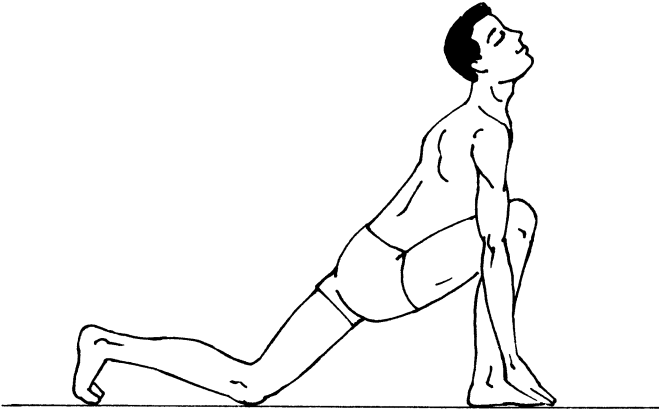
On vishuddi chakra.

Mantra

Om Marichaye Namaha

(Salutations to the lord of the dawn)

ASHWA SANCHALANASANA



Position 9 : Ashwa sanchalanasana (the equestrian pose)

This stage is the same as position 4.

Bend the left leg and bring the left foot forward so that it lies near the hands.

Simultaneously lower the right knee so that it touches the floor.

Breath

Inhale while assuming the pose.

Concentration

On ajna chakra.

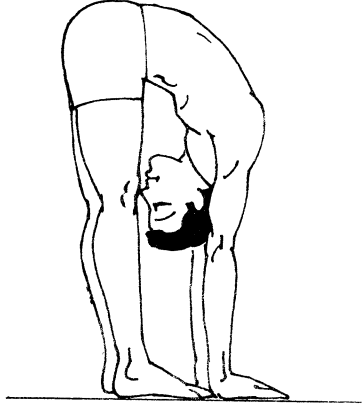
Mantra

Om Adityaya Namaha

(Salutations to the son of Aditi)

Note : Aditi is one of the names of the infinite cosmic mother.

PADAHASTASANA



Position 10 : Padahastasana (the hand to foot pose)

This position is a repeat of position 3.

Place the right foot next to the left foot.

Straighten both legs and try to bring the forehead as close to the knees as possible.

Do not strain if you are unable to touch the knees but do not bend the legs.

Breath

Exhale while performing the movement.

Concentration

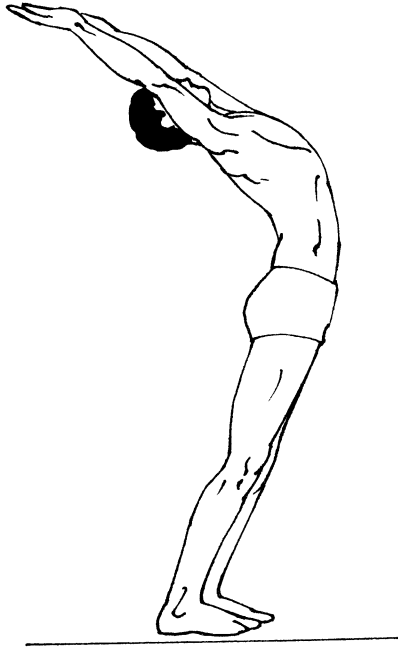
On swadhisthana chakra.

Mantra

Om Savitre Namaha

(Salutations to the benevolent mother)

HASTA UTTANASANA



Position 11 : Hasta uttanasana (the raised armspose)

This stage is a repeat of position 2.

Straighten the whole body and raise the arms above the head.

Keep the arms separated by one shoulder's width.

Bend the head and arms backward slightly.

Breath

Inhale as you straighten the body.

Concentration

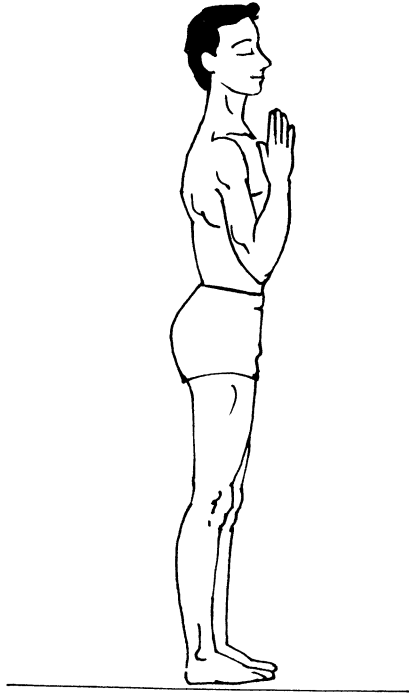
On vishuddhi chakra.

Mantra

Om Arkaya Namaha

(Salutations to he who is fit to be praised)

PRANAMASANA



Position 12 : Pranamasana (the prayer pose)

This is the final pose and is the same as position 1. Bring the hands in front of the chest and place the palms together. Relax the whole body.

Breath

Exhale as you assume the final pose.

Concentration

On anahata chakra.

Mantra

Om Bhāskarāya Namaha

(Salutations to he who leads to enlightenment)

Positions 13-24

Positions 1 to 12 constitute half a round of surya namaskara. For the second half, positions 1 to 12 are repeated but with a few minor changes:

- a) In stage 4, instead of stretching the right foot backward, stretch the left foot back in the same way.
- b) In position 9, bend the right leg and bring the right foot near the hands.

Bija mantras

As an alternative to the twelve names of the sun, there is a series of bija mantras or seed syllables. Bija mantras do not have any literal meaning but set up powerful vibrations of energy within the mind and body. The bija mantras are six in number, and are repeated consecutively in the following order, four times during a complete round of surya namaskara.

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>Om Hrām</i> | 3. <i>Om Hroom</i> | 5. <i>Om Hraum</i> |
| 2. <i>Om Hrim</i> | 4. <i>Om Hraim</i> | 6. <i>Om Hrah</i> |

When surya namaskara is practised too fast to repeat the sun mantras, then the bija mantras are sufficient.

Duration

For spiritual benefits do 3 to 12 rounds slowly. For physical benefits do 3 to 12 rounds more quickly. Beginners should not do a large number of rounds. They should start with 2 or 3 and add one more round on each successive day. Advanced students can practise a large number of rounds if they wish.

Sequence

Surya namaskara is ideally practised before the other asanas. This loosens the whole body and removes sleepiness. After completing surya namaskara the practitioner is advised to do shavasana for a few minutes. This will allow the heartbeat and respiration to return to normal, and relax all the muscles in the body.

Precautions

The practice of surya namaskara should be immediately discontinued if a fever develops due to excess toxins in the body. These toxins should be eliminated over a period of time by practising other asanas. When the toxins have been removed, surya namaskara can again be commenced. The practitioner should not do more rounds than he can comfortably perform without excessive physical fatigue.

Limitations

There are no age limits regarding the practice of surya namaskara; both the old and the young can perform it. Ladies, however, should not do this practice after the fourth month of pregnancy.

General benefits

With the description of each position a few benefits are given which can be directly attributed to that particular stage. However, surya namaskara gives an almost uncountable number of other benefits, which cannot be attributed to any one position but are the result of the whole practice.

Surya namaskara has a very powerful influence on all the systems of the body: endocrinal, circulatory, respiratory, digestive, etc. and helps bring them into balance with each other. Many diseases are caused when one or more of these systems are out of balance. Surya namaskara puts them into equilibrium, and thus helps to remedy many ailments that trouble humanity.

During the practice of surya namaskara all the major muscles are exercised in a complete way. Daily practice of this exercise keeps the whole body healthy and removes excess fat. It revitalizes the body and mind and makes the thinking power much sharper.

All the abdominal organs are alternately stretched and compressed. This ensures that the organs function correctly. If they do not work efficiently at present, it encourages them to do so.

Many people do not breathe properly. Synchronization of the breath with the physical movement during surya namaskara ensures that the practitioner, at least for a few minutes daily, breathes deeply and rhythmically as he should. This removes stagnant, germ-filled air from the lungs and replaces it with health-giving, oxygen enriched air. Increased mental clarity is brought about by the influx of fresh, oxidized blood to the brain.

Perspiration is a vital function since it is one of the body's methods of eliminating impurities. If people do not get enough physical exercise to work up a sweat, these impurities remain inside the body and cause or aggravate disease, or at least skin problems. Surya namaskara rectifies this and gives a radiant complexion to those plagued with boils and pimples.

Many people in this fast modern world suffer from nervous problems. There is no better way to remove nervous tension, stress and anxiety than by regularly doing surya namaskara. The movements gently massage the nervous connections throughout the whole body, allowing them to relax and become revitalized.

To summarize, surya namaskara is the ideal exercise to bestow good health, and who does not want good health? Surya namaskara is recommended for all people, fit or unfit, young or old; big or small, male or female.

Reference

For more information the reader is advised to read *Surya Namaskara – a technique of solar revitalization*, which is available from the Bihar School of Yoga.

The Middle Group of Asanas

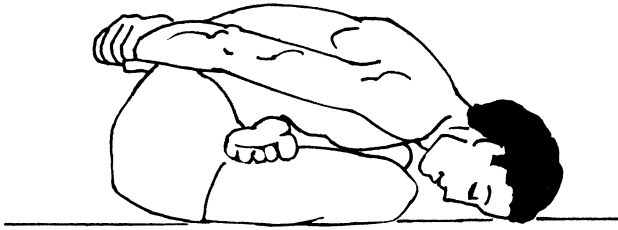
ASANAS PERFORMED IN OR FROM PADMASANA

These poses should be practised only by persons who can do padmasana without the slightest difficulty or strain. The practitioner can slowly train the body to sit in padmasana, by doing the pre-meditative exercises given in the beginners group.

Padmasana holds the body in a steady position which is necessary for meditative purposes. When body consciousness is not present the physical frame remains locked in position, simultaneously the energy of the body is directed upwards to the higher centers.

The asanas in this section increases one's ability to sit in padmasana for extended periods of time. They clear physical, emotional and mental blocks and help awaken the energy centers in the body. This is very necessary preparation, for there must be a high degree of tranquillity before one can sit in padmasana for extended periods, as is required for advanced meditative practices.

YOGA MUDRA



Yoga mudra (the psychic union pose)

Sit in padmasana and close the eyes.

Relax the body for some time, breathing normally.

Hold one wrist behind the back with the other hand.

Slowly bend the trunk forward until the forehead touches or nearly touches the ground.

In the final position try to relax the whole body as much as possible.

Slowly return to the starting position.

Note

The practitioner can place some padding or a blanket under the buttocks for more comfort while performing the pose. Although the traditional name suggests that this is a mudra, it is generally regarded as an asana.

Breath

Inhale slowly and deeply in the starting position.

Exhale while bending forward.

Breathe deeply and slowly in the final position.

Inhale while returning to the starting pose.

Duration

Try to remain in the final position for a few minutes.

If you are unable to stay in the final pose for more than a short time, repeat the asana a few times.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura chakra.

Physical : on the back, abdomen or breathing process.

Precautions

Do not strain the back, ankles, knees or thighs by forcing the muscles to stretch more than their flexibility will permit.

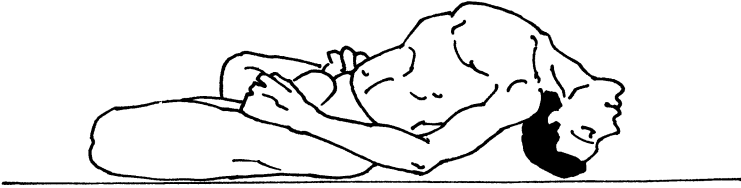
Benefits

This is an excellent asana for massaging the abdominal organs and removing many ailments connected with this part of the body, including constipation and indigestion.

It separates the individual vertebrae from each other, allowing the spinal nerves which emerge from the spaces between the vertebrae to be gently stretched and toned. These nerves connect the entire body with the brain, and so their improved tone can have extensive benefits on the health.

This asana is powerful for awakening the manipura chakra, which is located in the spine behind the navel. This center is one of the prime seats of energy in each individual.

MATSYASANA



Matsyasana (the fish pose)

Sit in padmasana. Bend backward, supporting the body with the arms and elbows, until the crown of the head touches the ground. Hold the big toes and rest the elbows on the floor. Arch the back as much as possible. Remain in the final pose up to 5 minutes. Do not strain.

Variation

Interlock the fingers of both hands and rest the back of the head on the open palms.

Breath

Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose.

People with infected tonsils or a sore throat can do sheetkari pranayama in the final pose.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura or anahata chakra.

Physical : on the abdomen, chest or breath.

Sequence

After halasana or sarvangasana.

Substitute

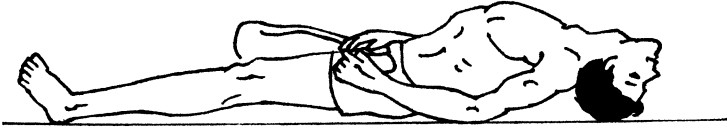
Supta vajrasana.

Benefits

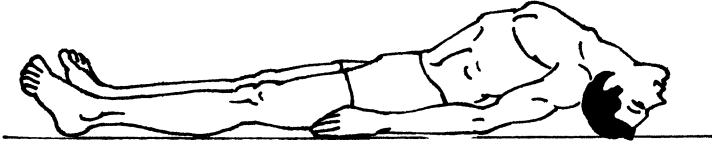
This asana stretches the intestines and abdominal organs, and is very useful for all abdominal illnesses.

To remove constipation drink three glasses of water and then do this asana. It is very good for lung ailments like asthma or bronchitis as it encourages deep respiration. It also helps to recirculate stagnant blood in the back, and regulates the function of the thyroid gland.

MATSYASANA



variation 1



variation 2

Matsyasana variation 1

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Fold one leg placing the foot on the opposite thigh.

Keep the other leg straight in front of the body.

Slowly bend backward, utilizing the elbows for support and lower the crown of the head to the floor.

Hold the foot of the bent leg with both hands.

Accentuate the arch of the back.

Remain in the final pose for a comfortable length of time and then return to the starting position.

As an alternative, rest the back of the head on the floor instead of the top of the head.

Matsyasana variation 2

Stretch both legs straight in front of the body.

Lean backward and rest the top of the head on the

floor, arch the back and place both palms on the thighs. Return to the starting position after some time in the final pose.

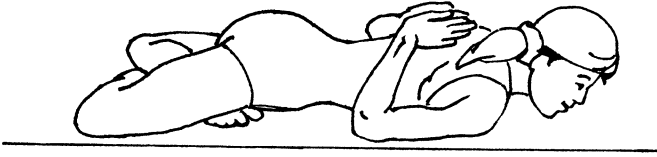
Benefits for both variations

As for the basic form but at a reduced level.

Note

All other details as for full matsyasana.

GUPTA PADMASANA



Gupta padmasana (the hidden lotus pose)

Assume padmasana.

Place the hands in front of the knees.

Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees.

Slowly lower the body forward to the ground.

Either the chin or one cheek can rest on the ground.

Place the palms together behind the back.

The fingers can either rest on the lower back pointing

down, or on the upper spine pointing up.

If possible, touch the back of the head with the middle fingers.

Duration

Practise this asana as much as possible. It is always beneficial.

Concentration

Spiritual : on anahata chakra.

Mental and physical : on relaxation of the whole body and mind.

Breath

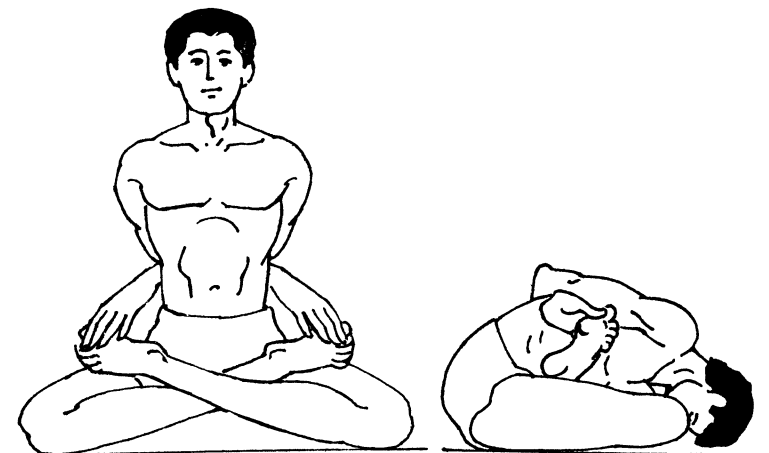
Normal and unrestrained in the final position.

Benefits

This asana corrects postural defects of the spinal column without applying sudden stress. It effectuates proper spinal posture, which is necessary for productive meditation.

It may be used as a meditative pose.

BADDHA PADMASANA



first stage

final stage

Baddha padmasana (the locked lotus pose)

Sit in padmasana. Place the right hand behind the back and grasp the right big toe, the left hand holds the left big toe. It is easier to hold both big toes by breathing out and leaning slightly forward. Bend forward and try to touch the forehead to the floor. Remain in the final pose as long as is comfortable.

Breath

Deep and slow in the final pose.

Concentration

Spiritual : on anahata chakra.

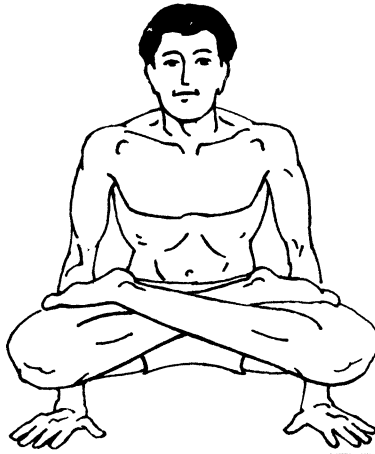
Physical : on the abdomen or breathing process.

Benefits

Same as yoga mudra, accentuates the massage of the abdominal organs.

Encourages normal growth in children with poorly developed chests. Alleviates pain in the shoulders, arms and back.

LOLASANA



Lolasana (the swinging pose)

Sit in padmasana.

Place the palms on the ground on either side of the thighs.

Raise the whole body off the ground, balancing only on the hands.

Swing the body to and fro between the arms.

Return to the sitting position and rest.

Repeat a few times.

Breath

Inhale while lifting the body off the ground.

Retain the breath inside while swinging backward and forward.

Exhale on returning to the ground.

Concentration

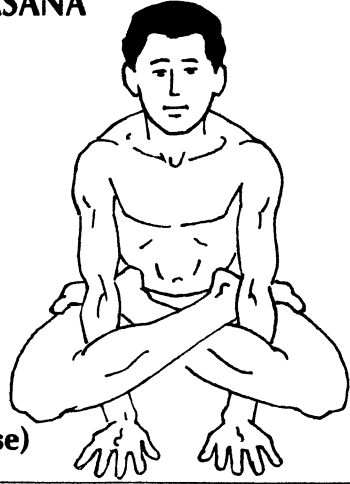
On the breath.

Benefits

Strengthens the arms, wrists and shoulders.

Broadens the chest.

KUKKUTASANA



Kukkutasana (the cockerel pose)

Sit in padmasana.

Insert the arms between the calves and thighs. Place the palms of the hands on the ground, with the fingers pointing forward.

Raise the body off the ground, balancing only on the hands.

Remain in the final pose for as long as is comfortably possible and then return to the ground.

Repeat a few times.

Breath

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Concentration

On the breath.

Note

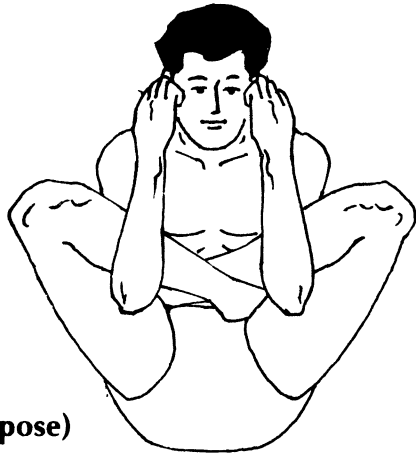
People with a lot of hair on their legs will find it difficult and painful to insert their arms between the thighs and calves. This problem can be removed by applying oil on the legs or practising after a bath.

Benefits

Strengthens the arm and shoulder muscles.

Broadens the chest.

GARBHASANA



Garbhasana (the embryo pose)

Sit in padmasana.

Insert the arms between the thigh and calf of each leg so that the elbows can bend under the calves.

Fold the arms upward and hold the ears, balancing the whole body on the buttocks.

Maintain the final position for as long as is comfortably possible.

Then lower the legs and release the arms.

Breath

Exhale while bringing the hands to the ears.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Concentration

On maintaining equilibrium or on the breath.

Benefits

This asana helps to calm an excited or angry mind. If one has an uncontrollable temper it can be practised as many times as possible throughout the day.

It is also useful for removing nervous disorders.

It stimulates the digestive fire and increases the appetite as well as developing a sense of balance.

TOLANGULASANA



Tolangulasana (the weighing scale pose)

Sit in padmasana.

Lie on the back, place the palms of the hands underneath the buttocks and raise the trunk so that it is supported by the elbows.

Try to raise the head, legs and trunk further off the ground, so that the whole body is supported only on the buttocks and forearms.

Perform jalandhara bandha (see later chapter).

Remain in the final pose for a comfortable period of time without strain and then slowly lower the body to the ground. Repeat up to 5 times.

Breath

Inhale in the final raised position, and retain the breath while doing jalandhara bandha. Do not retain the breath for longer than is comfortable.

Exhale while returning to the starting position.

Concentration

On retention of the breath.

Benefits

Obesity can be removed by this asana.

The abdominal organs are toned, including the liver.

Strengthens the shoulders, back and neck.

Broadens and develops the chest.

Induces a high state of relaxation.

BACKWARD BENDING ASANAS

The asanas in this section bend the spine backward and stretch the abdominal muscles. The muscles controlling the spine are well-toned and strengthened, which helps prevent slipped disc and other back ailments. The spinal nerves which emerge from between the adjoining vertebrae are also toned. This has beneficial repercussions throughout the body, since these give energy to all the nerves, organs and muscles.

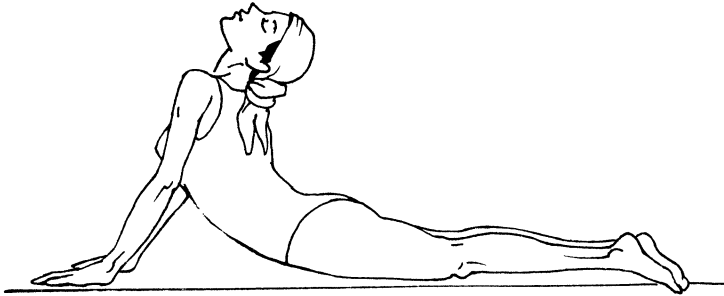
Behind the spine and connected with the spinal nerves is the sympathetic nerve chain which, together with the parasympathetic nerves, maintains the organs in the body at their correct level of activity. Backward bending asanas tone these nerves, thereby improving the functioning of the organs.

Impure blood has a tendency to accumulate in the back regions as circulation there tends to be sluggish. This lowers the efficiency of the muscles and nerves. Backward bending asanas are very useful for circulating this blood, allowing it to be purified and enriched.

During backward bending asanas the stretch of the abdominal muscles, especially the rectus abdomini muscle, squeezes the internal abdominal organs, giving them a good massage. This helps them to operate more efficiently and is very useful for removing diseases of these organs.

Bhujangasana, shalabhasana and dhanurasana are most beneficial if done consecutively. They have a powerful influence on the whole spine from top to bottom, including the nerves along the entire length of the back. They also stretch and squeeze the abdominal and pelvic organs. It is recommended that the practitioner performs these three backward bending asanas daily for maintenance of good health.

BHUJANGASANA



Bhujangasna (the cobra pose)

Lie on the stomach with the legs straight and the feet extended. Place the palms flat on the floor under the shoulders. Rest the forehead on the ground and relax the body. Slowly raise the head and the shoulders off the ground, bending the head as far back as it will go. Try to raise the shoulders without using the arms, only utilizing the back muscles. Now bring the arms into action and slowly bend the back as much as possible without strain until the arms are straight. Keep the navel as near to the ground as possible. Hold as long as comfortable.

Practise up to 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the body from the ground. Breathe normally in the final pose. If the final pose is held for a short time, retain the breath inside.

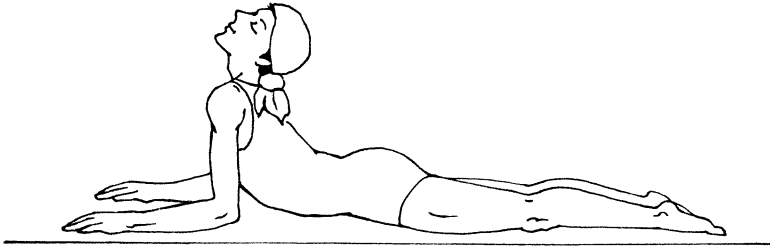
Limitations

People with peptic ulcers, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not do this asana.

Benefits

Helps remove female sexual disorders such as leucorrhoea, dysmenorrhoea and amenorrhoea. It tones the ovaries and uterus, stimulates the appetite and eliminates constipation. It is beneficial for all abdominal organs, especially the liver and kidneys. It relocates slipped discs, removes backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy.

BHUJANGASANA



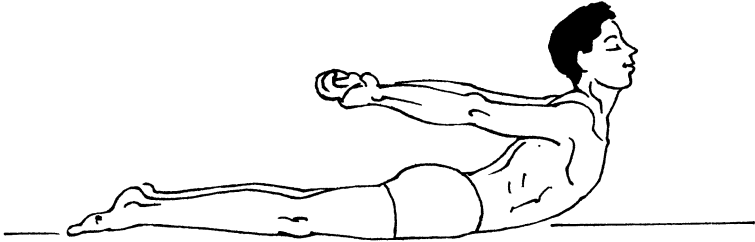
the sphinx pose

Bhujangasana variation 1 – the sphinx pose

Rest the lower arms flat on the floor so that the palms of the hands are downward, beside the head. The procedure is exactly the same as basic bhujangasana except the back is raised by bending the elbows. This upper arms are vertical in the final position.

This simple form of bhujangasana is for beginners.

SARPASANA



sarpasana

Bhujangasana variation 2 – sarpasana (the snake pose)

Lie on the stomach. Place the arms behind the back and hold one of the wrists. Tense the muscles of the arms and back and raise the chest as far as possible off the ground, bending the head backward.

Hold as long as comfortable. Repeat up to 5 times.

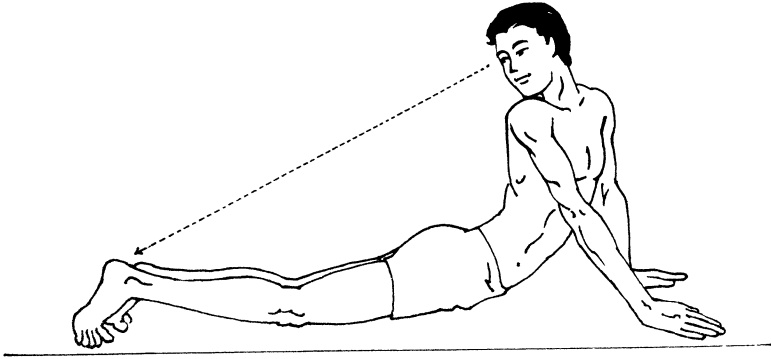
Breath

Inhale deeply just prior to raising the trunk. Retain inside while raising. Exhale while returning.

Benefits

Basically the same as bhujangasana.

TIRYAKA BHUJANGASANA



Tiryaka bhujangasana (the twisting cobra pose)

Assume the final position of basic bhujangasana.

Twist the upper portion of the trunk and head to one side and gaze at the heel of the opposite foot.

Then repeat in the other direction.

Twist the body up to 10 times on each side.

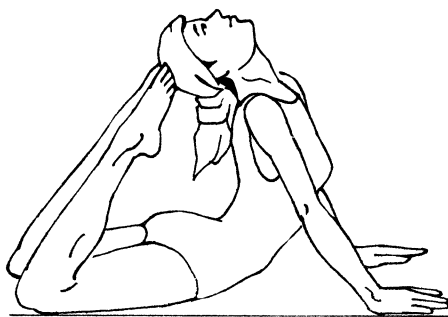
Note

This is practised during shankhprakashana.

Benefits

As bhujangasana, with increased influence on the intestines.

POORNA BHUJANGASANA



Poorna bhujangasana (the full cobra pose)

Assume bhujangasana, bend the knees and try to touch the back of the head with the toes.

Breath

Inhale while rising into bhujangasana.

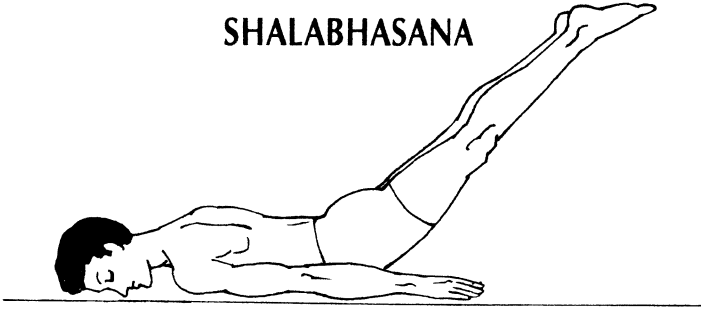
Exhale while touching the feet to the head.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Limitations

This variation is only for children or adepts with very supple backs.

SHALABHASANA



Shalabhasana (the locust pose)

Lie on the stomach with the hands under the thighs, palms facing downward. Stretch the legs and tense the arms. Raise the legs and abdomen as high as possible without bending the legs. Practise up to 5 times.

Breath

Inhale deeply in the lying-down position. Retain the breath inside while raising the legs and abdomen. Exhale while returning to the starting position.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddi chakra.

Physical: on the abdomen, lower back or heart.

Sequence

Together with bhujangasana and dhanurasana.

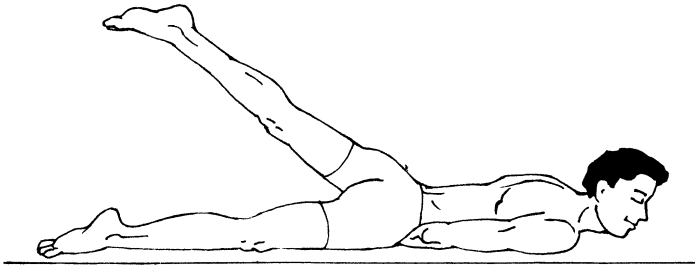
Limitations

Not to be practised by sufferers of peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or people with a weak heart.

Benefits

This asana tones and adjusts the functioning of the liver and other abdominal organs, especially the intestines, pancreas, and kidneys. It is very useful for relieving and eliminating diseases of the stomach and bowels, and it stimulates the appetite. It strengthens the lower spine and heart, and tones the sciatic nerves.

ARDHA SHALABHASANA



Ardha shalabhasana (the half locust pose)

Lie on the stomach with the hands under the thighs, palms downward.

Keep both legs straight throughout the asana.

Raise one leg as high as possible, keeping the other leg flat on the floor.

Retain this position for some time and then lower the leg to the floor.

Allow the respiration to return to normal.

Repeat the same movement with the other leg.

Breath

Inhale in the prone position.

Retain the breath inside while lifting the leg and in the final pose.

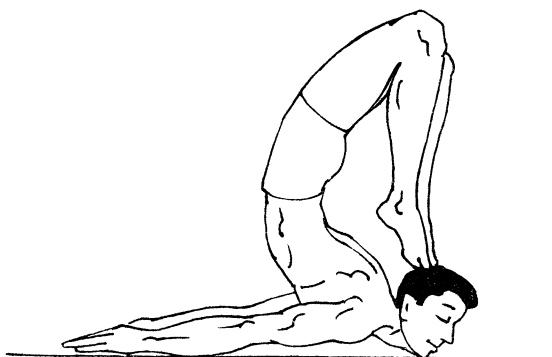
Exhale while returning to the starting position.

Breathe normally in the prone position.

Note

This is a simplified form of shalabhasana for beginners or people who are unable to do the full pose. All other details are as given for shalabhasana.

POORNA SHALABHASANA



Poorna shalabhasana (the full locust pose)

Assume the final position of shalabhasana with the legs raised in the air as high as possible.

Jerk the legs up and balance on the shoulders, chin and arms. Try to touch the head with the toes.

This final pose can be more easily attained by rhythmically swinging the legs up to progressively higher levels until the balance point is reached.

Maintain the final pose for a comfortable period of time. Then carefully return to the starting position.

Breath

Retain the breath inside while raising and lowering the body.

Breathe normally in the final position.

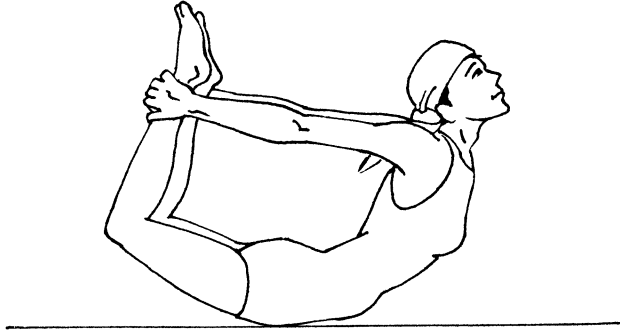
Limitations

This difficult form of shalabhasana is only for people who are physically fit with very supple backs.

Benefits

As for shalabhasana but with many benefits of sirshasana also.

DHANURASANA



Dhanurasana (the bow pose)

Lie flat on the stomach and inhale fully.
Bend the knees and hold the ankles with the hands.
Tense the leg muscles and arch the back.
Simultaneously raise the head, chest and thighs as high as possible.
Keep the arms straight.
Hold for as long as is comfortable.
Practise up to 5 times.

Note

One may rock backwards and forwards in the final position.
Do not repeat the asana until the breath returns to normal.

Breath

The breath may be retained inside in the final pose or slow, deep breathing may be practised.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi chakra.
Physical: on the abdominal region or back.

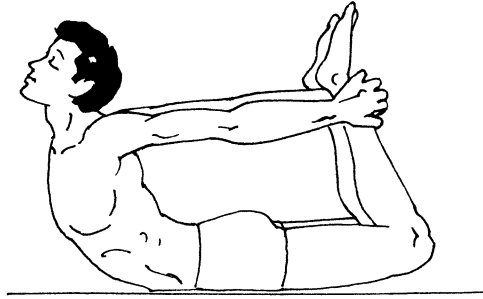
Limitations

Not to be practised by people with hernia, peptic ulcers, intestinal tuberculosis or bent spine.

Benefits

This asana powerfully massages the abdominal organs and muscles. Removes gastro-intestinal disorders, dyspepsia, chronic constipation and sluggishness of the liver. Quickly reduces fat in the abdominal area.

SARAL DHANURASANA



Saral dhanurasana (the easy bow pose)

Assume the starting position of dhanurasana, lying flat on the stomach and holding the bent legs at the ankles, with the hands.

Relax the whole body.

Tense the legs and try to push the feet backward while raising the head and chest. Do not try to raise the thighs off the ground.

Maintain the final pose for a comfortable period of time and then slowly return to the floor.

Repeat when the respiration rate returns to normal.

Breath

Inhale while lying on the ground.

Raise the body with the breath retained inside.

Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose.

Exhale on returning to the floor.

Note

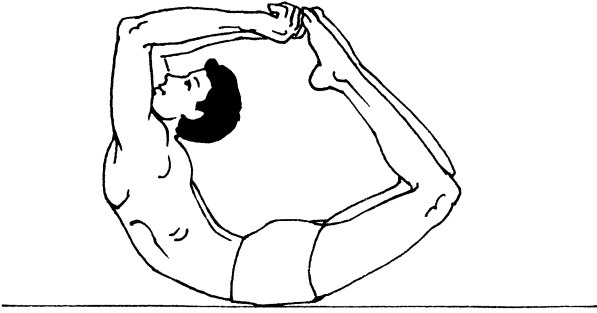
This is a good asana for beginners or people with a stiff back who are unable to do dhanurasana.

Benefits

The same as for dhanurasana but less effective.

All other details as given for dhanurasana.

POORNA DHANURASANA



Poorna dhanurasana (the full bow pose)

Assume the same starting position as dhanurasana except that the hands hold the toes.

The fingers should be in contact with the top of the feet and the thumbs with the soles.

The method is the same as dhanurasana, except feet, legs, thighs, chest and head are raised much higher. To attain greater height the arms must be moved first to the side, then above the shoulders.

Maintain the final pose for a short time, then return to the starting position.

Breath

As for dhanurasana.

Note

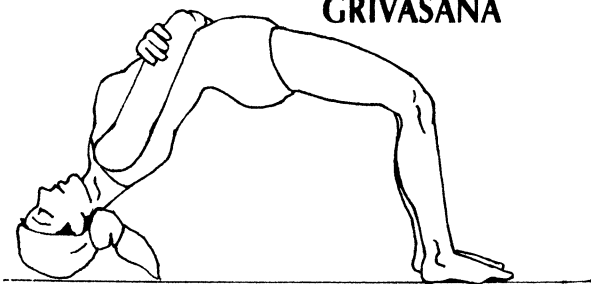
Do not repeat until the breath returns to normal.

This difficult variation of dhanurasana should only be practised by those people with supple backs.

Benefits

The same as dhanurasana but with more intensity.

GRIVASANA



Grivasana (the neck pose)

Lie on the back with knees bent and heels by the buttocks. Place the inverted palms on the ground by the temples. Raise the trunk and place the top of the head on the ground. Balance on the head and the feet. Raise the arms, cross them and place them on the chest. Retain the breath inside.

Duration

Practise once for as long as the breath can be retained, or for long periods with normal breathing for curative purposes.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura or vishuddhi chakra.

Physical : on the thyroid gland, neck or pelvic region.

Sequence

Follow with a forward neck bending pose such as paschimottanasana.

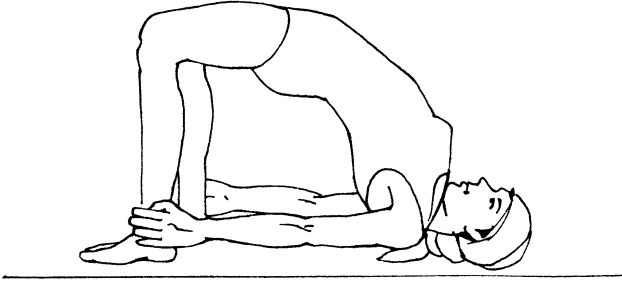
Limitations

Not for sufferers of high blood pressure, coronary diseases, amenorrhea, or people with weak necks.

Benefits

This asana aligns the upper vertebrae. In cases of late female puberty it helps to rectify the gonadal hormonal block. It removes leucorrhoea and other female disorders.

KANDHARASANA



Kandharasana (the shoulder pose)

Lie on the back with the legs bent at the knees and the heels touching the buttocks. Hold the ankles. Raise the buttocks and arch the back, keeping the feet flat on the floor. Do not move the position of the feet or shoulders. The body should be supported by the feet, neck, shoulders and arms.

Breath

Retain the breath inside when practising this pose.

Duration

Do up to 10 times for general health or for long periods with normal breathing for curative purposes.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi chakra.

Physical: on the abdominal region or thyroid gland.

Sequence

Use as a counterpose to forward bending poses.

Limitations

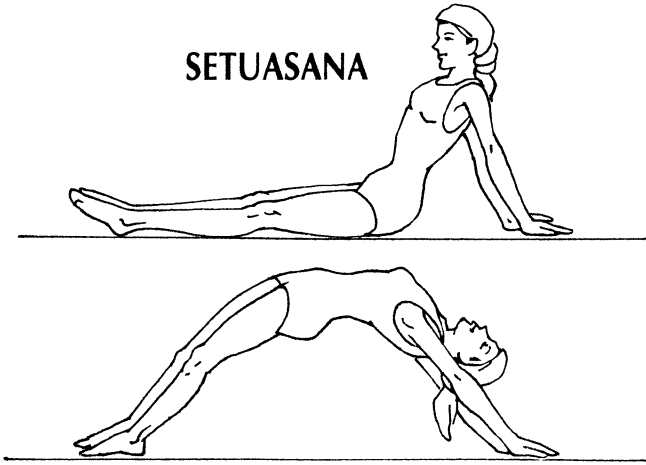
Should not be practised during pregnancy.

Benefits

This asana can be utilized to return displaced vertebral

discs. It stretches and massages the colon and other abdominal organs. It also straightens round shoulders and relieves backache. It is recommended especially for women who have a tendency towards miscarriage as it tones the female sexual organs. It is a good preparatory pose for chakrasana.

SETUASANA



Setuasana (the bridge pose)

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Place the palms on the ground to the side, about one foot behind the buttocks.

The elbows should be straight, the fingers pointing backward and the torso slightly reclined.

Raise the buttocks and stretch the mid-section upward. Bend the head back.

Place the soles of the feet flat on the ground.

The legs should be straight. After a comfortable time in the final position lower the buttocks to the ground.

Practise a maximum of 10 times.

Breath

Inhale while seated.

Retain while raising, holding and lowering the body.

Exhale while returning to the ground.

Concentration

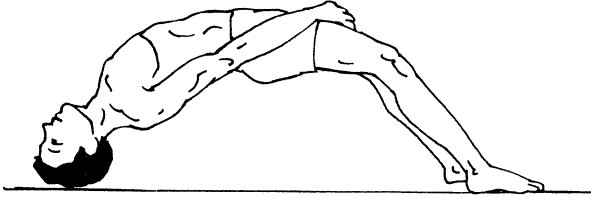
Spiritual: on manipura chakra.

Physical: on the back and abdomen.

Benefits

This asana tones the lumbar region of the spine and the achilles tendon behind the ankles.

SIRSHA PADASANA



Sirsha padasana (the head and foot pose)

Lie in shavasana (the supine position).

Relax the whole body.

Now tense the body and raise the trunk so that the entire body is supported only on the head and feet.

The arms can be initially kept on the floor until balance is attained; then they should be placed on top of the body with the palms on the thighs.

Duration

Hold for as long as you can comfortably retain the breath inside. Do not strain. Repeat up to 5 times.

Precautions

Place a blanket under the head to prevent injury.

Limitations

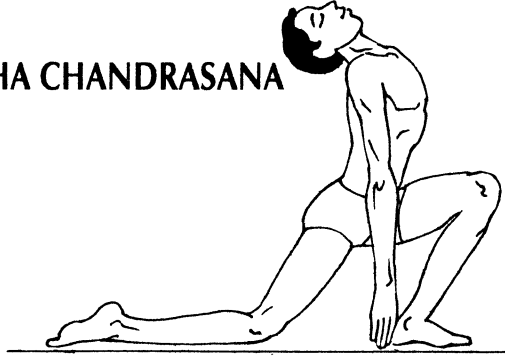
Not for people with high blood pressure or a weak heart.

Benefits

The backward bending asana makes the spinal muscles strong and supple. It stimulates the spinal nerves and encourages a fresh flow of blood to them. The entire blood circulation is speeded up.

It strengthens the thigh, abdominal and neck muscles and is an excellent relaxation pose.

ARDHA CHANDRASANA



Ardha chandrasana (the crescent moon pose)

Stand on the knees with legs together and arms by the side. Step forward with the left leg.

Bend, and place the hands by the sides of the left foot, palms flat on the floor.

Stretch the right leg back and arch the back and neck upward. In the final pose, only the feet, right knee and fingertips will touch the floor.

Practise 5 times.

Breath

Exhale while bending forward.

Inhale while arching the back.

Exhale again while returning to the kneeling position.

Concentration

Spiritual: on swadhisthana or vishuddi chakra.

Physical: on the back or respiration.

Sequence

Practise after forward bending asanas.

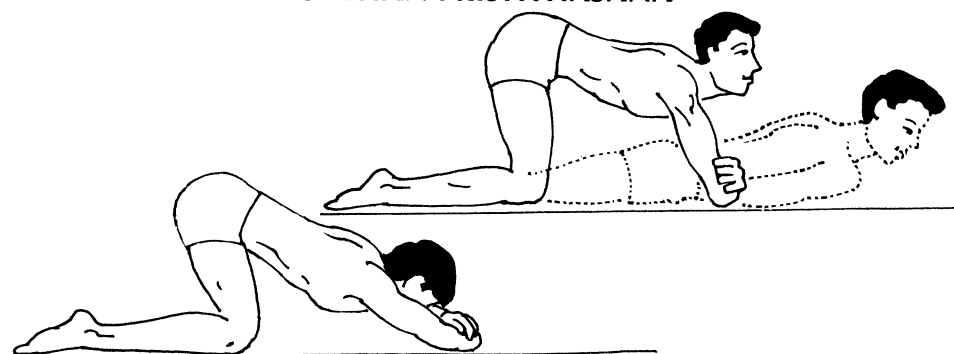
Benefits

Limbers and strengthens the skeletal structure.

Variation

This asana can also be performed by raising the arms over the head and stretching the head and upper trunk as far back as possible. This improves the exercise given to the whole back.

UTTHAN PRISHTHASANA



Utthan prishthasana (the lizard pose)

Lie on the stomach with the arms crossed under the lower chest. Hold the biceps (upper arms). The toes should be stretched, the head facing forward, with the body weight on the forearms.

The elbows should not move during the entire round. Raise the trunk and buttocks so that you are supported by the knees and upper arms. Stretch the torso backwards placing the chin and chest on the ground. Return to the raised position and then to the lying position.

Practise a maximum of 10 times.

Breath

Inhale while raising the buttocks (twice during each round). Exhale while lowering the buttocks (twice during each round).

Concentration

On the back.

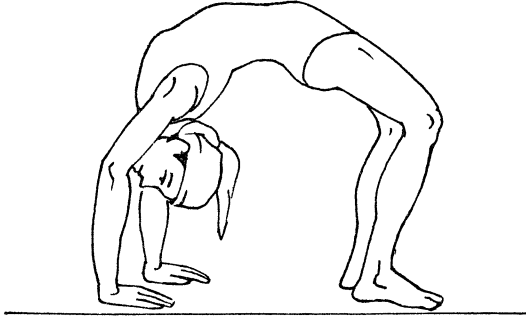
Sequence

After a forward bending asana.

Benefits

Exercises and strengthens the diaphragm and tones the entire back, especially the nerves and muscles.

CHAKRASANA



Chakrasana (the wheel pose)

Lie on the back with knees bent and the heels touching the buttocks. The feet should be about one foot apart. Place the palms on the ground beside the temples, with fingers pointing towards the shoulders.

Slowly raise the trunk. Let the head rotate slightly and allow the crown to support the weight of the upper body. The legs will form right angles at the knees.

Straighten the arms and legs, lift the head off the ground and raise the body so that it is fully arched. You can straighten the knees almost completely by moving the trunk upward.

Slowly lower yourself back to the ground and then the supine position.

Breath

Initially practise chakrasana with the breath retained inside.

After some regular practice, chakrasana may be

maintained for long periods by breathing normally in the fully raised position.

Duration

Practise chakrasana once for as long as you can comfortably maintain it.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura chakra.

Physical : on the back, abdomen or respiration.

Sequence

Always follow chakrasana with a forward bending counterpose.

Limitations

Chakrasana should not be practised by sufferers of high blood pressure, coronary ailments, stomach ulcers, toxic intestines, partial deafness or dilated eye capillaries, or by anyone who has recently fractured bones or undergone abdominal operation.

It is not to be attempted until the practitioner is able to do the preliminary backward bending poses.

Benefits

This asana is beneficial to the entire nervous and glandular system.

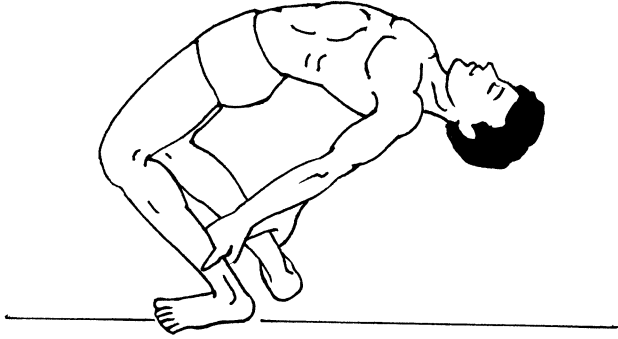
It influences all hormonal secretions and relieves varied ailments of the female reproductive system. It fully stretches the back and abdominal muscles. It powerfully compresses and massages the abdominal organs.

Variations

Those adepts who can do this asana without even the slightest difficulty can improve its effect by moving the hands and feet closer together in the final position.

They may also try raising first one leg and then the other in the final pose.

PRISHTHASANA



Prishthasana (the back pose)

Stand erect with the feet about 12 inches apart. Raise the arms over the head. Slowly bend the trunk backward from the waist, simultaneously bending the legs so that the knees move forward. Move the arms to the sides and reach down to grasp the ankles. Then bend the head backwards and try to lower the head and back near to the floor. This is easier if the toes point to the side.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura chakra.

Physical : relaxing the back, maintaining balance.

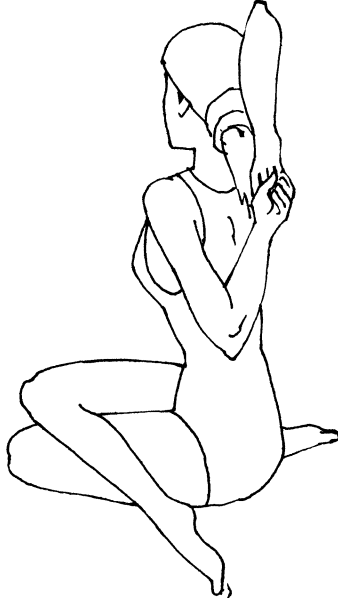
Limitations

Not for people with high blood pressure, coronary thrombosis, stomach ulcers or serious back ailments.

Benefits

This asana stretches and tones the abdominal muscles and organs. It removes stagnant blood from the back and strengthens the legs. It stimulates and tones the spinal nerves and develops balance.

GOMUKHASANA



Gomukhasana (the cow face pose)

Assume a sitting position, legs out-stretched.

Fold the left leg and place the heel beside the right buttock.

Fold the right leg over the top of the left leg so that the right heel is on the ground beside the left thigh.

The knees should lie one above the other.

Place the left arm behind the back and the right arm over the right shoulder.

Join the fingers of each hand behind the back.

Make the trunk erect, hold the head back and close the eyes.

Repeat the process on the other side.

Breath

Deep, relaxed breathing will commence while the final posture is held.

Concentration

Spiritual: on ajana chakra.

Physical and mental: on the respiration.

Benefits

Aids in the elimination of diabetes, backache, stiff shoulders and neck, and sexual ailments. Stimulates the kidneys, alleviates sciatica and rheumatism, and develops the chest.

FORWARD BENDING ASANAS

This group of asanas is very important for stretching and toning the spinal nerves, making the back muscles supple and strong and for compressing and massaging the abdominal organs.

A supple back is most important for maintaining good health. People who have a supple back are blessed with vitality and health, whereas those with rigid spines are afflicted with all kinds of illnesses or aches and pains. People who do asanas and loosen up their spines, notice big changes in their health and attitude towards life.

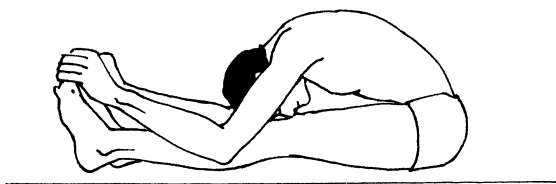
Beginners and sedentary workers who get very little physical exercise, are likely to find these asanas quite difficult to do at first because the backs are unaccustomed to bending forward very much. They should not despair but persevere, trying to bend the back as far forward as it will go without excessive strain. After some time even the most rigid back will become more supple as the muscles stretch. The individual will be pleasantly surprised to find that he can bend his back much further than he dreamed possible.

No one should force the back to bend further than its flexibility will allow, otherwise injury may result. The

muscles of the back gradually elongate in their own time; it is just a matter of practising these asanas regularly and waiting for the muscles to stretch.

The practitioner should not do all the forward bending asanas one after the other but choose a couple and perfect them over a period of weeks or months. He can attempt the others later when his back is more flexible.

PASCHIMOTTANASANA



Paschimottasana (the back stretching pose)

Sit on the floor with the legs straight in front of the body, the lower arms on the thighs.

Relax the whole body, especially the back muscles. Slowly bend the body forward.

Try to grasp the big toes with the fingers and the thumbs. If this is impossible then hold the heels, the ankles or the legs as near to the feet as possible.

Again, consciously relax the back and leg muscles. Keeping the legs straight and without utilizing the back muscles, only using the arms, pull the trunk a little lower toward the legs. This should be a process without any sudden movement or excessive strain anywhere in the body. If possible, without strain, touch the knees with the forehead.

Remain in the final pose for a comfortable length of time, trying to further relax the whole body, and then slowly return to the starting position.

Note

Do not bend the legs at the knees.

It is part of the aim of the asana to stretch the muscles at the back of the legs. Do not force. They will elongate in time. After some weeks or months of regular practice you will be able to touch the knee with the forehead or perhaps even the chin.

Breath

Breathe normally in the sitting position. Exhale slowly while bending forward. Inhale while holding the body motionless. Exhale as you pull the trunk further forward with the arms. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose. Inhale while returning to the starting position. If the final pose is not held for a long time the breath may be retained outside.

Duration

Adepts can maintain the final pose for up to 5 minutes providing they are comfortable in it. Beginners should perform the asana a few times, staying in the final pose for only a short length of time. Spiritual aspirants should aim to stay in the final position with complete relaxation for extended lengths of time.

Concentration

Spiritual : on swadhisthana chakra.

Physical and mental : on the abdomen, relaxation of the back muscles or the slow breathing process.

Sequence

Use as a counterpose to backward bending asanas.

Limitations

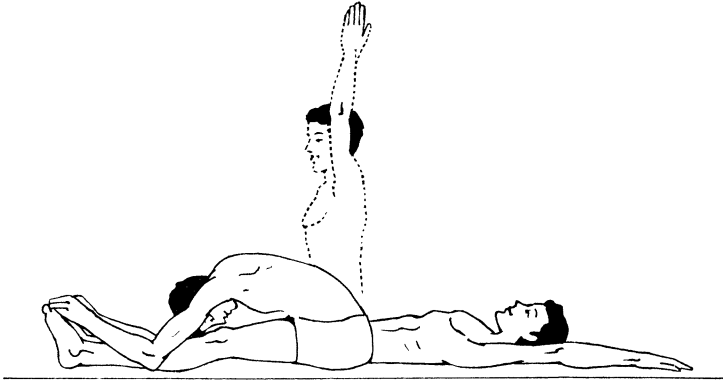
People who have slipped discs, sciatica, chronic arthritis and sacral infections should not do this asana.

Benefits

Stretches the hamstring muscles and loosens the hip joints. Effectively removes excess fat in the abdominal region. Tones all the abdominal organs and removes diseases of this area, such as diabetes. It also activates the kidneys, liver, pancreas and adrenal glands. Tones the pelvic organs and is therefore especially useful for eliminating female sexual maladies. Encourages a good flow of fresh blood to the spinal nerves and muscles.

This is a very powerful asana for spiritual awakening and is highly regarded in ancient yoga texts.

DYNAMIC PASCHIMOTTANASANA



Dynamic paschimottanasana

Lie flat on the floor with the arms stretched behind the head. Relax the whole body. Slowly raise the trunk to the sitting position, keeping the arms above the head. Bend forward into paschimottanasana.

Hold for a short time and then return to the sitting position. Return to the supine position.

Practise a maximum of 10 times.

Breath

Breathe normally in the supine pose. Inhale while rising to the sitting position. Exhale while bending into paschimottanasana. Retain outside while in paschimottanasana. Inhale while returning to the supine pose.

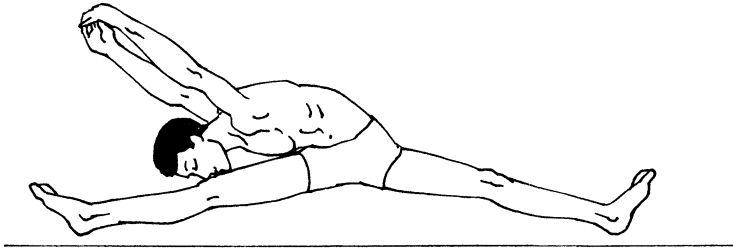
Concentration

On the movement of the body or the breath.

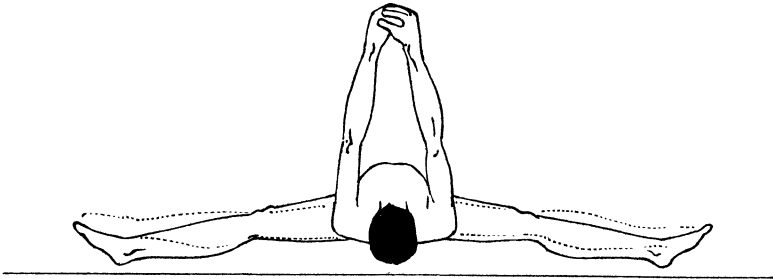
Benefits

Loosens up the whole body. Gives the same benefits as paschimottanasana, though at a reduced level.

PADA PRASAR PASCHIMOTTANASANA



pada prasar paschimottanasana



variation 1

Pada prasar paschimottanasana (the legs spread and back stretching pose)

- Sit with the legs spread as wide as possible.
- Clasp the hands over the head and swivel the torso slightly to the right.
- Stretch the arms upward and bend the trunk downward.
- Touch the right knee with the nose.
- Raise the trunk and repeat on the opposite side.

Pada prasar paschimottanasana- variation 1

Sit with the legs spread and the hands clasped behind the back.

Raise the arms and try to touch the ground between the knees with the nose.

Raise the trunk and resume a seated position.

Pada prasar paschimottanasana - variation 2

Sit with the legs spread but do not clasp the hands behind the back.

Bend forward, grasp the big toes and try to place the forehead on the floor.

Do not bend the knees.

Return to the starting position after a short time in the final pose.

Breath (for all three techniques)

Breathe normally in the sitting position.

Retain the breath while bending forward into the final pose and returning to the starting position.

Duration

Do each technique up to 5 times.

Sequence

This asana is a counterpose to backward bending asanas.

Limitations

Not to be done by people with slipped disc, sciatica, chronic arthritis or sacral infections.

Benefits

This asana has essentially the same benefits as paschimottanasana.

JANU SIRSHASANA



Janu sirshasana (the head to knee pose)

Sit with the legs stretched in front of the body.
Fold one leg and place the heel against the perineum, the sole touching the opposite thigh. Keep the knee on the floor throughout.

Lean forward.

Grasp the toes of the straight leg with both hands.

Do not bend the knee.

Utilizing only the arms, not the back muscles, pull the trunk forward slowly so that the head is on the straight knee.

Repeat the process with the other leg folded.

Note

Keep both knees in contact with the floor.

Do not strain the muscles but gently stretch them.

Breath

Exhale while bending the trunk forward.

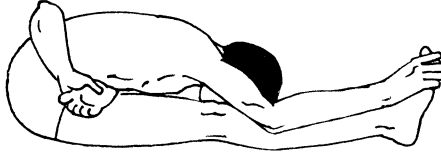
Retain the breath if you stay in the final pose for a short time.

Breathe normally if the pose is held for long periods.

Inhale while returning to the sitting position.

All other details as for paschimottanasana.

ARDHA PADMA PASCHIMOTTANASANA



Ardha padma paschimottanasana (the half lotus back stretching pose)

Place one foot on the opposite thigh, keeping the other leg stretched in front of the body.

Grasp the toes of the straight leg with the hand on the same side of the body.

Utilizing the arms, not the back muscles, slowly pull the trunk forward so that the head is near or resting on the straight knee.

Keep both knees on the floor.

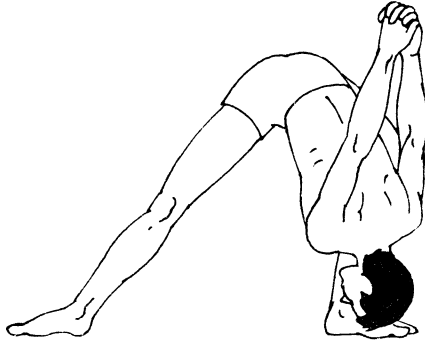
Repeat the process with the other leg folded.

Note

If the practitioner is able, one can pass the arm behind the back and grasp the big toe of the folded leg.

All other details as for paschimottanasana.

SIRSHA ANGUSTHA YOGASANA



Sirsha angustha yogasana (the head to toe pose)

Stand erect with the feet about 3 feet apart.

Clasp the hands behind the back.

Twist the upper torso to the left.

Bend the body at the waist, stretch the arms upward, and bring the nose down to the left foot.

Bend the left leg slightly to assume this position.

Raise the trunk and recenter the body.

Repeat on the right side.

Practise a maximum of 5 times on each side.

Breath

Inhale while standing erect. Retain while twisting, bending and rising. Exhale when upright.

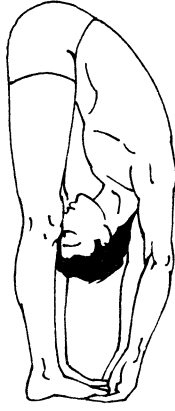
Limitations

Not to be practised by people who have back ailments such as slipped disc, sciatica or sacral infections.

Benefits

This asana stretches the hamstring muscles, provides lateral stretch to the spine and eliminates waistline fat deposits. It stimulates the entire nervous system and the appetite. It helps to remove abdominal problems and constipation.

PADA HASTASANA



static form

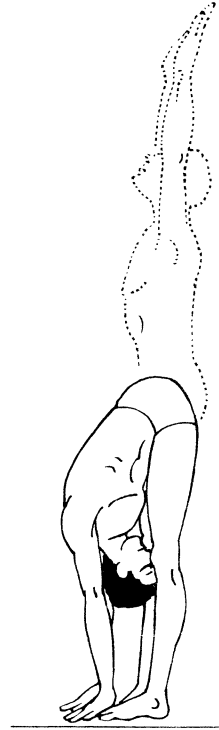
Pada hastasana (the forward bending pose)

Stand with the trunk erect and the hands beside the body. Slowly bend the head forward, then the upper trunk and the lower trunk. The body should bend forward as though there are no muscles in the back. Place the fingers underneath the toes or touch the ground with the palms to the fingertips. If this is not possible then bring the fingertips as near to the ground as possible. Try to bring the forehead to the knees.

Maintain this pose up to 1 minute then slowly return to the starting position.

Note

Keep the legs straight throughout the movement.
Do not strain the hamstring muscles at the back of



dynamic form

the legs, or the back muscles by forcing the body to bend too far forward.

Breath

Exhale as you bend forward.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

Inhale as you return to the starting point.

Concentration

On relaxing the back muscles or on the breath.

Pada hastasana (dynamic form)

Assume the standing position. Raise the arms above the head and lean the trunk backward. Bend forward and touch the hands to the floor. Remain in the bent position for one or two seconds and then return to the upright pose. Repeat as many times as possible without exhaustion

Breath

Exhale as you bend forward.

Retain the breath outside in the bent position.

Inhale as you resume the starting position.

Limitations (for both forms)

Not for people with serious back ailments.

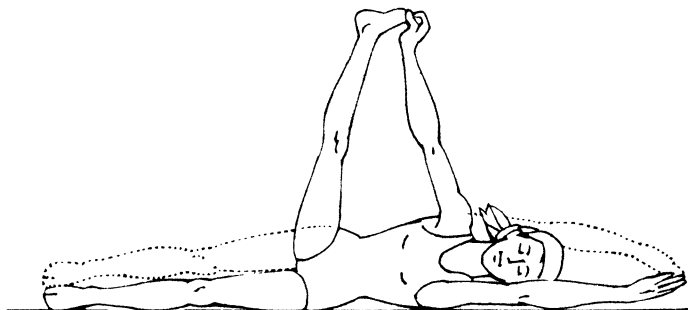
Benefits (for both forms)

Removes excess fat, particularly if done dynamically. Eliminates flatulence, constipation and indigestion. Makes the spinal column and back muscles loose and supple. All the spinal nerves are stimulated and toned and the body metabolism is speeded up. Influences the sexual organs, removing sexual ailments and prepares for trouble-free childbirth. Improves the elimination of waste matter from the body and so reduces the likelihood of disease. It directs a good flow of blood to the brain and facial organs.

Note

This useful asana can be practised any time of day. It is a standing version of paschimottanasana.

HASTA PADA AGUSHTHASANA



Hasta pada angushthasana (the finger to toe stretch pose)

Lie on the left side with arms stretched over and behind the head.

The right foot should rest on the left foot, and the right palm on the left palm.

Raise the right leg and arm to their full extent without bending them so that they each form a 45 degree angle with the floor. Hold the big toe without bending the knee. Lower the right arm and leg and repeat on the opposite side.

Breath

Inhale and raise the limbs. Exhale while lowering.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 10 times on both sides.

Concentration

On the physical movement.

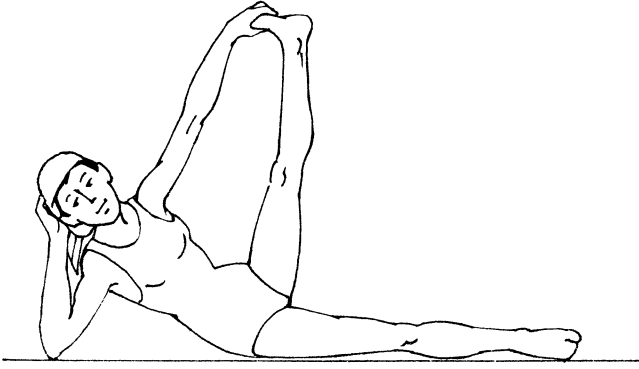
Benefits

This asana makes the hip joints flexible.

It is especially beneficial for young girls.

It is useful for reducing fat on the hips and thighs.

MERU AKARSHANASANA



Meru akarshanasana (the spinal bending pose)

Lie on the right side with the left leg on top of the right. Raise the upper torso and head. Support them on the elbow by placing the right hand under the side of the head. Place the left hand on the left thigh. Raise the left leg as high as possible. Simultaneously slide the left hand to the foot and grasp the big toe. Do not bend the knee. Lower the raised leg and arm back down to their base position. Practise a maximum of 10 times on each side.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arm and leg.
Exhale while lowering.

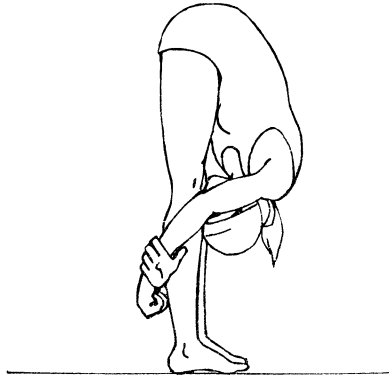
Concentration

On the physical movement.

Benefits

Relaxes hamstring and abdominal muscles. Stretches the side muscles, making them more flexible and strong. Reduces fat on the hips and thighs.

UTTHITA JANU SIRSHASANA



Utthita janu sirshasana (the standing head between the knee pose)

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart. Extend the arms straight in front of the chest. Bend forward and clasp the hands behind the lower legs. Bring the head as far as possible into the space between the knees. The legs should remain straight.

Breath

Inhale deeply and exhale fully before bending. Retain the breath outside while bending. Inhale after returning to the erect position.

Sequence

As a counterpose to backward bending poses.

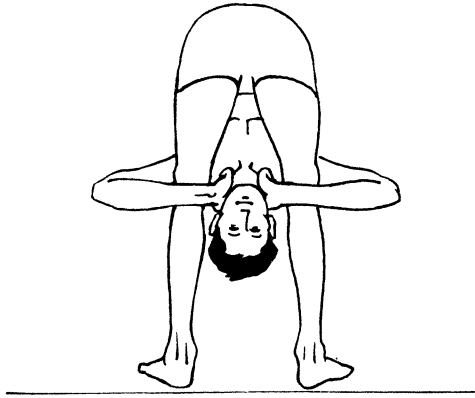
Limitations

Not to be practised by sufferers of sciatica, sacral infections, chronic arthritis or slipped disc.

Benefits

This asana stimulates the pancreas and relaxes the hip joints and hamstring muscles. It massages the spinal nerves and brings a rich supply of blood to the brain, curbing tiredness, yawning and lethargy.

UTTHITA JANU SIRSHASANA



Utthita janu sirshasana (variation)

Stand erect with the feet 2 to 3 feet apart. Bend the legs slightly at the knees.

Repeat the forward bending movement as described for utthita janu sirshasana.

Wrap the arms around the back of the legs so that they are horizontal, the elbows pointing sideways.

Keeping the legs bent, try to bring the hands forward between the legs and clasp them behind the back of the head.

Consciously relax the back muscles.

Then slowly and gently try to straighten the legs, keeping the hands behind the head.

Do not strain.

Hold the final pose for a short time and then release by bending the legs. Repeat as desired.

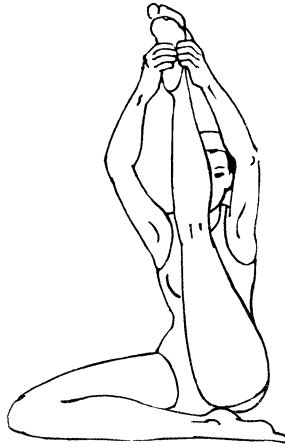
Breath

Breathe out as you straighten the legs. Hold the breath or try to breathe normally in the final pose, depending on how long you remain in it. Breathe in as you bend the legs and release the final pose by bending the legs.

Note

This more intense form of utthita janu sirshasana is sometimes known as utthan asana. All other details are as given for utthita janu sirshasana.

EKA PADA PADMOTTANASANA



Eka pada padmottanasana (the leg raised to head pose)

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Bend the left leg and place the foot flat on the ground in front of the left buttock.

Fold the right leg keeping the knee flat on ground, and place the right heel under the perineum.

Interlock the fingers under the left foot. Raise the left foot and straighten the knee. Bring the knee up to the nose. Keep the leg straight.

Stretch each leg a maximum of 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while seated. Retain while raising and lowering the leg. Exhale when seated.

Limitations

Not for persons with any back ailment.

Benefits

Makes hamstring muscles and hip joints flexible.

SPINAL TWIST ASANAS

The few asanas in this section supplement the backward and forward bending asanas. Every asana program should include at least one asana from this group, preferably following the practice of the forward and backward bending asanas, as they remove tension in the back. The twist imposed on the spine and the whole trunk beneficially exercises the associated muscles, loosens the spinal column and stimulates the spinal nerves. It also has a strong influence on the abdominal organs, by alternately stretching and compressing them as the body is twisted first in one direction and then in the other.

Beginners must be careful not to twist the trunk more than the flexibility of the muscles will comfortably allow. After some weeks of regular practice the muscles will gradually accommodate a more accentuated twist. All that is needed is patience and perseverance on the part of the practitioner. The small effort that is required will be more than compensated for by improved health and vitality.

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA



Ardha matsyendrasana (the half spinal twist pose)

Sit with the legs straight in front of the body.

Place the right foot flat on the floor outside the left knee.

Bend the left leg to the right and place the left heel against the right buttock.

Place the left arm outside the right leg, and with the left hand hold the right foot or ankle. The right knee should be as near as possible to the left armpit.

Turn the body to the right, placing the right arm behind the back.

Twist the back and then the neck as far as possible without strain.

Remain in the final pose for a short time and then slowly return to the starting position.

Change the legs and repeat to the other side.

Simplified variation for beginners

People with very stiff bodies who cannot do ardha matsyendrasana should place the leg that is folded under the buttocks straight in front of the body.

The technique thereafter is the same as the basic form. As soon as the body becomes more supple they should discontinue this simple variation and attempt the full asana.

Breath

Exhale while twisting the trunk. Breathe as deeply as possible without strain in the final pose. Inhale while returning to the starting position.

Note

This important asana should be practised at least once every day. It is a simplification of poorna matsyendrasana (see the section on advanced asanas).

Duration

When the spinal muscles are sufficiently flexible, try to maintain the pose for at least a minute on each side of the body.

Concentration

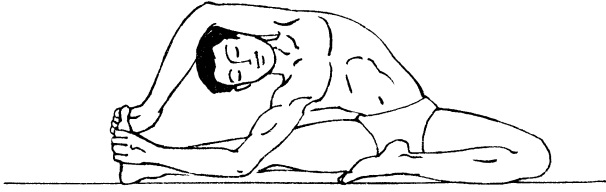
Spiritual : on ajna chakra.

Physical : on the respiration in the final pose.

Benefits

Tones the spinal nerves, makes the back muscles supple and loosens the vertebrae. Massages the abdominal organs, thereby removing digestive ailments. Helps regulate the secretion of adrenaline from the adrenal glands. Activates the pancreas and is therefore useful in eliminating diabetes. Helps to relieve lumbago and muscular rheumatism. Tones the large number of nerves that arise in the region of the back. Influences a large proportion of the nerves connecting the brain to the whole body, rendering the nervous system more efficient and healthy. Very useful for mild cases of slipped disc.

PARIVRITTI JANU SIRSHASANA



Parivritti janu sirshasana (the spiralling head to knee pose)

Sit with the legs straight in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the heel against the perineum. Bend forward, incline the trunk to the right and hold the right foot with the right hand. The fingers should be in contact with the instep, with the thumb on top of the foot. Place the elbow on the inside of the straight leg.

Bring the left arm over the head and hold the right toes. Tighten the arms and pull the right shoulder toward the foot. Try to ease the head under the left arm and twist the trunk as much as is comfortably possible. Look towards the ceiling. Do not strain the back.

Breath

Exhale while pulling the body sideways.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Limitations

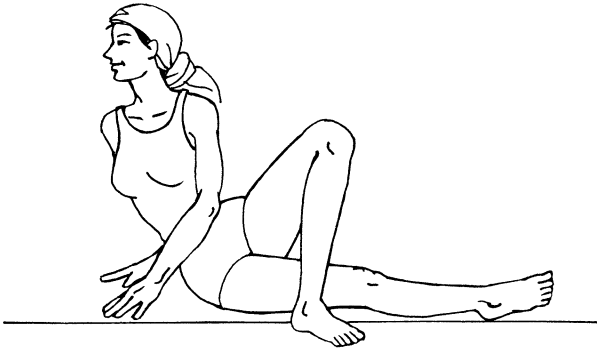
Not for people with back problems or for pregnant women.

Benefits

Gives the same benefits as paschimottanasana, with the added advantage that each side of the abdomen and chest (the thoracic cage including the lungs) is stretched and then compressed.

Duplicates the benefits of ardha matsyendrasana.

MERU WAKRASANA



Meru wakrasana (the simple twist)

Sit with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the hands slightly behind and to the side of the buttocks. The fingers should point backwards. Put the left hand beside the right hand. Place the left foot outside the right knee. Move the right hand slightly backward. Twist the head and trunk as far to the right as possible. Re-center the trunk and then twist it again. Practise a maximum of 10 twists to each side.

Breath

Inhale before twisting. Retain while twisting. Exhale after re-centering.

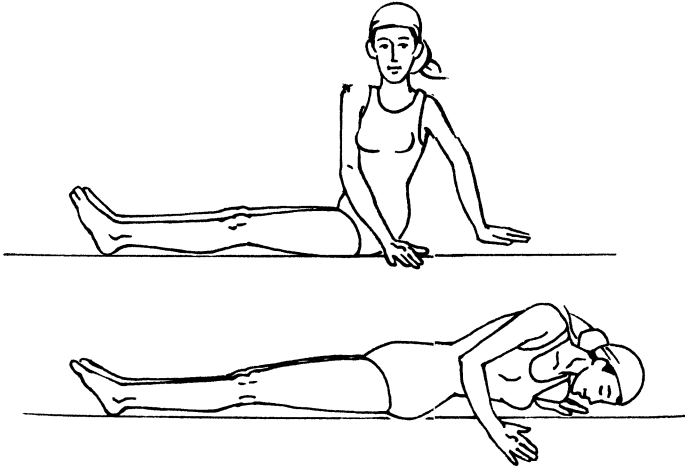
Concentration

On relaxation of the back muscles.

Benefits

This asana is a preparatory pose for ardhha matsyendrasana. It stretches the spinal cord and is also very useful for removing backache.

BHU NAMANASANA



Bhu namanasana (the spinal twist and prostration pose)

Sit with the spine erect and the legs stretched forward. Place both hands by the side of the hip. Twist the torso 90 degrees to the left, then bend the upper body and touch the nose to the ground. The buttocks should not rise off the floor. Straighten the trunk and return to the forward facing position.

Breath

Inhale while facing forward and while raising the trunk. Exhale while bending.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 10 times on each side.

Concentration

On relaxation of the back muscles or the breath.

Benefits

This asana stretches the spine and lower back, making the muscles supple and stimulating the spinal nerves.

INVERTED ASANAS

This important group of asanas must be performed correctly and under the right circumstances. If not, they will be of little or no benefit and can even cause harm to the practitioner.

Inverted asanas encourage a rich supply of blood to flow to the brain, nourishing the millions of neurons and flushing out the toxins that accumulate there. Thus the controlling centre of the body is encouraged to work more effectively. As a consequence, all the organs, muscles, nerves, etc., function nearer to their optimum capacity. The mental power, concentration and ability to sustain large amounts of work without strain are improved. Anxiety, stress and neurosis are reduced if not removed. The enriched blood flow to the brain also allows the pituitary, the master gland of the endocrinal system, to operate more efficiently. This has a positive influence on the personality, the way of thinking and the body processes.

Blood that tends to accumulate in the lower limbs and the abdomen is drained back to the heart. Then it is circulated to the lungs, purified and recirculated to all parts of the body, providing nourishment to the cells of the entire human organism.

During inverted asanas the respiration becomes slow

and deep. This maximizes the expulsion of carbon dioxide and the intake of oxygen. Most people unknowingly starve their bodies of oxygen by incorrect breathing: short, shallow inhalations and exhalations which neither supply the lungs with enough air, nor expel the accumulation of stale air. Inverted asanas encourage correct respiration and so allow the lungs to function as they should, bringing noticeable benefits to the practitioner.

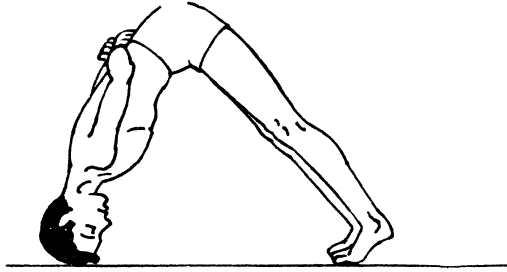
Rules for practising inverted asanas

1. Do not practise inverted asanas until at least three hours after taking food.
2. Do not perform any inverted asanas immediately after vigorous exercise. Wait for half an hour to allow the body to remove the waste products of muscle metabolism from the blood.
3. People with illnesses that tend to make the blood impure should not do inverted asanas until their blood becomes reasonably pure. Those people who are uncertain about the purity of their blood should seek the advice of a yoga teacher or doctor.
4. Do not practice this asana if you have spinal problems, especially a slipped disc.
5. Do not practise near furniture or anything that might impede a free fall to the ground. During either a backward or forward fall the practitioner must sustain the force of the fall with the feet. While falling, the body should be completely relaxed, never tense.
6. Beginners should only remain in the final pose for a few seconds. When they can successfully maintain the position without the slightest difficulty, the time can be increased by a few seconds daily until the

final pose is maintained for the period of time recommended for each asana.

7. If any discomfort occurs, discontinue the practice. Do not repeat it at that particular time.
8. Always practise these poses on a folded blanket thick enough to protect the neck and head; never practise on a mattress, spring bed or air cushion.
9. Assume the poses slowly and gently.
10. Always follow inverted asanas by shavasana and rest until the breath and heartbeat are completely normal.

BHUMI PADA MASTAKASANA



Bhumi pada mastakasana (the half headstand pose)

Assume marjariasana (the cat pose).

Place the crown of the head on the ground between the hands. Raise the knees and buttocks and balance on the head and feet. Raise the arms and clasp the hands behind the back. Hold for as long as is comfortable. Replace the hands, lower the knees and return to the cat pose. This process can be repeated.

Note

Have sufficient soft padding beneath the head.

Breath

Practise with normal breathing.

Concentration

Spiritual: on sahasrara chakra.

Physical: on the respiration, brain or balance.

Sequence

Follow this asana with tadasana, its counterpose.

Limitations

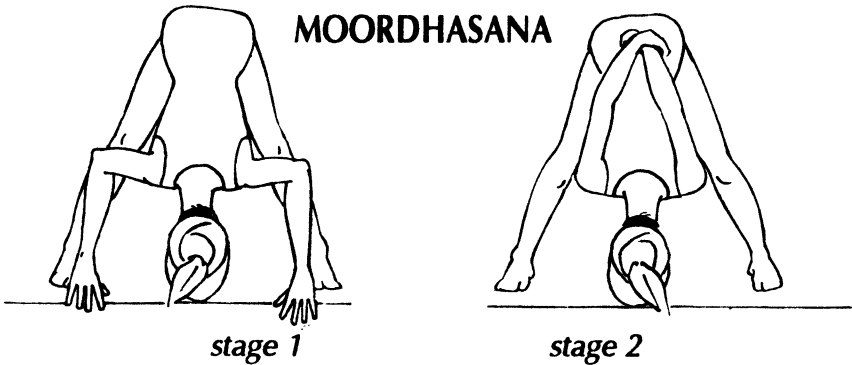
Not for persons with high blood pressure or vertigo.

Benefits

This asana helps in cases of low blood pressure.

It develops nervous balance, strengthens the head and neck muscles and supplies blood to the brain.

It is a preliminary pose for sirshasana.



Moordhasana (the crown-based pose)

Stand erect with the feet 3 to 4 feet apart. Bend the body at the hips and place the hands directly in front of the feet (stage I). Place the crown of the head on the ground between the hands. Raise the arms and clasp the hands behind the back. Raise the heels and balance on the head and toes (stage 2). Maintain this pose up to 1 minute, then replace the hands on the ground. Raise the head and return to the erect position.

After a short rest, repeat 2 or 3 times.

Breath

Retain the breath inside while assuming and returning from the pose. Practise normal breathing once balance has been attained.

Concentration

Spiritual : on sahasrara chakra.
Physical and mental : on respiration and balance.

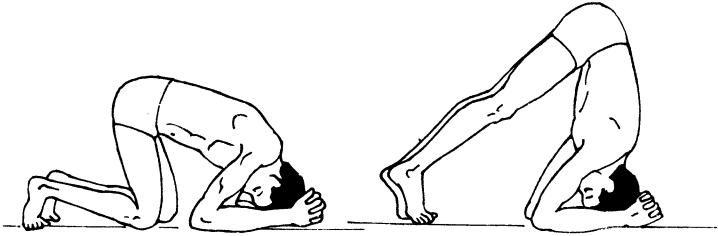
Limitations

Not for persons with high blood pressure or vertigo.

Benefits

This asana brings a rich supply of blood to the brain. It is a preliminary pose for sirshasana as it enables the brain to adapt to the influx of blood while the crown become accustomed to supporting the weight of the body.

SIRSHASANA



stage 1

stage 2

Sirshasana (the headstand pose)

Sit in vajrasana. Bend forward and place the forearms on the ground with fingers inter-twined and the elbows in front of the knees. Place the crown of the head between the inter-twined hands (stage 1). Be sure it is tightly wedged in, so that it cannot roll backward when pressure is applied.

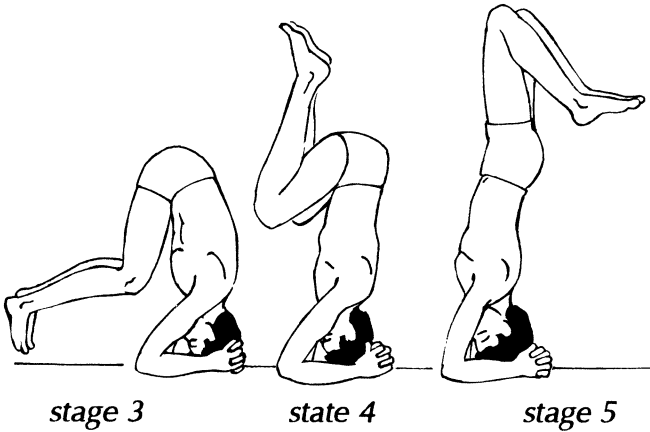
Lift the knees off the ground and raise the buttocks until the legs are straight (stage 2).

Slowly walk the legs toward the trunk and allow the knees to bend so that the back is upright and the thighs press against the abdomen and lower chest. Slowly transfer the bodyweight from the toes onto the head and arms, and raise one foot a few inches off the ground. Raise the other foot and balance on the head and arms (stage 3). When balanced, raise and straighten the hips so that the thighs move up and away from the torso (stages 4 and 5).

Straighten the legs. The body should be perfectly straight in the final pose. It is helpful if someone checks the position and tells you if this is so.

Hold this pose for some time, then slowly refold the legs and lower the toes gently to the ground.

SIRSHASANA



Breath

Retain the breath inside when assuming and returning from sirshasana. Breathe normally in the final pose. The breath should become increasingly subtle in this posture as one becomes accustomed to it.

Duration

Sirshasana can be practised by experts for periods of up to 30 minutes. Beginners should start with 30 seconds and add 1 minutes a week until the desired period is reached. For general health benefits 3 to 5 minutes in the final pose is sufficient.

Concentration

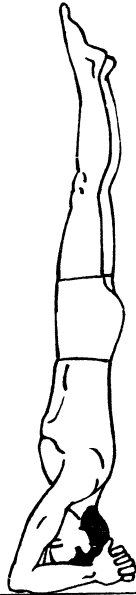
Spiritual : on sahasrara chakra.

Physical : on the brain, respiration or balance.

Sequence

Beginners should practise sirshasana at the end of a series followed only by tadasana, its counterpose, and then shavasana. Advanced practitioners can practise it either at the beginning or the end of a series. Especially note and carry out the instructions listed in the introduction to inverted poses.

SIRSHASANA



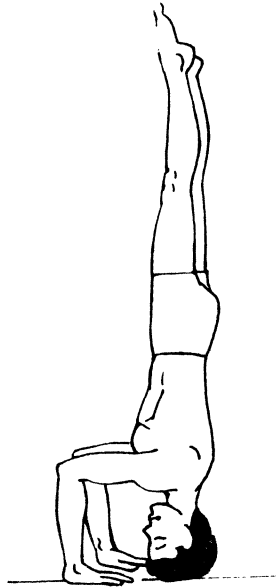
Limitations

Sirshasana should not be practised by persons with high blood pressure, vertigo, heart palpitations, thrombosis, chronic catarrh, chronic constipation, any condition of impure blood or severe nearsightedness. It should not be attempted until one has perfected the preliminary head-based poses.

Benefits

Sirshasana increases the blood flow to the brain and pituitary (master control gland) which helps to rectify many forms of nervous and glandular disorders, especially those related to the reproductive system. It reverses the upward return flow of blood in the leg and visceral regions, which aids tissue rebuilding. It removes psychological disturbances, and relieves headaches, asthma, hayfever, lack of energy, etc. It is the greatest of all asanas as it totally revitalizes the mind and body.

SALAMBA SIRSHASANA



Salamba sirshasana (the supported headstand pose)

Assume marjariasana (the cat pose).

Place the crown of the head on the ground between the hands. Move the hands back to the sides of the knees. Raise the knees and walk the feet forward until the thighs are near the chest.

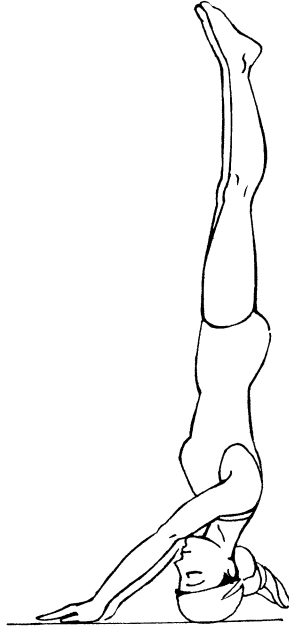
Transfer the body weight from the feet to the head and hands. Slowly raise one foot first then the other. Raise the legs and straighten the knees so that the body is fully erect. Remain for a comfortable period of time and then slowly descend.

Breath

Retain inside while assuming the asana and while descending. Breathe normally in the final pose.

All other details are as given for sirshasana.

NIRALAMBA SIRSHASANA



Niralamba sirshasana (the unsupported headstand pose)

This is the same as salamba sirshasana except the arms are stretched forward and kept straight throughout.

Padma niralamba sirshasana (the unsupported headstand lotus pose)

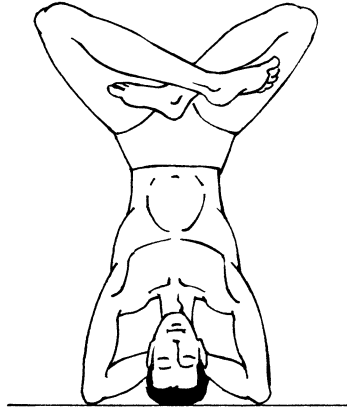
Assume padmasana, the lotus pose. Place the hands in front of the knees and stand on the knees.

Place the head on the ground between the hands and slide the arms into the space under the legs with palms downward and elbows straight.

Draw the legs up to the chest, using the arms as rails. Straighten the hips and raise the legs.

All other details are as given for sirshasana.

OORDHWA PADMASANA



Oordhwa padmasana (the headstand lotus pose)

Perform sirshasana.

While in sirshasana slowly fold the legs into padmasana.

Remain in this pose for some time then straighten the legs.

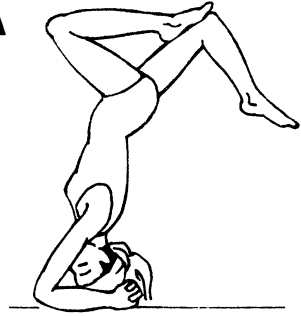
Return to the ground as described for sirshasana.

Note

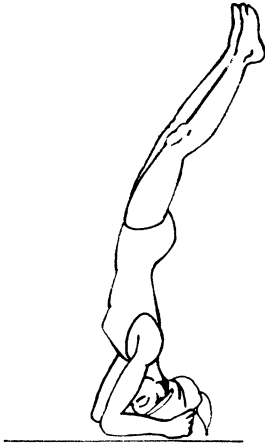
Do not try this asana until you can perform sirshasana without difficulty. In this pose any fall to the floor can cause serious injury.

All other details are the same as for sirshasana.

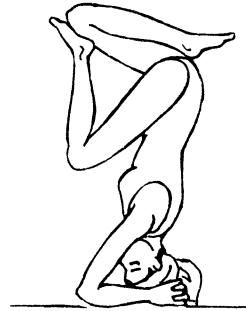
KAPALI ASANA



variation 1



kapali asana



variation 2

Kapali asana (the forehead-supported pose)

Assume sirshasana, the headstand pose. Shift the angle of the head and balance on the forehead.

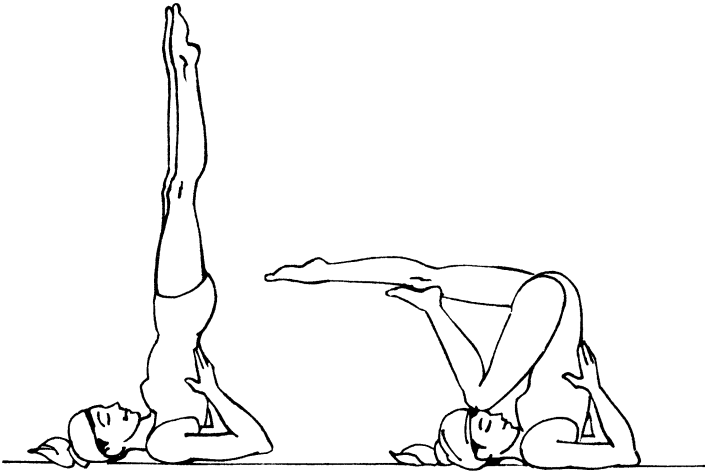
Return to sirshasana before coming down.

Variation

(1) Bend the right knee and put the sole of the right foot on the front of the left thigh. The right knee should point forward. (2) Bend the left knee and touch the buttocks with the left heel. Bend forward at the hips and bring the right knee to the chest.

All other details as for sirshasana.

SARVANGASANA



sarvangasana

variation 1

Sarvangasana (the shoulderstand pose)

Lie flat on the back with the feet together, the arms by the sides and palms flat on the ground. Using the arms as levers raise the legs and back to a vertical position. Bend the elbows and use the arms as props to steady the back by pressing it with the palms. The trunk and legs should extend straight up, forming a right angle with the neck, the chest pressing against the chin.

Variations

1. Bend the right knee and place the right foot on the left thigh.
Bend the hips forward and place the right knee on the forehead. Remove the right foot from the left thigh.
Fold the left leg and bring its knee to the forehead.
2. From sarvangasana, bend the hips forward and bring the legs to a horizontal position over the head.

Breath

Retain inside while assuming and returning from this asana. Practise normal breathing when the body is steady in the raised position.

Duration

Advanced practitioners can practise up to 15 minutes. Beginners should practise for a few seconds and add a few seconds daily. For general health benefits 3 to 5 minutes are adequate.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi chakra.

Physical: on the thyroid gland or respiration.

Sequence

Sarvangasana is ideally practised immediately before halasana. The counterpose can be matsyasana, ushrasana or supta vajrasana, practised for half the combined duration of sarvangasana and halasana.

Limitations

Not for sufferers of enlarged thyroid, liver or spleen, high blood pressure or heart ailments.

Benefits

This asana stimulates the thyroid gland and thereby improves the balance of the circulatory, digestive, reproductive, nervous and glandular systems.

It adjusts improper body growth and clears psychological disturbances by bringing a rich supply of blood to the brain.

It relieves asthma, bronchitis and elephantitis.

It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anal muscles, relieving hemorrhoids (piles).

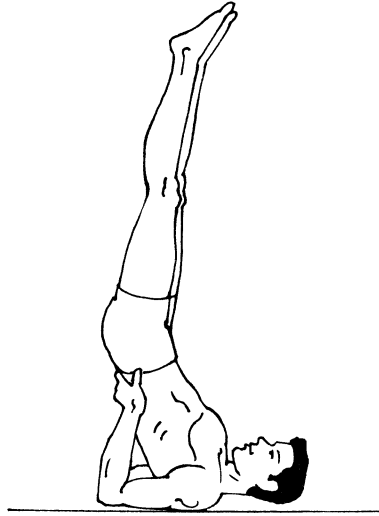
It tones the legs, abdomen, the female reproductive organs, spine and neck.

It inhibits hydrocele and eliminates waistline fat.

Leucorrhoea and diabetes can be remedied.

Mastery of this asana gives conscious control over body temperature.

VIPAREETA KARANI MUDRA



Vipareeta karani mudra (the inverted attitude)

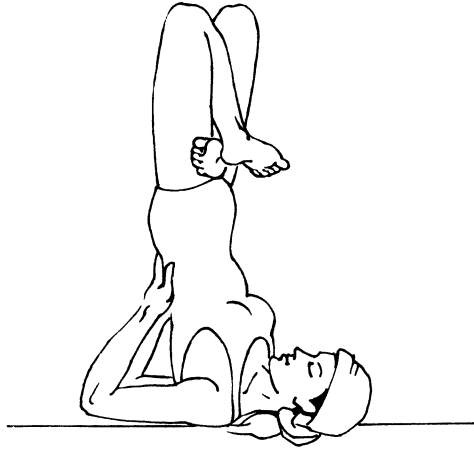
The method is the same as for sarvangasana, except the chin is not pressed against the chest in the final pose. The trunk is held at a 45 degree angle to the ground instead of at a right angle.

Note

This asana is very similar to sarvangasana in all respects. It is easier and is recommended for beginners and persons with a stiff neck who are unable to perform sarvangasana. This posture is also used in kriya yoga.

All other details as given for sarvangasana.

PADMA SARVANGASANA



Padma sarvangasana (the shoulderstand lotus pose)

Perform sarvangasana.

In the final position fold the legs into padmasana.

Variation

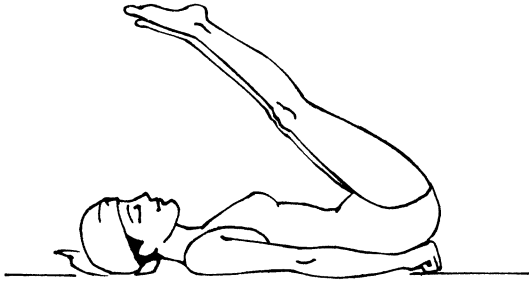
Perform padmasana.

Lean backward and lie flat on the back.

Raise the folded legs as in sarvangasana.

Remain in the final position for some time and then return to the starting position by reversing the same process.

POORWA HALASANA



Poorwa halasana (the preliminary plough pose)

Lie on the back with the fists under the buttocks. The legs should be stretched with the weight of the buttocks on the fists. Raise the legs to a vertical position. Bring them over the head so that they are on a 45 degree incline. Separate the legs as much as possible. Bring them together again, and slowly return to the supine position.

Practise a maximum of 10 times.

Breath

Inhale while supine. Retain while raising, separating and lowering the legs. Exhale when again supine.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi chakra.

Physical: on the thyroid gland, abdomen or respiration.

Sequence

Follow this asana by a backward bending counterpose.

Limitations

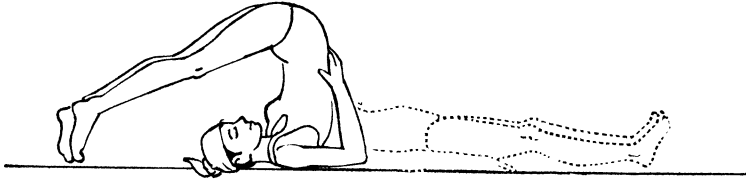
This asana should not be done by old or infirm practitioners or persons with sciatica or slipped disc.

Benefits

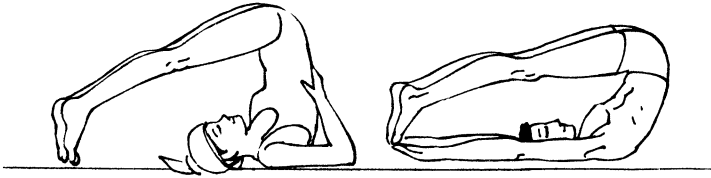
This asana stretches the pelvis, regulates the kidneys, activities the intestines and removes fat deposits.

It should be mastered before one attempts halasana.

HALASANA



halasana



addition 1

addition 2

Halasana (the plough pose)

Lie flat on the back with the arms straight and beside the body, palms facing downward.

Keeping the legs straight, slowly raise them to the vertical position above the body. Only use the stomach muscles to raise the legs. Do not use the arms. Simultaneously bend the trunk upward, hips first. Slowly lower the legs over the head and touch the floor with the toes of both feet. Keep the legs straight, bend the arms and place the hands on the back as in sarvangasana. Relax the body.

Remain in the final pose for a comfortable period of time. Then either return to the starting position or perform the following additions to the basic pose:

1. Walk the feet away from the head until the body is completely stretched and a tight chin lock occurs.
2. Walk the feet towards the head until the back is fully tensed. Keep the legs straight and directly above the head. Grasp the feet with the fingers.

Maintain these poses for a comfortable length of time, then return to the final pose of basic halasana.

Breath

Retain inside while assuming and returning from the pose. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

Duration

Adepts can hold the final pose of halasana and the two additional stages for more than 10 minutes each. Beginners should hold each pose for 15 seconds during the first week of practice, doing each in rotation up to 4 times and adding 15 seconds every week until each pose is held for 1 minute.

Concentration

Spiritual: on vishuddhi or manipura chakra.

Physical and mental: on the abdomen, relaxation of the back muscles, respiration or the thyroid gland.

Sequence

If possible perform halasana immediately after sarvangasana. Follow halasana by matsyasana, ushrasana or supta vajrasana, practised for half of the combined duration of sarvangasana and halasana.

Precautions

Beginners should not do poorwa halasana until their back muscles become flexible.

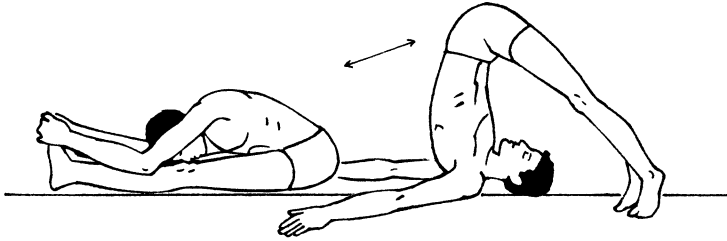
Limitations

Not for old and infirm people, sufferers of sciatica and other back ailments, or high blood pressure.

Benefits

Adjusts the functioning of the abdominal organs, especially the kidneys, liver and pancreas. Activates digestion, relieves constipation and removes fat from the waist. Beneficially influences all the visceral organs. Regulates the activities of the thyroid, thereby balancing all the body's metabolic rates. Helps to remedy diabetes, eliminate piles, loosen the vertebrae and tone the spinal nerves.

DRUTA HALASANA



Druta halasana (the dynamic plough pose)

Lie on the back with the arms straight and the shoulders relaxed. Roll the legs quickly over the head and touch the toes to the floor behind the head. Roll rapidly back to the supine position and immediately bend forward into paschimottanasana. Keep the legs straight and try to touch the knees with the forehead. Resume the seated pose and repeat with an even, flowing motion. Practise up to 10 times.

Breath

Inhale deeply and exhale fully before starting. Retain outside while rolling. Inhale when stationary.

Sequence

Follow this asana with a backward bending pose.

Precautions

Be careful not to strain any muscles or the lungs.

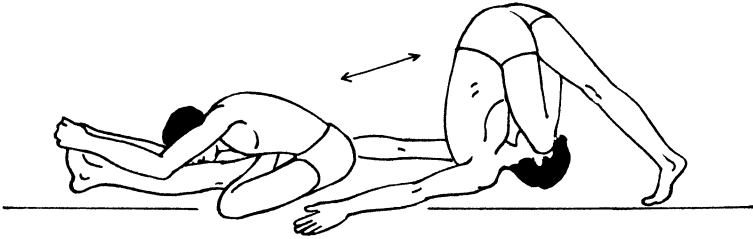
Limitations

This asana is not be practised by old or infirm people, sufferers of sciatica, or beginners.

Benefits

This asana tones the kidneys and suprarenal glands, activates intestinal peristalsis, facilitates the breakdown of fats by exercising the liver and gall bladder, and stretches the pelvic region. It improves digestion and removes constipation.

ARDHA PADMA HALASANA



Ardha padma halasana (the half lotus plough pose)

Sit with one leg stretched forward and the other leg in the half lotus position. Place the hands beside the thighs. Push down with the hands and roll backwards. The straight leg will go over the head and the toes will touch the ground.

Roll back to the seated position. Without breaking the continuity of movement, bend the body at the waist and bring the nose down to the straight knee. Grasp the toes with both hands. Raise the torso and resume the original upright position.

Practise a maximum of 5 times with each leg folded.

Breath

Inhale deeply and exhale fully before rolling and inhale again when seated.

Sequence

Follow this by a backward bending counterpose.

Precautions

Be careful not to strain the back or leg muscles.

Take care not to hit the back of the head on the floor.

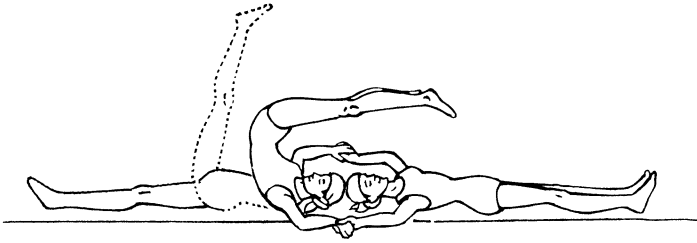
Limitations

Not for old or infirm persons, or those who suffer from sciatica, slipped disc or high blood pressure.

Benefits

Stretches the pelvis, regulates the kidneys, activates the intestines and removes fat deposits.

STAMBHAN ASANA



Stambhan asana (the posture of retention)

This asana is practised by two persons together. Both lie on their backs with the crown of their heads in contact. They stretch both arms sideways and hold each others' hands at arms length. The arms are tensed and the heads press each other. One person raises his legs to a vertical position. After a few seconds he lowers the legs, then raises them again, this time horizontally over his partner's head. After a few seconds he lowers the legs and relaxes. Each person should practise a maximum of 5 times.

Breath

Inhale while supine. Retain while raising, holding and lowering the legs. Exhale when again supine. The breath is identical for both persons.

Note

The first stage where the legs are raised vertically may be practised simultaneously by both persons.

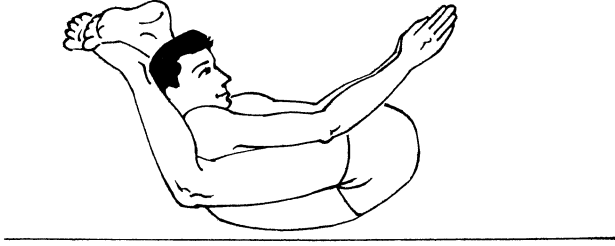
Limitations

Should not be practised by any infirm person.

Benefits

This asana strengthens the arm and back muscles. It provides abdominal stimulation which activates intestinal peristalsis.

DWI PADA KANDHARASANA



Dwi pada kandharasana (two-legged shoulder pose)

Lie on the back with legs stretched and arms beside the body. Bend one leg upward and place it so the foot is behind the head and the leg is under the arm. Repeat with the other leg. Do not strain. The arms can be utilized to gently press the legs downward and make it easier to position the feet comfortably behind the head. Try to cross the feet. In the final pose, point the arms forward and place the palms together. Relax the whole body, close the eyes and breathe slowly. Maintain this pose for as long as comfortable.

Concentration

On swadhsthana chakra.

Sequence

Follow this pose with any backward bending asana.

Precautions

Do not force the body into the final pose.

Limitations

Not to be attempted by persons with slipped disc, sciatica or any other serious back ailment.

Benefits

Helps to control the nervous system. Tones all the abdominal organs, kidneys, spleen, liver, intestines, pancreas, etc. Also tones the pelvic organs, improving the efficiency of the sexual and eliminatory systems and the sexual glands. It increases vitality and removes laziness and lethargy.

BALANCING ASANAS

This series of asanas develops the practitioner's sense of balance, as well as giving further benefits as described in the text for each asana. They help to improve coordination between different parts of the body, so that the practitioner is able to move more efficiently and gracefully. Most people waste much energy by moving their limbs without synchronisation with the rest of the body. The result is less work with more effort. These asanas develop the cerebellum, the brain centre that controls fine movements of the body.

To execute these asanas successfully, concentration is absolutely necessary to maintain equilibrium. Balancing poses help to improve the practitioner's powers of concentration in other fields of activity. They also induce nervous balance and remove stress, anxiety and worries. If you feel particularly tense at any time, do one or more of these asanas for as long as possible.

Many beginners find balancing asanas reasonably difficult at first, as most people do not develop their sense of balance to a very high degree during normal life. However, the body is very adaptable and the beginner will find the

sense of balance developing quickly after a few weeks of regular practice.

When practising these poses it is most important that the mind is steadied through concentration on one point. Gazing at a black spot or a mark on the wall while practising the poses allows the body to maintain seemingly difficult positions for long periods of time.

For further information on *tratak*, the practice of steady gazing, see the section at the back of this book.

EKA PADA PRANAMASANA



Eka pada pranamasana (the one leg prayer pose)

Stand erect with the feet together and arms at the sides. Raise one foot and place the sole against the inside of the opposite upper thigh. The heel is near the perineum, the palms together in front of the chest.

Duration

Practise as long and as much as possible.

Concentration

On a visible point.

Benefits

Develops nervous equilibrium and balance.
Strengthens the leg, ankle and foot muscles.

GARUDASANA



Garudasana (the eagle pose)

Assume a standing position. Raise the right leg and twist it around the left leg. The right thigh should eventually lie in front of the left thigh and the right foot should rest on the calf of the left leg. Now fold the arms and twist the right arm around the left arm until the palms can be placed together to resemble an eagle's beak. Bend the left leg and lower the body until the right toe touches the floor. Practise for as long as possible without strain.

Concentration

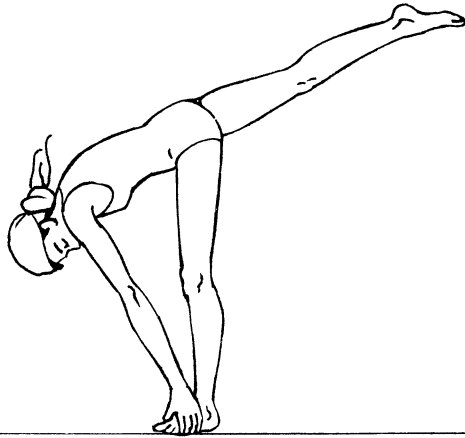
On a visible point and on balance.

Benefits

Strengthens the muscles, tones the nerves and loosens the joints of the legs. Helps to relieve sciatica and rheumatism in the legs and arms.

Eliminates hydrocele and develops balance.

BAKASANA



Bakasana (the crane pose)

Stand erect with the feet together and arms raised above the head. Bend the body at the waist and grasp the left toes with both hands. Raise the right leg behind as high as possible. Do not bend either knee. Hold this position as long as comfortable. Lower the leg and return to the erect position.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms. Exhale while bending the trunk. Breathe normally in the final pose. Inhale while returning to the erect position.

Duration

Practise one on each leg for as long as possible.

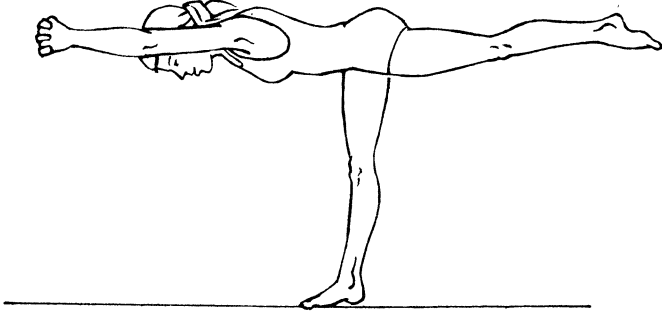
Concentration

On maintaining balance.

Benefits

This asana improves blood circulation to the brain, strengthens the arms, wrists and leg muscles, relaxes the lower back and helps in the development of nervous co-ordination.

EKA PADASANA



Eka padasana (the one foot pose)

Stand erect with the feet together.

Raise the arms directly above the head and interlock the fingers.

Slowly lean forward, keeping the trunk and head in line with the straightened arms.

Simultaneously raise the left leg backward, keeping it straight and in line with the trunk.

The body should rotate from the right hip joint.

The final pose is attained when the left leg, the trunk, the head and the arms are all in one straight, horizontal line, the right leg straight and vertical.

Remain in the final pose for as long as possible and then slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat the movement, raising the right leg backward.

Breath

Inhale while raising the arms.

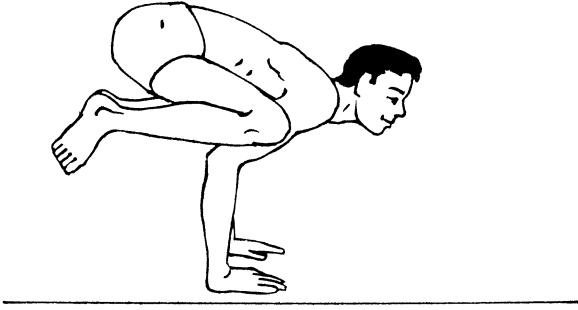
Exhale while bending to assume the final pose.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Inhale while returning to the starting position.

All other details as given for bakasana.

BAKA DHYANASANA



Baka dhyanasana (the patient crane pose)

Squat on the floor with the legs apart. Rise on tiptoe and place the hands flat on the ground directly in front of the feet. The elbows should be bent slightly.

The knees should touch the outside of the upper arms, as near as possible to the armpits.

Slowly lean forward and lift the feet off the floor, balancing only on the hands, with the knees resting firmly on the upper arms.

Face forward.

Breath

Retain the breath inside in the raised position.

Duration

Maintain the final pose for as long as you are able to retain the breath without straining. Repeat up to 10 times.

Concentration

On maintaining balance.

Limitations

Not to be attempted by persons with high blood pressure or cerebral thrombosis.

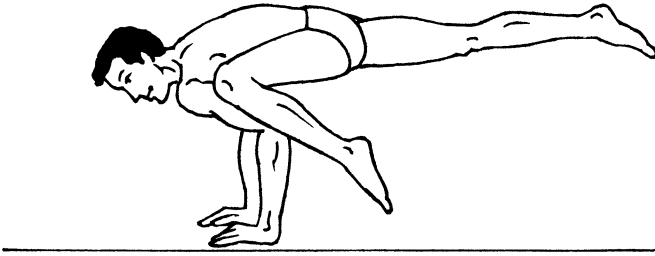
Benefits

This pose steadies the nervous system and removes tension and anxiety.

It strengthens the arms and wrists and develops the sense of balance.

It requires more nervous co-ordination than muscular strength.

EKA PADA BAKA DHYANASANA



Eka pada baka dhyanasana (the one-legged crane pose)

Assume the final pose of baka dhyanasana.

Stretch one leg directly backward.

Hold this position for as long as possible with the breath retained inside.

Note

This is more difficult form of baka dhyanasana for advanced practitioners.

All other details are as for baka dhyanasana.

ARDHA PADMA PADOTTANASANA



Ardha padma padottanasana (the half lotus leg stretch pose)

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Place the left foot on top of the right thigh. Bend the right leg and place its foot flat on the ground. Clasp the hands under the right thigh. Fix the gaze on a visible point. Straighten the right leg and balance on the back of the buttocks. Bend the right knee and lower the foot to the ground. Repeat the same process with the right foot on the left thigh. Practise a maximum of 5 times with each leg.

Breath

Inhale while seated. Retain while balancing.

Exhale when firmly seated again.

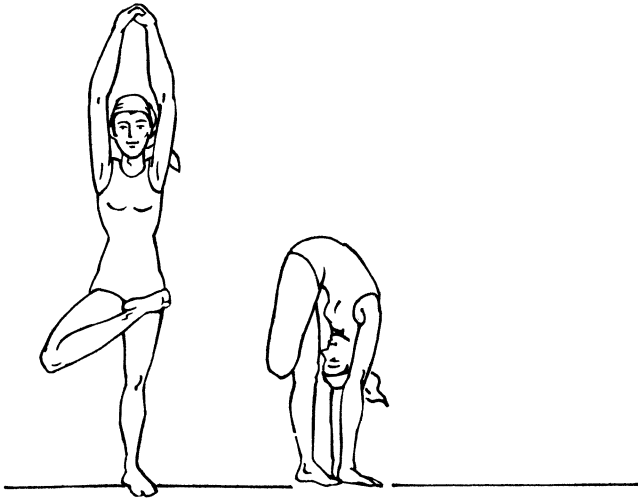
Concentration

On maintaining balance by gazing at a fixed point.

Benefits

This asana prepares the legs for the lotus pose and aids the development of nervous balance.

ARDHA BADDHA PADMOTTANASANA



Ardha baddha padmottanasana (the half lotus leg stretch pose)

Stand erect.

While balancing on the left leg, bend the right leg at the knee and place the right foot as high as possible on the left thigh.

Raise both arms above the head claspings the fingers. Relax and steady the whole body.

Slowly bend forward and touch the left foot with the fingers.

Keep the left leg straight.

If possible touch the left knee with the forehead.
Stay in the final pose for as long as comfortable.
Slowly return to the erect position.
Unfold the right leg and relax.
Repeat the same procedure with the left leg folded on
the right thigh.

Breath

Exhale while bending forward.
Breathe normally in the final pose.
Inhale as you return to the starting pose.

Duration

Maintain for up to 2 minutes on each leg.

Concentration

On maintaining balance or on the breath.

Limitations

Not for people with sciatica or slipped disc.

Benefits

Stimulates digestion and removes constipation.
Develops the sense of balance and improves the
power of concentration.
Loosens and strengthens the legs.

SANTULANA PARVATASANA



Santulana parvatasana (the balancing mountain pose)

Sit in padmasana. Gaze at a fixed point.

Using the hands for support, slowly rise on to the knees. Straighten the hips and trunk.

Slowly raise both hands straight over the head, one at a time.

Breath

Practise with normal, unrestrained breathing.

Duration

Practise for as long as possible.

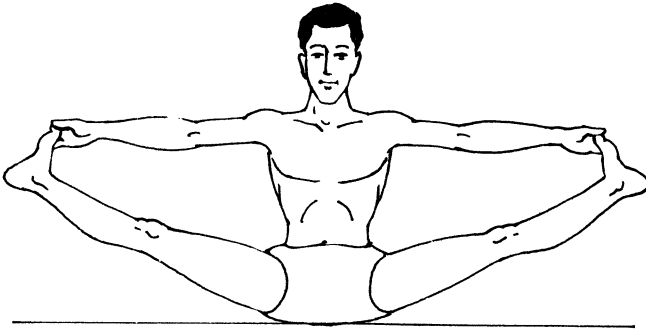
Concentration

This is a reasonably difficult balancing pose and so the concentration should only be directed towards maintaining balance.

Benefits

This asana helps in the development of nervous balance.

MERUDANDASANA



Merudandasana (the spinal column pose)

Assume a sitting position.

Bend the legs at the knees and place the soles on the floor in front of the buttocks.

The feet should be about half a meter apart.

Hold the big toes and relax the body.

Slowly lean the trunk backward and straighten the legs.

The arms and legs should be straight and separated as much as possible.

Breath

Inhale while seated. Retain the breath inside while stretching the legs. Exhale after finishing.

Duration

For as long as you can comfortably retain the breath. Do not strain.

Concentration

On maintaining balance by gazing at a fixed point.

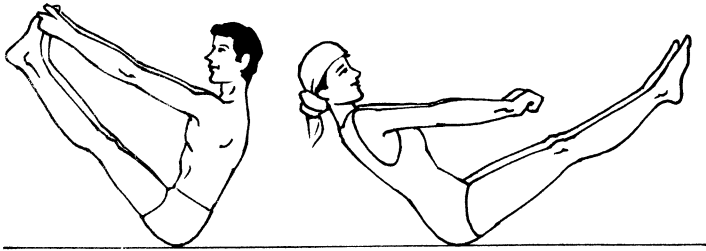
Limitations

Not for sufferers of slipped disc or sciatica.

Benefits

Activates the abdominal organs, especially the liver, and strengthens the abdominal muscles. Helps to remove intestinal worms, stimulates intestinal peristalsis and tones the entire visceral region. Tones the spinal nerves and strengthens the spinal muscles. Develops balance and concentration.

MERUDANDASANA



utthita hasta merudandasana

ashwa sanchalanasana

Merudandasana variation 1 : utthita hasta merudandasana (the raised limbs and spine pose)

This is very similar to merudandasana. Instead of separating the feet in the final pose, bring them together, keeping the arms and legs straight.

Merudandasana variation 2 : ashwa sanchalanasana (the rocking horse pose)

Sit erect with the legs together and the knees near the chest. Bend the arms so that the fists can be placed on the outside of the knees.

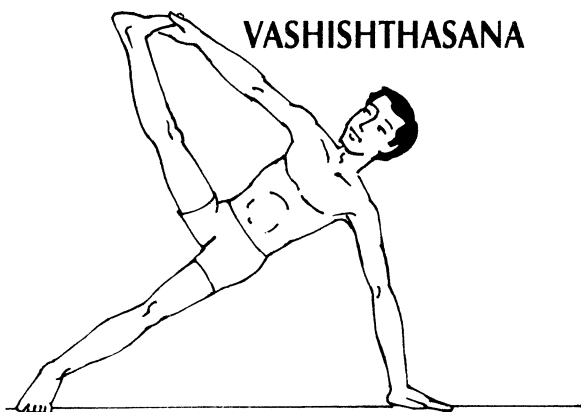
Recline the back while simultaneously stretching the arms and legs. Try to straighten both the arms and legs, keeping the fists above the knees.

The whole body should be balanced on the buttocks. Try to raise the legs as much as possible, keeping them straight. Maintain the final pose for a short time and then return to the starting position. Rest and repeat.

Note

Beginners should perfect this asana before attempting to practise merudandasana or utthita hasta merudandasana.

All other details as for merudandasana.



Vashishthasana (the straight arm stretch pose)

Lie on the left side with the right leg above the left leg. Place the right hand on the right thigh and the left palm on the ground under the left shoulder. The fingers must point away from the feet. Straighten the left elbow and raise the upper torso. Raise the hip until the entire body is straight and on a 30 degree incline supported by the left arm and foot. Bend the right knee and grasp the big toe with the right hand.

Raise the foot and stretch the leg. Release the toe. Lower the leg and then the body.

Practise a maximum of 5 times on each side.

Breath

Practise this asana with the breath retained inside.

Normal unrestrained breathing may be practised once the foot is securely raised.

Concentration

On maintaining balance and on relaxing the leg muscles.

Benefits

This asana improves nervous balance and removes anxiety. It makes the leg muscles supple and strengthens the arms.

VATAYANASANA



Vatayanasana (the galloping horse pose)

Stand erect. Gaze at a fixed point.

Bend the left knee and place the left foot on the right thigh, in the half lotus manner.

Place the palms together in front of the chest in a prayer gesture.

Bend the right leg and slowly lower the body as far as possible. Rest the left knee on the ground.

Slowly return to the erect position.

After a rest, repeat the movement.

Variation

Practise with the arms stretched downward at a 45 degree angle.

Breath

Inhale while standing on one foot.

Retain while lowering and rising.

Exhale when erect.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Duration

Practise a maximum of 10 times on each leg.

Concentration

On maintaining balance by gazing at a fixed point.

Benefits

This asana strengthens the leg muscles and relaxes the knee joints. It is excellent for atrophied muscles and gout in the knees.

It develops the ability to retain seminal fluid by strengthening the prostatic and spermatic muscles and nerves.

It reduces hyperacidity of the kidneys, together with over-frequent urination.

NATAVARA ASANA



Natavara asana (Lord Krishna's pose)

Stand erect.

Place the right foot to the left of the left leg with the toes slightly above the ground and the sole almost vertical.

Rest the right calf against the left shin.

Raise both hands as if playing a flute.

Duration

Practise for as long as possible on each leg.

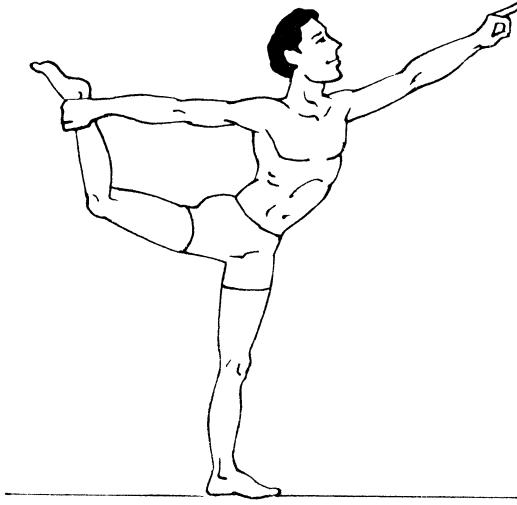
Concentration

On ajna chakra.

Benefits

Controls the nerves, aids in developing concentration and is a good preparatory pose for meditation.

NATARAJA ASANA



Nataraja asana (Lord Shiva's pose) preparatory form

Stand erect. Bend the right leg backwards and raise the foot as high as possible.

Grasp the right ankle with the right hand.

Reach upward and forward with the left arm.

Do gyana mudra with the left fingers and gaze at the horizon.

Duration

Practise for as long as possible on each leg.

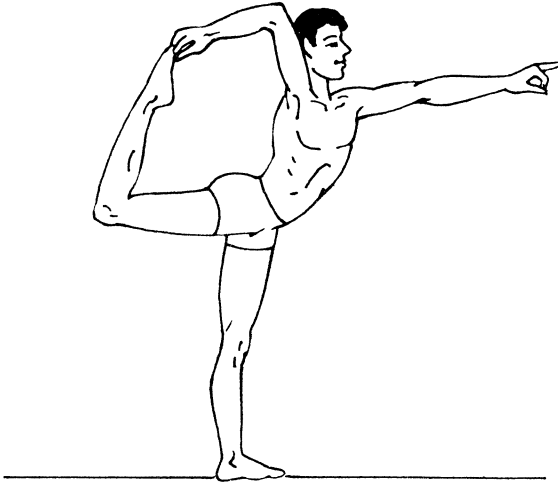
Concentration

On ajna chakra.

Benefits

Balances the nervous system, aids in bodily control and mental concentration and makes the legs supple.

NATARAJA ASANA



Nataraja asana (Lord Shiva's pose) full form

This is exactly the same as the preparatory form except that the big toe of the backward-facing foot is held instead of the ankle.

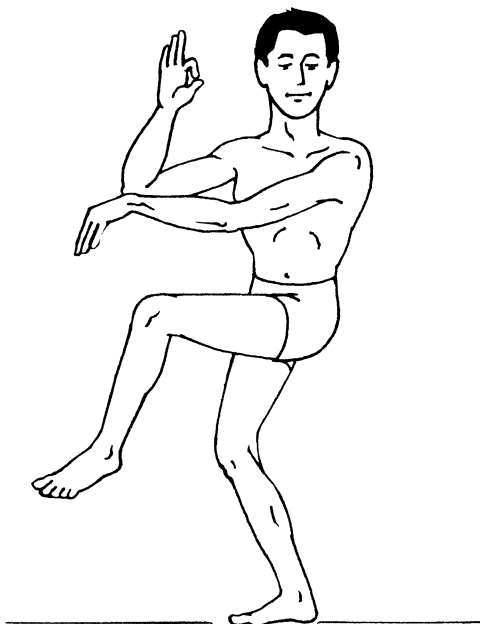
The elbow of the arm that faces backward should point up. This position of the hand and arm will allow the foot to be raised nearer to the back of the head. Advanced practitioners with flexible bodies may be able to touch the back of the head with the toes or hold the toes with both hands.

Note

This form of nataraja asana should be practised after the preparatory form has been perfected.

All other details are as given for the simpler preparatory form.

NATARAJA ASANA



Nataraja asana (Lord Shiva's dance) variation

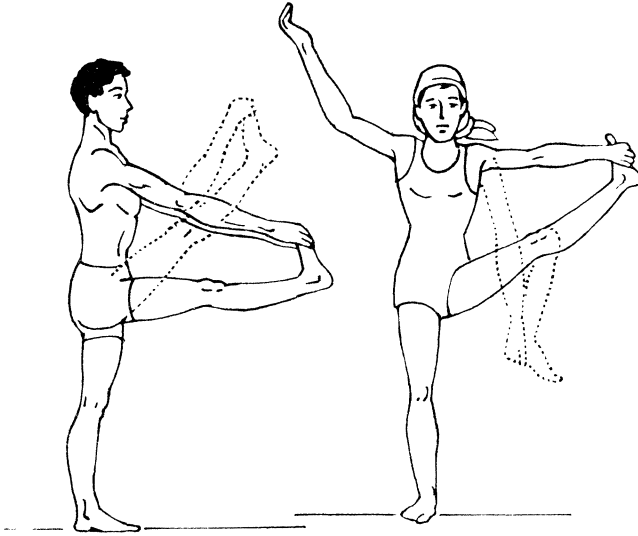
Stand erect. Raise the left foot so that the thigh is horizontal and the foot points away from the body and is slightly to the right of right leg.

Hold the left arm in line with the left leg so that it points downward and outward.

Bend the right arm and point the elbow in the opposite direction to the left arm. Hold the lower arm vertical and chin or gyana mudra with the upper hand. Gaze toward the horizon.

All other details as given for nataraja asana preparatory form.

UTTHITA HASTA PADANGUSTHASANA



basic form

variation 2

Utthita hasta padangusthasana (the raised hand to big toe pose)

Stand erect with the feet together and the hands on the hips. Relax the whole body.

Bend the right leg at the knee and raise the thigh as near as possible to the chest.

Grasp the big toe of the raised foot with the right hand fingers. The right arm should be outside the bent leg. Straighten the right leg and slowly pull it upward.

Maintain this pose for a comfortable length of time.

Release the toe and slowly lower the leg to the ground, keeping it straight.

Variation 1

Repeat the basic form but hold the raised straight leg with both hands. Clasp the fingers together and place them behind the heel. Using the arms as levers, try to gently pull the leg as near as possible to the head. Advanced practitioners may be able to touch their chin to the raised leg.

Variation 2

Stand erect with the feet together.

Bend the right leg at the knee and raise the thigh as high as possible towards the chest.

Hold the big toe of the right foot with the right hand.

The arm should be on the inside of the right leg.

Slowly straighten the raised leg to the side. Raise the left arm pointing it to the left and upward.

Then try to gently pull the straight raised leg higher and closer to the body.

Maintain the final pose for a comfortable length of time. Then slowly lower the raised leg to the floor.

Breath

For all three forms, exhale while straightening the raised leg, and then inhale. Exhale while pulling the leg higher and closer to the body. Breathe deeply in the final pose. Exhale while lowering the leg.

Duration

The final pose of each form can be held for up to 60 seconds. Those people who are unable to maintain the pose can repeat 5 times, with each leg.

Concentration

On a fixed point in front of the body.

Precautions

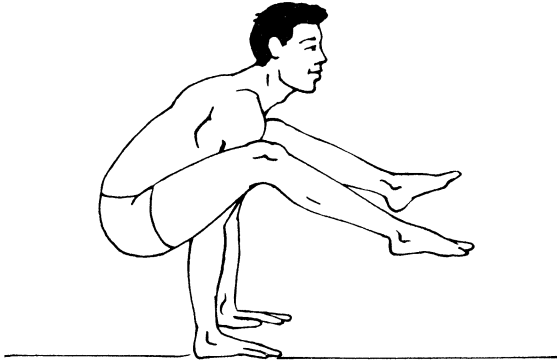
Do not strain the leg muscles.

Benefits

All forms improve concentration and co-ordinate muscular and nervous balance.

Strengthens and stretches the leg muscles.

DWI HASTA BHUJANGASANA



Dwi hasta bhujangasana (the two handed cobra pose)

Stand with the feet about 1½ feet apart. Bend the legs at the knees, squat and place both palms flat on the floor between the feet. Place the left leg outside the left upper arm. Similarly, place the right leg outside the right upper arm above the elbow. This must be done carefully to avoid overbalancing. In the final pose the whole body is supported by the arms and hands. Maintain for as long as comfortable and then slowly reverse the order of movements and resume the starting position. Do not strain.

Repeat 2 to 3 times.

Breath

Normal in the final pose.

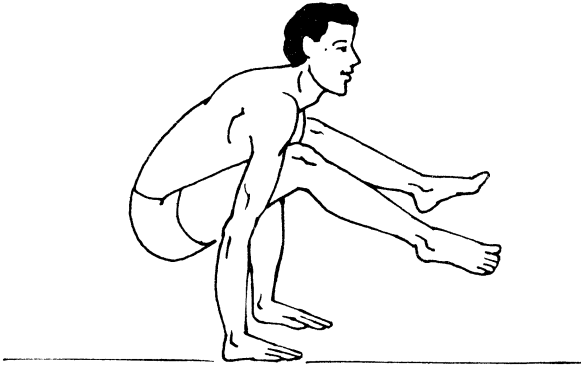
Concentration

On maintaining balance.

Benefits

Develops the arm muscles and loosens the shoulder joints. Massages the abdomen, the sacral region, stomach, kidneys and spleen. Useful for diabetics as it stimulates the pancreas to secrete insulin.

EKA HASTA BHUJANGASANA



Eka hasta bhujangasana (the single-handed cobra pose)

Sit on the floor with both legs stretched in front of the body.

Bend the left leg at the knee.

Put the left leg on the outside of the left upper arm.

The back of the left thigh should touch the back of the upper left arm.

Place both palms flat on the floor, the right palm on the outside of the right leg.

Raise the whole body off the ground.

Keep the right leg straight and parallel with the ground between the two arms.

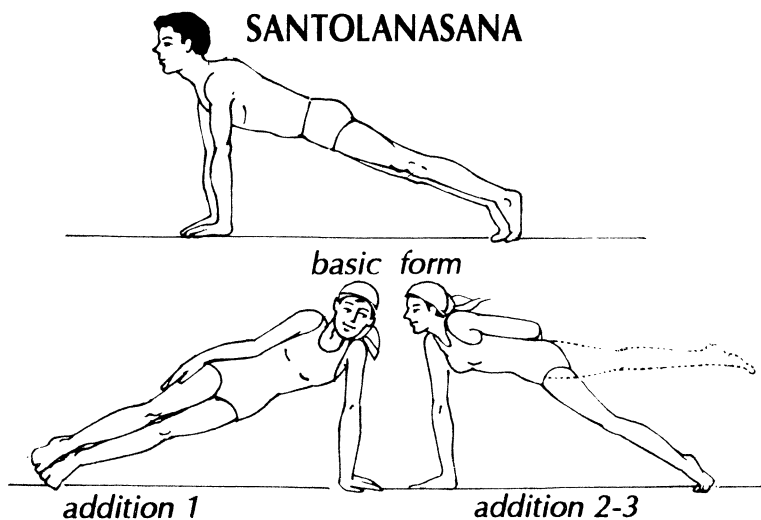
Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time and then return to the starting position.

Repeat the same procedure again with the left leg held straight in the final pose.

Note

This is a variation of dwi hasta bhujangasana.

All other details are as given for dwi hasta bhujangasana.



Santolanasana (the balancing pose)

Assume the cat pose (*marjariasana*). Raise the buttocks and straighten the knees to form the mountain pose (*sumeru asana*). Move the shoulders forward and drop the buttocks until the body is straight and taut. The arms should be vertical.

Additions

1. Raise one arm and roll the body onto the side. The upper hand will rest on the upper thigh. Roll back to the basic pose and repeat this movement on the opposite side.
2. Raise one arm and place it behind the back.
3. Raise one leg and stretch it back and upward.

Breath

Practise the base pose with normal breathing. Retain the breath inside when practising the additions.

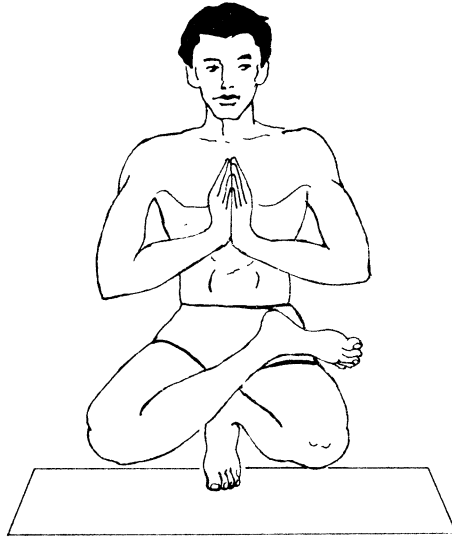
Duration

Practise this asana for as long as possible.

Benefits

This pose develops the nervous system.

PADA ANGUSHTHASANA



Pada angushthasana (the tiptoe pose)

Assume a squatting position. Raise the heels.
Lower the knees so that the thighs are horizontal.
Place one foot on top of the opposite thigh.
The heel of the supporting foot should press against the perineum.
Place the palms together in front of the chest.

Concentration

On maintaining balance by gazing at a point.

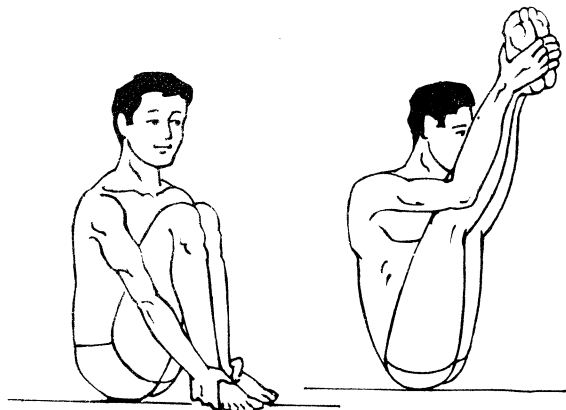
Duration

Practise for as long as possible on each foot in turn.

Benefits

This asana is especially useful for celibates (brahmacharyas). It regulates the sexual system and helps to combat spermatorrhea. It remedies flat feet and strengthens the toes and ankles.

NIRALAMBA PASCHIMOTTANASANA



Niralamba paschimottanasana (the unsupported back stretching pose)

Sit with knees bent and feet flat on the ground. Grasp the sole of the feet from the outer sides of the legs. Raise the feet and straighten the knees. Balance on the buttocks. Try to touch the nose to the knees.

Breath

Inhale while sitting. Retain while raising, balancing and lowering. Exhale while sitting. Normal breathing may be practised in the balanced position.

Duration

Practise up to 5 times if dynamic or hold for up to 3 minutes if static.

Concentration

On maintaining balance by gazing at a fixed point.

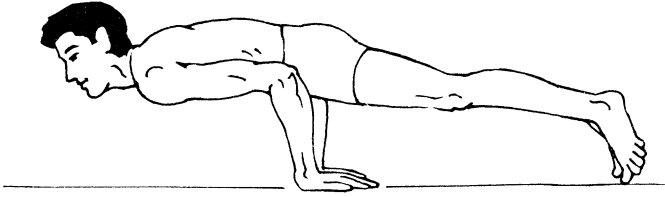
Limitations

Should not be practised by persons with slipped disc, sciatica, sacral infections or chronic arthritis.

Benefits

This asana stimulates the pancreas, relaxes the hamstring muscles and renders the hip joints flexible. It also aids in developing nervous balance.

HAMSASANA



Hamsasana (the swan pose)

Kneel on the floor with the feet together and the knees apart.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the ground between the knees with the fingers pointing towards the feet.

Bend the arms at the elbows so that the elbows point backwards and are together at the abdomen.

Simultaneously lean forward and rest the abdomen on the upper arms and elbows.

Keeping the feet together, stretch the legs backward until they are straight.

Raise the head upward.

In the final pose all the weight of the body should rest only on the tips of the toes and the hands.

Hold for as long as comfortable.

Concentration

Spiritual : on manipura chakra.

Mental and physical : on the breath or abdomen.

Sequence

This asana can be performed at any time of day but not after meals.

Not to be practised by persons suffering from peptic or duodenal ulcers, acidity, hernia, high blood pressure or over-dilated blood vessels caused by antibiotics.

Benefits

Strengthens the abdominal organs and muscles; helps to expel stomach or intestinal worms; stimulates the appetite, removes constipation and helps to eliminate amebic dysentery.

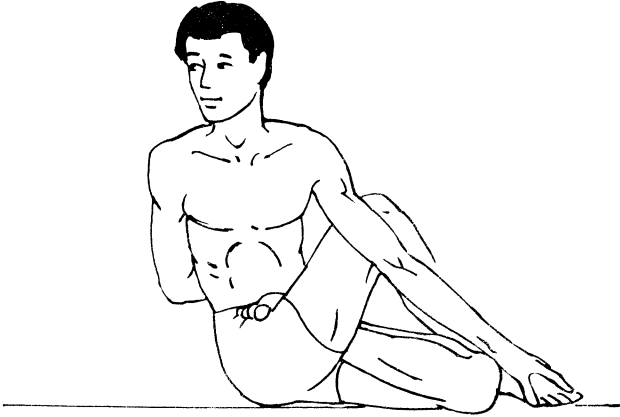
The Advanced Group of Asanas

ADVANCED ASANAS

The following asanas should only be attempted by advanced practitioners who have made their bodies supple by the regular practice of easier asanas. In general we recommend aspirants to start trying the following asanas only when they can execute the asanas in the beginners and intermediate groups without the slightest difficulty. A beginner or person with average ability who tries these difficult poses is likely to become discouraged and will probably feel that they are impossible for him, as well as for all people except circus performers. Of course this has a negative influence on the mind. There is no reason why most people with reasonably good health should not eventually be able to perform advanced asanas but at the correct time, when their bodies are ready and not before.

Practitioners who attempt these asanas should be fully aware of the injurious consequences of over-straining the body in any way. This applies particularly to the following asanas, as in many of them the practitioner is required to move the limbs into most unusual positions. Gentle coaxing of the limbs into the final pose over a period of time is far better than forcing the limbs into the final pose in one day and possibly causing more harm than good.

POORNA MATSYENDRASANA



Poorna matsyendrasana (the full spinal twist pose)

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched forward. Place the left foot on the right hip joint. The left heel should press against the abdomen with the left thigh remaining on the ground. Move the right foot to the left side of the left knee, the sole flat on the floor. The right leg must be bent and the knee raised. Twist the body to the right, place the left armpit against the right side of the raised knee and reach down to grasp the right ankle (or if possible the toe) with the left hand. The left arm should eventually be straight. Place the right arm behind the back and try to touch the left heel with the right hand.

Using the left arm as a lever, twist the trunk further to the right. Finally, twist the head to the right.

Maintain the final pose for a time without straining and then slowly return to the forward-facing position. Release the limbs and relax the muscles. Repeat the

same process with the legs reversed. After twisting to each side, sit with the legs stretched in front and the trunk and head erect.

Breath

Exhale as you twist the body into the final pose.

Breathe normally in the final pose.

Inhale as you return to the forward-facing pose.

Duration

For general health benefits 2 minutes on each side is sufficient. This pose should not be maintained for long periods of time.

Concentration

On the eyebrow center, relaxation of the back, the abdomen or the respiration.

Precautions

Be careful not to strain the body in any way by twisting the trunk more than its flexibility will allow, or by placing the folded leg higher than it is able to go naturally.

Benefits

Essentially the same as ardha matsyendrasana but more accentuated.

It has a great influence on the back, making the muscles flexible, the vertebral joints and discs loose and the nerves free of tension.

Stagnant blood is squeezed from the back region and is replaced by fresh oxygenated blood on completion of the asana.

Tones those nerves in the neck which connect the brain with the different parts of the body.

Massages the internal organs and is useful in the treatment of all abdominal ailments.

Helps remove constipation, dyspepsia, diabetes.

Regulates the secretion of adrenaline, giving vitality to the weak and calmness to the overwrought.

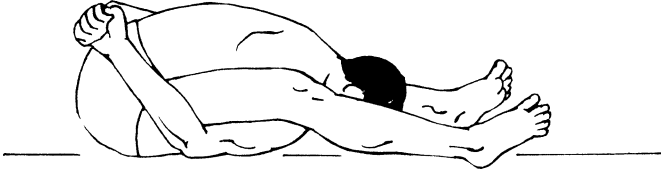
Helps to relieve lumbago and rheumatism, together with neckache, headache and backache.

Makes the leg muscles supple and loosens the joints.

Note

This asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath, who is said to have meditated for hours in this pose. It is the full form of ardha matsyendrasana.

KOORMASANA



Koormasana (the tortoise pose)

Sit with the legs spread as wide as possible.

Lean forward and insert the hands under the knees with the palms downward.

Bring the forehead to the ground, slide the arms under the knees and clasp the hands behind the back in the final pose.

Release the hands and slowly sit up.

Breath

Exhale as you bend the trunk forward. Practise normal unrestrained breathing in the final pose.

Duration

For spiritual purposes this asana can be practised for long periods.

For physical and mental purposes 5 minutes is enough.

Concentration

Spiritual : on swadhisthana or manipura chakra.

Physical : on relaxing the back muscles and abdomen.

Sequence

Follow with a backward bending asana.

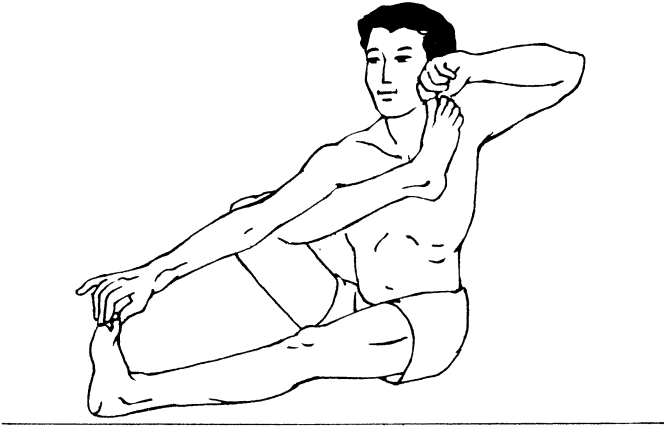
Limitations

Not to be done by people with slipped disc, sciatica or chronic arthritis.

Benefits

This asana tones the spine and kidneys. Removes excess fat from the abdomen, tones all the internal organs of the abdomen and aids in ailments such as diabetes, flatulence and constipation. Encourages a flow of fresh blood to the spinal nerves and muscles. Removes backache, headache and neckache.

DHANURAKARSHAN ASANA



Dhanurakarshan asana (the archer's pose)

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Place the right foot on the left thigh, and grasp the right big toe from the top with the left hand.

Hold the left big toe with the right hand, keeping the leg straight. Raise the right big toe to the left ear. Do not bend the neck or back.

Practise a maximum of 10 times with each foot.

This action resembles that of drawing a bow.

Breath

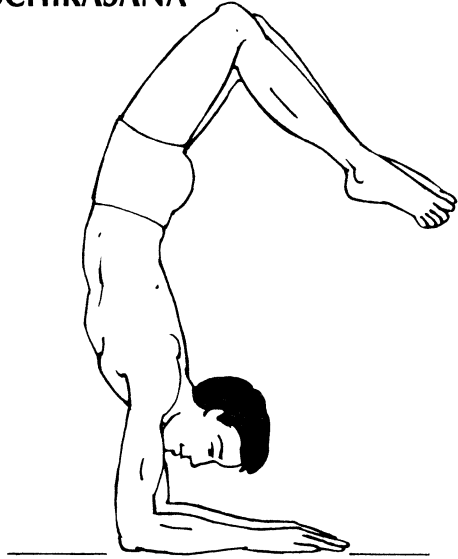
Inhale while seated, prior to pulling the toe to the ear.

Retain inside while pulling the toe. Exhale on returning to the half lotus pose.

Benefits

Tones the abdominal organs, stretches the spine and strengthens the biceps and ankles. Remedies hydrocele.

VRISCHIKASANA



Vrischikasana (the scorpion pose)

Assume the final pose of sirshasana. Bend the legs and arch the back. Move the forearms carefully so that they lie on each side of the head parallel with each other, palms flat on the floor. Lower the feet as much as possible towards the ground behind the head. Slowly raise the head backward and upward. Then flexing the arm muscles, carefully raise the upper arms from the elbows so that they are vertical. Try to relax the whole body as much as possible. Slowly return to sirshasana then to the ground.

Note

One can also return from the final pose by simply allowing the feet to drop to the ground behind the head and then assuming a standing position.

Breath

Retain inside while assuming the pose.
Breathe normally in the final pose.

Duration

Vrischikasana is difficult to maintain for long. Remain in the final pose up to 5 minutes if possible.

Concentration

On maintaining balance.

Sequence

Practise at the end of an asana session. Follow with a forward bending asana for a few seconds. Then do tadasana for half a minute and rest in shavasana.

Precautions

Until this asana is perfected, practise near a wall.

Do not practise near furniture.

Limitations

Not to be done by persons with high blood pressure, vertigo, cerebral thrombosis, chronic catarrh or heart problems. This asana should only be attempted by people who can perform all the inverted poses without the slightest difficulty.

Benefits

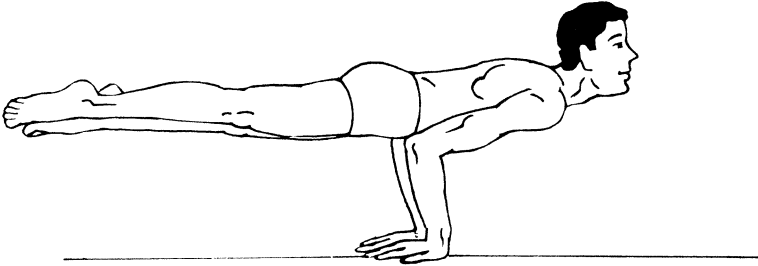
This asana reorganizes the vital force in the body, which is the key to the conquest of physical ageing. It brings about nervous stability and revitalizes all the bodily systems. It increases the blood flow to the brain and the pituitary gland, which helps to rectify nervous disorders and glandular malfunctions. Drains stagnant blood from the lower limbs and abdomen. Is useful for removing piles or varicose veins. It rectifies sexual disorders and brings the sexual glands into balance. The arched position tones the spinal nerves, makes the muscles supple and loosens the vertebrae.

Strengthens the arms and develops a sense of balance.

Note

This asana resembles a striking scorpion. It gives control over the psychic poison and nectar center in the throat region.

MAYURASANA



Mayurasana (the peacock pose)

Kneel on the floor. Place the feet together and separate the knees. Lean forward and place both palms between the knees on the floor, with the fingers pointing towards the feet. Bring the elbows and forearms together. Lean further forward and rest the abdomen on the elbows and the chest on the upper arms. Stretch the legs backward so they are straight and together. Tense the muscles and slowly elevate the trunk and the legs so that they are horizontal to the ground. The whole body should then be balanced only on the palms of the hands. Maintain the final pose for a short period without strain, then carefully return to the base position. When the breathing rate has returned to normal, the asana may be repeated.

Note

Elevate the legs as high as possible when proficient. In the final pose the weight of the body should be supported by the abdomen, not the chest.

Breath

Exhale while raising the body off the ground. Retain the breath outside in the final pose. Inhale while lowering the body. Breathe normally if the final pose is held for a longer period.

Duration

Practise for as long as the breath can be retained. Persons who maintain the final pose for longer periods should avoid muscular strain. Repeat up to 3 times, allowing the respiration to become normal on completion of each final pose.

Concentration

Spiritual: on manipura chakra.

Physical: on maintaining balance in the final pose.

Sequence

Perform at the end of an asana session.

Should definitely not precede inverted poses.

Limitations

Not to be practised by persons with high blood pressure, hernia or stomach ulcers.

Benefits

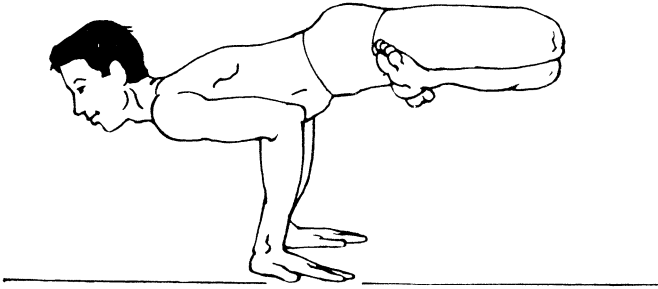
This asana stimulates the metabolic processes which increases secretion from different organs. Waste matter is evacuated from the intestines and bowels. Toxins are eliminated from the blood. This helps to remove skin complaints such as boils.

This asana is recommended for the treatment of most stomach ailments, abdominal problems and diabetes. Persons advised to speed up the body processes and eliminate toxins should prepare by following these instructions :

1. Stop eating milk products, fat, meat and any other food that is difficult to digest. Try not to eat spices.

2. Take buttermilk, fruits, vegetables, rice and all simple foods. Live on this diet for one month.
3. After two weeks of this restricted diet, start to perform mayurasana as many times as possible each day, (or hamsasana if mayurasana is too difficult). Within one month the body should be very clean both internally and externally. If not, the diet and practice of mayurasana should be continued.

PADMA MAYURASANA



Padma mayurasana (the tied peacock pose)

Perform padmasana. Raise the body on to the knees. Place the palms on the floor in front of the body so that the fingers point towards the knees. Bend the elbows and bring them together. Lean forward and place them against the middle of the abdomen. Lean further forward and support the chest on the upper arms. Slowly raise the legs and balance the whole body on the palms. Try to hold the trunk and folded legs as horizontal as possible. Do not strain.

Breath

Inhale deeply before raising the body off the ground. Retain while in raised pose. Exhale while lowering.

Duration

For general benefits do 3 to 5 times. For specific illnesses such as diabetes, do as many times as possible.

Concentration

On the retained breath or the abdomen.

Benefits

Helps to eliminate dyspepsia and enlargement of the spleen. Encourages the pancreas to produce insulin. All other details are as given for mayurasana.

HANUMANASANA



Hanumanasana (the monkey god pose)

Kneel on the left knee. Place the right foot beside the left knee and put the palms of both hands flat on the floor on each side of the body.

Gradually, without any undue strain, slide the right foot forward and the left foot backward as far as is comfortable. Support the weight on the hands.

Practise until you can lower the buttocks to the floor. Place the palms together in front of the chest.

Duration

Once on each side for as long as comfortable.

Concentration

On ajna or anahata chakra.

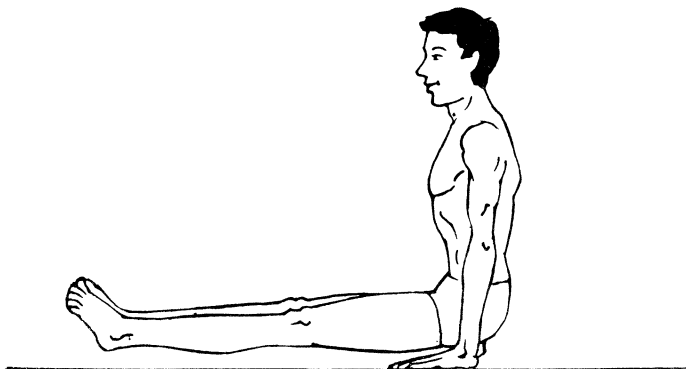
Sequence

After completing the asana, sit with legs extended forward.

Benefits

This asana stimulates the visceral organs and muscles. It is very useful for removing sexual ailments and preparing the organs of childbirth for a troublefree delivery. It improves the blood circulation in the legs, thighs and hips.

BRAHMACHARYASANA



Brahmacharyasana (the celibate's pose)

Sit with the legs together in front of the body. Place the palms on the floor near the hips with the fingers forward.

Tense the whole body, straighten the arms and lift the body off the ground. The legs should remain straight and horizontal. The whole body should be supported and balanced on the hands.

Breath

Inhale while on the floor. Retain inside while balancing. Exhale while returning to the ground.

Duration

Practise up to 3 times holding for as long as possible.

Concentration

On manipura chakra.

Sequence

Follow with shavasana or advasana.

Benefits

This asana makes the abdominal organs and muscles strong.

People who wish to conserve sexual energy should perfect it.

MOOLA BANDHASANA



Moola bandhasana (the perineum contracting pose)

Assume a sitting position with the legs stretched forward.

Bend the knees and bring the feet together at the perineum.

Raise the body onto the heels so that the heels press the perineum.

The heels can either point forward or backward.

Repeat when all tension has left the legs and feet.

Concentration

Practise nasikagra drishti in the final pose.

Precautions

Do not strain the legs and feet.

Benefits

This advanced practice automatically induces moola bandha. It is a very powerful asana for celibates and tones all the sexual and eliminative organs. It also makes the legs and feet exceptionally supple.

GORAKSHASANA



Gorakshasana (Yogi Gorakhanath's pose)

Assume a sitting position.

Place the heels together as for moola bandhasana.

Instead of placing the heels under the perineum, raise them toward the navel keeping the toes on the floor.

Cross the wrists in front of the navel and hold the heels, the right fingers on the left heels and the left fingers on the right heel.

Straighten the spine and face forward.

Breath

Normal in the final pose.

Concentration

Practise nasikagra drishti in the final pose.

Precautions

The muscles should be slowly stretched over a period of months.

Note

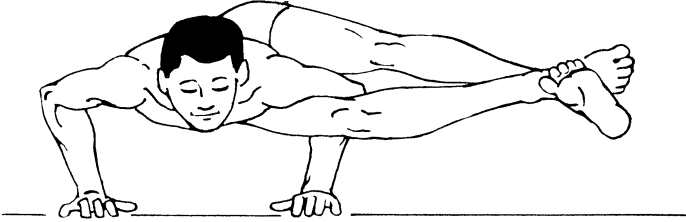
Persons who can remain comfortably in the final pose can utilize it for meditation.

Gorakhnath, the great yogi, used to meditate in this pose for hours.

Benefits

This asana makes the legs and feet extremely flexible.

ASTAVAKRASANA



Astavakrasana (the eight-curves pose)

Stand with the feet about 1½ feet apart. Bend the legs at the knees. Place the left palm on the ground between the feet and the right palm on the ground a little in front of the right foot.

Place the left leg above the left arm, resting the thigh on the back of the upper left arm.

Stretch the right leg forward between the arms so that it lies close to the left arm.

Lift both legs off the floor. Place the right foot on the left ankle and stretch both legs to the left. Be sure that the left arm is between the thighs and the elbow is below the thighs. Balance on the arms.

This is the final pose. Repeat on the other side.

Breath

Normal in the final pose.

Concentration

On maintaining balance.

Sequence

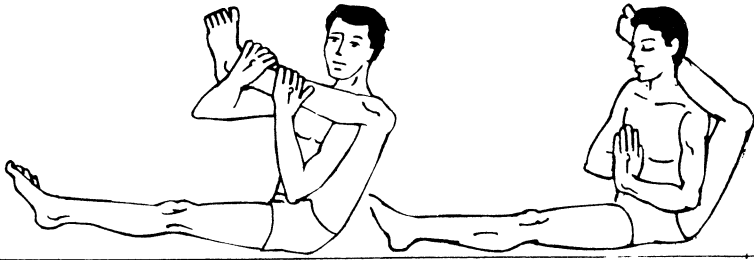
Follow with either shavasana or advasana.

Benefits

Develops nervous control throughout the body and mind. Strengthens the arm muscles.

This asana is named after a great sage in ancient India who was born with a body that was crooked in eight places.

EKA PADA SIRASANA



Eka pada sirasana (the foot to head pose)

Sit with the legs stretched forward.

Bend the left leg slightly and hold the left ankle from the outside with the right hand.

Place the left hand slightly above the ankle, the arm touching the inside of the left thigh.

Pull the left leg as high as possible.

Try to place the leg on top of the left shoulder.

Lower the left arm so that it rests against the back of the left thigh.

Use the right arm to try and raise the left leg further, so that the foot lies behind the back of the neck.

Bring the hands together in front of the chest.

Retain the final position for a comfortable length of time. Then slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat 1 or 2 times for each leg.

Breath

Deep and slow in the final position.

Concentration

On breathing in the final position.

Limitations

Not for pregnant women or people with sciatica.

Benefits

Massages each side of the abdomen in turn. Tones the sexual organs and eliminates associated ailments.

Useful for varicose veins if the final pose is maintained for an extended length of time.

UTTHAN EKA PADA SIRASANA



Utthan eka pada sirasana (the standing foot to head pose)

Assume eka pada sirasana. Place both arms on the knee of the free leg and try to stand up. If possible place the palms together in front of the chest.

Maintain the standing position for a short time and then sit down again. Release the leg and stretch both legs in front of the body in the sitting position. Repeat with the other leg behind the head.

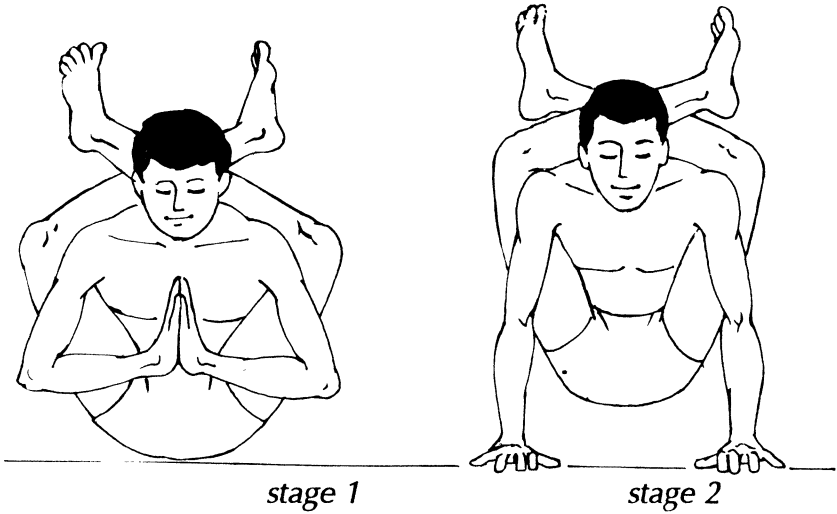
Note

This asana should only be attempted by people who can do eka pada sirasana without difficulty.

Concentration

On raising the body to the upright position.
All other details as for eka pada sirasana.

DWI PADA SIRASANA



Dwi pada sirasana (the two-feet head pose)

Practise eka pada sirasana. Then slowly place the other foot behind the neck. Try to lock the feet behind the neck by crossing the ankles.

Place the palms of the hands on the floor beside the thighs. Try to balance on the coccyx (tail bone).

Now bring the palms together in front of the chest (stage 1).

Maintain for a short time, then place the palms beside the thighs again.

Straighten the arms and lift the whole body off the floor, balancing only on the palms (stage 2).

Maintain for a comfortable length of time and then gently lower the body to the ground.

Slowly uncross and lower the feet.

Stretch the legs forward and relax the whole body.

Note

All other details as for dwi pada kandharasana.

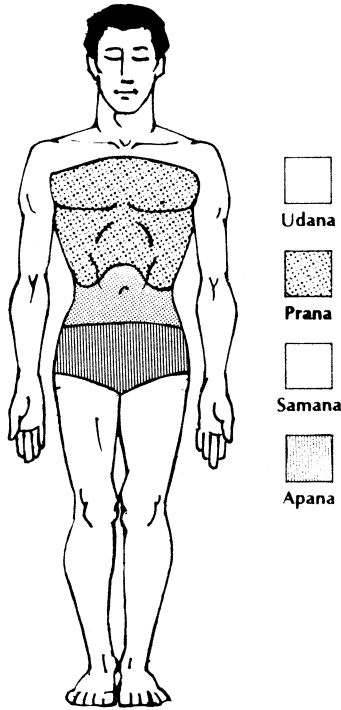
Pranayama

INTRODUCTION TO PRANAYAMA

Prana is the vital or etheric force which pervades the whole cosmos. It is in all things, whether animate or inanimate; it is in stones, insects, animals and human beings. Though closely related to the air we breathe, it is not exactly the same thing. Prana is more subtle than air and can be defined as the energy essence that is within everything in the universe.

Yama means 'to control'. Pranayama can be defined as a series of techniques which stimulate and increase the vital energy, ultimately bringing about perfect control over the flow of prana within the body. Pranayama should not be thought of as mere breathing exercises, aimed at introducing extra oxygen into the lungs, though of course this is a very beneficial aspect. Pranayama utilizes breathing to influence the flow of prana in the *nadis* (pranic channels) of the *pranamaya kosha* (the body of bio-energy). This purifies them and induces physical and mental stability. The practice of *kumbhaka* (breath retention) brings about control of the prana and eventual mastery of the mind.

SCRIPTURAL DETAILS



Traditionally, the prana in the body is divided into five elementary parts which are collectively known as the *pancha pranas* (five pranas). They consist of prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

Prana

This is not the overall prana but belongs to a specific part of the body located in the region between the larynx and the top of the diaphragm. It is associated with the respiratory organs, the organs of speech, and the gullet, together with the muscles and nerves that activate them. It is the force by which the breath is drawn inside.

Apana

This is located below the navel region and provides energy for the large intestines, kidneys, anus and genitals. It is concerned with the expulsion of prana through the rectum and the nose and mouth.

Samana

This is concerned with the region between the heart and navel. It activates and controls the digestive system: liver, intestines, pancreas, stomach, and the secretions they supply. Samana also activates the heart and circulatory system. It is responsible for assimilation of nutrients.

Udana

The body above the larynx is controlled by udana. Thus the eyes, nose, ears, and all sensory receptors are activated by this prana. Without it we would be unable to think or be conscious of the outside world.

Vyana

This vital force pervades the whole body. It regulates and controls all movement of the body and co-ordinates the other vital energies. Vyana harmonizes and activates the limbs, their associated muscles, ligaments, nerves and points. It is also responsible for the erect posture of the body.

Upa pranas

There are also five upa pranas: naga, koorma, krikara, devadatta and dhananjaya. They are concerned with minor actions such as sneezing, yawning, scratching, belching, hiccuping and hunger.

Vayus

All these pranas are controlled by the *vayus*. Each *vayu* is associated with one prana, and has the same name. For example, apana *vayu* controls the apana vital energy. These *vayus* are generated by the breathing process, and it is through them that pranayama can influence the vital forces in the body.

Breathing and the life process

Man's lifespan depends much on his mode of respiration. A person who breathes in short, quick gasps is likely to have a shorter life than a person who breathes slowly and deeply. The ancient yogis measured a person's lifespan, not in years but by the number of his respirations. They considered that everyone is allocated a fixed number of respirations in his life, differing for each person. By making each respiration longer, one's life is prolonged. By breathing deeply one is able to gain more vitality or prana from each respiration.

The ancient yogis lived in forests and secluded regions. They had no external commitments or distractions and were able to study the wild animals in great detail. They noticed that animals with a slow breathing rate, such as snakes, elephants and tortoises have a long lifespan. Animals with fast breathing rates, such as birds, dogs, rabbits, etc., live only a few years. From this observation they realized the importance of slow breathing.

Respiration is directly related to the heart. Slow respiration occurs with a slow-beating heart, and a slow-beating heart is conducive to long life. The heart of a mouse beats one thousand times per minute. It only has a short lifespan. A whale's heartbeat is about sixteen times per minute and an elephant's about twenty five. Both are renowned for their long life.

Swara yoga

Swara yoga is the study of the breath. This science reveals many hidden secrets about life. By following subtle changes in the flow of air through the nostrils, the swara yogi is able to know what will happen in the future. Breathing changes according to circumstances. For example, when a person is angry or has emotional disturbances the rate and force of his breath increases,

whereas if he is contented, his breathing is slow and calm. The following table shows the distance from the nose that the exhalation of air can be felt during different moods:

normal	-	6 anguls	walking	-	24 anguls
emotional	-	12 anguls	sleeping	-	30 anguls
singing	-	16 anguls	during sex	-	36 anguls
eating	-	20 anguls	exercising	-	36 anguls

Note: One angul equals the width of one finger.

These are examples on a gross plane but it is possible to ascertain deeper information about a person by his breath. The flow of air through each nostril determines the mood of each individual. Sometimes if the flow of air is greater through the left nostril, the individual is more inclined towards thinking. If the flow is greater through the right nostril, the individual is more inclined towards physical actions. According to swara yoga this flow is continually changing so that sometimes the flow is greater through the right nostril and sometimes through the left. It is said that this flow changes approximately every hour, which accounts for the fluctuating activities of man.

The duration of inhalation in the day brings man's mind into relationship with the external environment. The duration of exhalation predominates during sleep and allows man to enter the world of peace and rest.

The pranic link

Prana is the medium which links the body with the soul. It is the connecting force between consciousness and matter. It activates the gross body via the *nadis* (vital energy channels). It supports and maintains life by supplying vitality to what would otherwise be lifeless. The air we breathe is the vehicle of the more subtle prana.

Pranayama and the spiritual aspirant

Primarily, pranayama ensures that the flow of prana throughout the *pranamaya kosha* (vital body) is free and unimpeded. This keeps the body healthy.

Secondly, the spiritual seeker acquires tranquility of mind. During some techniques respiration is progressively slowed down and the force of the exhaled air is reduced. Some techniques also utilize *kumbhaka* (breath retention) to curtail the breathing process completely for a short time. This brings control over the flow of prana in the vital body which calms the mind and restricts the thinking process, an essential prelude for spiritual practices.

The left nostril is closely connected with the *ida* nadi. When the flow of air in the two nostrils is equal, the flow of prana in *ida* and *pingala nadis* also becomes equal. Then prana starts flowing along the most important nadi in the vital body, *sushumna*. Under these conditions deep concentration is possible, enabling one to attain high states of meditation. In "*The Science of Pranayama*," Swami Sivananda says:

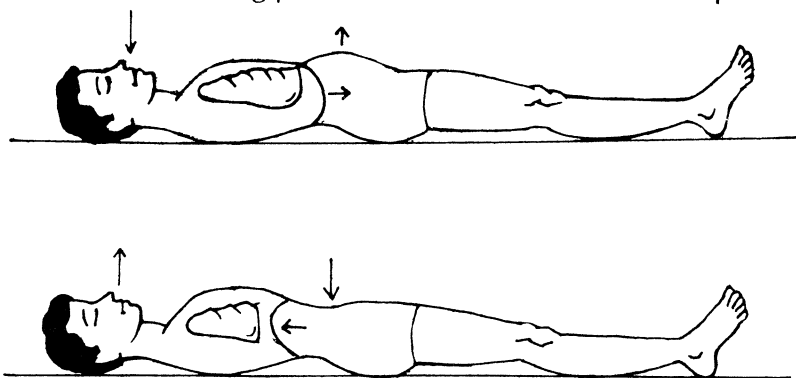
"There is an intimate connection between breath, nerve currents and the control of the inner prana or vital forces. Prana becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action, and on the mental plane as thought. Pranayama is the means by which a yogi tries to realize within his little body the whole cosmic life, and attempts to attain perfection by obtaining all the powers of the universe."

Correct breathing

Most of us breathe incorrectly, using only a small part of our lung capacity. Our breathing is shallow and the result is that our body and brain are starved, which is completely

unnecessary considering the plentiful supply of oxygen in the air all about us. By shallow respiration we also build up stagnant air in the lower regions of the lungs. This can lead to various diseases such as tuberculosis. So let us learn to breathe properly and gain good health. Remember: without breathing we cannot live; by half breathing we only half live.

The breathing process can be divided into two parts:



(1) abdominal breathing

This is also known as diaphragmatic respiration. You can experience it for yourself by sitting or lying flat on your back and placing one hand on the navel.

Inhale deeply and your hand will rise as the abdomen expands. The diaphragm is a strong muscle membrane which separates the lungs from the abdominal organs. The lower it moves during inhalation, the more air is inhaled into the lungs.

Exhale deeply and notice how the hand moves down as the abdomen contracts. The diaphragm will move higher if the contraction of the abdomen is accentuated. Maximum expulsion of air from the lungs will occur thereby. During this practice do not move the chest or shoulders.

(2) Thoracic or chest breathing.

Inhale while expanding the chest or ribcage so that the ribs move outward and upward. Exhale and the ribs will move inward and downward. Try not to move the abdomen at all.

Yogic breathing

By combining these types of respiration it is possible to inhale the optimum amount of air into the lungs and also exhale the maximum amount of waste air. This type of respiration, which is the way everyone should breathe, is called complete or yogic breathing. It is practised as follows:

Inhale by expanding first the abdomen and then the chest in one slow, smooth motion until the maximum amount of air is drawn into the lungs.

Exhale by relaxing first the chest and then the abdomen. Finally, accentuate the contraction of the abdominal muscles, so that the maximum amount of air is expelled from the lungs.

The whole movement from abdomen to chest and from chest to abdomen should be very smooth, almost like a wave.

This same procedure should be followed for each exhalation and inhalation. At first, because of lack of training, you will have to do it consciously for a few minutes every day, preferably before starting pranayama. Eventually, however, the process will become automatic and should be done throughout the day.

The change in your whole life will be wonderful to see. You will be less susceptible to minor illnesses such as colds and coughs as well as more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and asthma. Your vitality will improve and you will be less inclined to become easily tired. Your thinking power will improve and you will be less susceptible to anxiety or stress.

PRE-PRANAYAMA EXERCISES

The following simple breathing exercises are very useful for cleaning the lungs prior to pranayama or at any time of day. They remove impure stale air which accumulates in the lower regions of the lungs.

Method 1 : Assume a standing or sitting position. Keeping the back straight, place the hands on the floor if sitting, or on the thighs if standing. The arms should remain straight. Inhale from the abdomen and simultaneously raise both arms over the head in one slow, smooth motion. This raising of the arms will expand the chest and induce the maximum amount of air into the lungs. Exhale while lowering the arms and contracting the abdominal muscles. This will expel maximum air from the lungs. Repeat for a few minutes.

Method 2 : Utilizing hasta uttanasana.

Maintain the same pose as method 1. Inhale while expanding the abdomen and raising the arms above the head. Then complete the inhalation by spreading the arms sideways and expanding the chest.

Exhale while bringing the arms together, lowering them and then contracting the abdominal muscles.

Repeat for a few minutes.

Method 3 : Utilizing utthita lolasana.

Stand erect with the feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet apart.

Inhale deeply while raising both arms over the head. Then let the body slowly flop forward as you breathe out, bending from the waist. As you lean forward make the sound *ha - ha - ha* up to ten times until the lungs are completely empty. Inhale slowly while rising to the standing position with the arms again above the head. Repeat for a few minutes.

This is an excellent method of ventilating the lungs and removing stagnant air.

ADVICE AND PRECAUTIONS

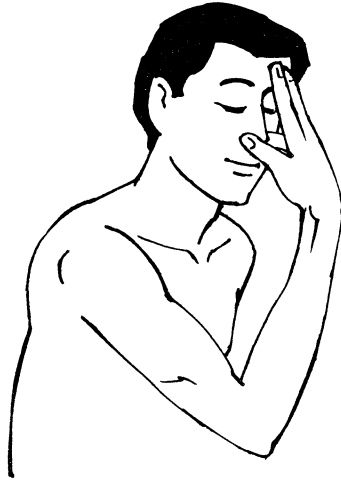
The following points should be carefully observed before commencing pranayama practice.

- (a) Wait for at least four hours after meals before practising pranayama because the bladder, stomach and intestines should be empty.
- (b) Practise pranayama after asanas and before meditation.
- (c) Throughout the practice the body should be as relaxed as possible. The spine, neck and head should be erect and centered.
- (d) There should be no strain. The breath should not be retained for longer than is comfortable. This is most important as the lungs are very delicate organs and any misuse can easily cause them injury.
- (e) Practise in a well ventilated (not windy), clean and pleasant environment. Do not practise pranayama in a foul smelling, smoky or dusty room.
- (f) When beginning, some constipation and a reduction in the quantity of urine expelled may be experienced. In the case of dry motions, stop taking salt and spices.

If you have loose motion, stop pranayama for a few days and take rice and curd (yoghurt).

- (g) Cover the body with a comfortable garment sheet or blanket so that there are no external disturbances such as insects during the practice.
- (h) Siddhasana and siddha yoni asana are the best asanas for pranayama as they increase the shoulder span to the maximum extent.
- (i) In its higher stages, pranayama should only be learned with a qualified instructor.
- (j) Persons practising intensive pranayama should not smoke tobacco, cannabis etc.

NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA



Nadi shodhana (the psychic-network purification)

Sit in any of the meditative poses such as padmasana, siddhasana, sukhasana, etc., but not vajrasana. It should be a pose which can be comfortably maintained for at least 15 minutes. Place the hands on the knees, straighten the spine, hold the head upright so that it faces directly forward and relax the whole body. Close the eyes and mentally prepare the mind and body for the forthcoming practice. For a few minutes be aware only of the body and the breath. Now start the practice.

Stage I

Keeping the left hand on the knee, raise the right hand. The index and middle fingers should remain at the eyebrow center (bhrumadhya) throughout the whole practice. The thumb should be near the right nostril so that it can control the flow of air by pressing the side of the nostril. The third finger should be placed beside the left nostril so that it can control the flow of air in the left nostril.

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Inhale through the left nostril and then exhale through the same nostril. The rate of inhalation and exhalation should be normal. Breathe in and out 5 times. Release the pressure of the thumb on the side of the right nostril. Press the side of the left nostril with the ring finger to prevent the flow of air.

Inhale and exhale through the right nostril. Again the rate of respiration should be normal. Repeat 5 times. Respiration through each nostril 5 times in turn is one round. Practise 25 rounds. The practitioner should not breathe heavily and there should be no sound as the air passes through the nostrils.

After 15 days, leave stage 1 and practise stage 2.

Stage 2 : alternate nostril breathing

Close the right nostril with the thumb.

Inhale through the left nostril. At the end of the inhalation close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril and breathe out through the right nostril. Then inhale through the right nostril. At the end of the inhalation close the right nostril, open the left nostril and exhale through the left nostril. This is one round. In this stage, the practitioner should start counting the length of each inhalation and exhalation. The counting should be done mentally by repeating 1 - *Om*, 2 - *Om*, 3 - *Om*, etc. The time for inhalation and exhalation should be equal. For example, in 5 and out 5, or whatever number is comfortable. Do not strain under any circumstances. After a few days try to increase the period of inhalation and exhalation maintaining the same 1 to 1 ratio. In other words, try to increase the time of inhalation to 6 counts and the

time of exhalation to 6. When this is easily achieved try to obtain a count of 7 for inhalation and 7 for exhalation. Do not force the breath in any way. Be careful not to speed up the counting during exhalation to compensate for shortage of breath. At the slightest sign of discomfort reduce the time of each inhalation and exhalation or discontinue the practice for a day. After 15 days or more go on to stage 3.

Stage 3 : antaranga kumbhaka (inner retention)

Close the right nostril. Inhale through the left nostril. At the end of the inhalation, close both nostrils. Retain the breath for a count of 5. Exhale through the right nostril. Then inhale through the right nostril, the left nostril remaining closed. Again retain the breath for a count of 5, closing both nostrils. Exhale through the left nostril by opening the left nostril and keeping the right nostril closed. This is one round. Practise 25 rounds. After some days of practice, alter the ratio of inhalation, retention, exhalation to 1:2:2. For example, if you breathe in for a count of 5, try to hold the breath inside for a count of 10 and breathe out for a count of 10. After a few days add 1 unit to the inhalation (*i.e.*, from 5 to 6), add 2 units to the retention and 2 units to the exhalation (to make them 12).

When this long inhalation, retention and exhalation has been perfected so that there is not the slightest discomfort, again increase the length of each round. Keep the ratio the same.

After some weeks or months of practice, the ratio should be changed to 1:4:2.

When this has been mastered change the ratio to 1:6:4. When this is mastered change the ratio to 1:8:6. When the final ratio (1:8:6) can be maintained for 25 rounds with complete relaxation and without having to halt for a rest, proceed to stage 4.

State 4 : antaranga and bahiranga kumbhaka (internal and external retention)

Inhale through the left nostril. Retain the breath inside. Exhale through the right nostril. Retain the breath outside. Breathe in through the right nostril. Retain the breath inside. Exhale through the left nostril. Retain the breath outside. This is one round. Repeat 15 rounds.

The ratio should start off as 1:4:2:2 for inhalation, internal retention, exhalation, external retention. The practitioner should slowly increase the duration for inhalation from 5 to 6 counts and then from 6 to 7 and so on. Increase the duration of the exhalation and retention accordingly.

Advanced practitioners can perform jalandhara or moola bandha during the retentions of stage 4.

Sequence

Practise this after asanas and before meditation.

Precautions

Do not retain the breath for longer than is comfortable. Proceed to the next ratio only when perfection is achieved in the preceding stage.

Limitations

Learn cautiously and under expert guidance.

Benefits

Nadi shodhana is an indispensable prelude to the advanced meditative practices. It induces calmness and tranquility. All the pranic passages are cleared of blockages. The flow of prana in the ida and pingala nadis is equalized. The blood system is purified of toxins. The whole body is nourished by the extra supply of oxygen, and carbon dioxide is efficiently expelled. The overall result is a vast improvement in health. By purifying the brain cells, the brain centers are encouraged to work nearer to their optimum capacity. All stale air is removed from the lungs.

SHEETALI PRANAYAMA



Sheetali pranayama (the cooling breath)

Sit in any meditative pose, palms on the knees. Extend the tongue and fold the sides to form a narrow tube. Inhale slowly and deeply through the folded tongue. Practise yogic breathing described in the introduction to pranayama. Retain the breath outside and perform jalandhara bandha.

After a short time release jalandhara bandha and exhale through the nose.

Duration

In conjunction with other pranayamas, 9 rounds is sufficient. People with high blood pressure should start with 9 rounds and slowly increase to 60 rounds.

Note

The tube-shape of the tongue cools the air as it is inhaled into the lungs, thereby cooling the whole body system.

Sequence

After asanas and other pranayama.

Benefits

Induces muscular relaxation and mental tranquility. Encourages free flow of prana throughout the body. Eliminates thirst and purifies the blood.

SHEETKARI PRANAYAMA



Sheetkari pranayama (the hissing breath)

This is very similar to sheetali pranayama and is performed in the same way except for the position of the tongue.

The tongue should be folded back so that the lower surface touches the upper palate.

Clench the teeth together and separate the lips as much as possible.

Inhale through the teeth.

All other details as for sheetali pranayama.

BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA



Bhramari pranayama (the pranic humming control)

Sit in a comfortable meditative asana. The spinal cord should be erect and the head straight. Close the eyes and relax the whole body for a short time.

Keep the mouth closed throughout the practice.

Inhale deeply through both nostrils. Retain the breath inside and perform jalandhara and/or moola bandha.

After about 4 seconds practice release the bandhas and plug both ears with the index fingers. Keeping the mouth closed, separate the teeth and slowly exhale, producing a long continuous humming sound like a bee.

The exhalation should be slow and steady.

Feel the sound vibrations in the brain and be conscious only of the sound.

This is one round.

Start with 5 rounds and slowly increase the number.

Precautions

Do not practise in the supine position.

Do not strain the lungs in any way.

Benefits

Relieves cerebral tension; removes anger, anxiety and frustration; and reduces blood pressure.

Eliminates throat ailments; strengthens and improves the voice.

It also creates awareness of *nada* (psychic sound).

BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA

Bhastrika pranayama (the bellows breath)

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana. Hold the head and spine erect. Close the eyes and relax.

Stage 1

Place the left hand on the left knee and the index and middle fingers of the right hand on the forehead. Put the thumb beside the right nostril and the ring finger beside the left nostril. Close the right nostril by pressing the thumb against the side of the nostril. Breathe rapidly through the left nostril 20 times, expanding and contracting the abdomen rhythmically. Then take one deep inhalation, close both nostrils by pressing both sides of the nose with the thumb and ring finger, and perform jalandhara and/or moola bandha. Retain the breath for a comfortable period of time, then release the bandhas and exhale.

Close the left nostril with the ring finger. Breathe rapidly through the right nostril 20 times with rhythmic expansions and contractions of the abdominal muscles.

Then inhale deeply, close both nostrils and perform jalandhara and/or moola bandha. Hold for some time and slowly exhale.

This is one round. Practise 3 rounds.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2

Sit in the same position, hands on the knees.

Breathe rapidly 20 times through both nostrils.

Then inhale deeply, retain the breath and perform jalandhara and/or moola bandha. After a comfortable period release the bandhas and breathe out.

This is one round. Practise 3 rounds.

This is the end of the complete practice of bhastrika. Advanced practitioners may increase the number of inhalations and exhalations up to 50 and the number of rounds may also be increased up to 5 for each stage.

Precautions

A feeling of faintness or perspiration indicates that the practice is being performed incorrectly. Avoid violent respiration, facial contortions and excessive shaking of the body. If any of the above symptoms are experienced, then advice of a yoga teacher should be sought.

Relax during the practice and rest after each round. Bhastrika should be done slowly for the first few weeks. Increase the speed of respiration gradually as the lungs become stronger.

Limitations

Bhastrika is not for people with high blood pressure, vertigo or any heart ailment. Beginners should practise cautiously and with expert guidance.

Benefits

This is a wonderful method to purify the lungs of unwanted gases and germs. It is excellent for asthma, tuberculosis, pleurisy, etc. It removes inflammation of the throat as well as any accumulation of phlegm. It increases the appetite by fanning the gastric fire. It induces peace and tranquility of mind.

Note

In this technique the lungs are used like a blacksmith's bellows.

KAPALBHATI PRANAYAMA

Kapalbhati pranayama (frontal brain cleansing)

Sit in any comfortable meditative pose.

Close the eyes and relax.

Perform 60 to 100 rapid respirations.

Unlike bhastrika, the inhalation should be spontaneous with the emphasis on exhalation.

Then exhale deeply and perform jalandhara, moola and uddiyana bandhas simultaneously.

Meditate on the void in the region of the eyebrow center, feeling the all-pervading emptiness and calmness.

Release the bandhas, inhale slowly and relax.

This is one round. Repeat up to 5 times.

Duration

Advanced practitioners should extend the number of rounds to 10 or more. The benefits are increased if the breath retention is long. However, do not maintain for an excessive length of time. Slowly increase the period of retention over a few months.

Sequence

Practise immediately before meditation.

Precautions

Do not retain the breath longer than is comfortable. Same as for bhastrika.

Benefits

This process purifies the frontal region of the brain. Thoughts and visions are automatically stopped, allowing the mind to rest and become revitalized. It is an excellent technique for relieving cerebral thrombosis.

Note

This is a good preparatory technique for meditation. It is also one of the six shatkarmas used in hatha yoga.

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

Ujjayi pranayama (the psychic breath)

Sit in any comfortable position.

Contract the glottis in the throat, and perform khechari mudra, *i.e.*, fold the tongue back so that the under side is pressed against the back of the upper palate.

Breathe deeply and softly, like the gentle snoring of a sleeping baby. Feel that you are breathing through the throat only.

Duration

With practice it can be done for hours.

Benefits

This simple practice has subtle influences on the whole body.

It has a soothing effect on the nervous system and calms the mind.

People who suffer from insomnia should practise it without khechari mudra in shavasana.

It slows down the heartbeat and is therefore useful for persons with high blood pressure.

It has subtle effects on the psychic plane and is used in many mudras (see later chapter) and meditative techniques.

SURYA BHEDA PRANAYAMA

Surya bheda pranayama (the vitality stimulating technique)

Assume a comfortable meditative asana. Make the spine and head erect and place the hands on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Raise the right hand, placing the middle and index fingers on the forehead and the thumb and ring finger gently on each side of the nose.

Close the left nostril with the ring finger. Inhale deeply through the right nostril.

Close both nostrils, retain the breath and perform jalandhara and moola bandha.

Maintain for as long as is comfortably possible.

Release moola bandha then jalandhara bandha.

Exhale through the right nostril by keeping the left nostril closed with the ring finger.

This is one round. Repeat the same process.

Duration

Perform up to 10 rounds. Try to slowly increase the length of retention over a few weeks.

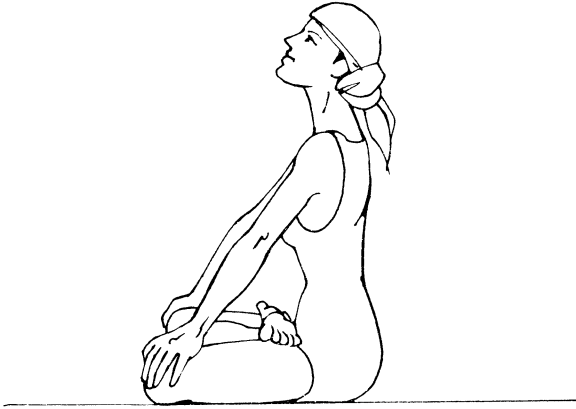
Precautions

Do not practise before or immediately after meals, because the body needs the energy for digestion. Should be learned cautiously under expert guidance.

Benefits

This pranayama activates pingala nadi and therefore gives the practitioner dynamism to perform physical activities more efficiently.

MOORCHA PRANAYAMA



Moorcha pranayama (the fainting pranayama)

This practice requires a steady and firm asana; the best are the padmasana and siddhasana.

Inhale through both nostrils while bending the head backward and performing shambhavi mudra.

The inhalation should be slow and deep.

Retain the breath inside for as long as comfortable, maintaining shambhavi mudra and keeping the arms straight by locking the elbows and pressing the knees with the hands.

Then exhale while bending the arms, closing the eyes and slowly bending the head so that it faces forward again.

Relax the whole body for a few seconds, keeping the eyes closed and experiencing the lightness and calmness in the mind and body.

This is one round. Repeat the same process.

Note

Breathe only through the nose during this entire practice.

Duration

Perform each round for as long as possible, but without strain.

Try to slowly increase the duration with practice.

Perform as many rounds as necessary until a fainting sensation is felt.

Sequence

Spiritual : before meditation.

Physical and mental : after asanas or before sleep.

Limitations

Should be learned cautiously under expert guidance.

Not for people with high blood pressure, vertigo or high intracranial pressure.

Benefits

This is excellent preparation for meditation. It enables one to draw the mind inward and reach a psychic state where external experiences such as hearing and feeling disappear.

It induces tranquility in the whole body and mind and is therefore useful for removing tensions, anxiety and anger. It is beneficial for persons who suffer from neurosis or mental problems.

Bandha

INTRODUCTION TO BANDHAS

This is a small but very important group of yogic practices. These physical techniques allow the practitioner to control different organs and nerves in the body. The word *bandha* means `to hold or tighten´ which exactly describes the physical actions that are required to perform these practices. Various parts of the body are gently but powerfully contracted and tightened. This has the effect of massaging the organs, removing stagnant blood, stimulating and regulating the nerves connected with these organs. This improves the functioning and health of the body.

Although these bandhas are performed physically, they have a subtle effect on the chakras, by an influx of psychic vibrations throughout the practitioner's whole being. They help to release the *granthis* (psychic knots) – the Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Shiva granthi – which prevent free flow of prana along the sushumna nadi. In this way spiritual power is released. Advanced practitioners may experience tightening of the sushumna nadi, which is a sure sign that the psychic energy is manifesting. Those people who have attained high states of meditation will know that this is the same experience that is felt when a chakra is about to open and reveal or express itself.

Bandhas in conjunction with other techniques

While being developed and perfected, the bandhas can be practised on their own. However, as the aspirant progresses along the yogic path, bandhas should be incorporated into the practices of mudras and pranayama (as described later in the book). In this way maximum benefits will be attained. When the flow of prana is stimulated as in the practice of pranayama, the bandhas control the flow and direct it to the required areas, thereby preventing dissipation.

It is when yogic techniques are combined that the psychic faculties of the individual are awakened and advanced yoga begins. The methods of utilizing bandhas in conjunction with mudras and pranayama are discussed in chapters on these practices.

Kumbhaka (breath retention)

Bandhas require the practitioner to retain the breath. At first, of course, the retention should be of short duration but it will become longer and longer as the practitioner develops his abilities. Retention may be external or internal. The activity of the lungs can be suspended after deep exhalation or air can be retained in the lungs after inhalation. This practice is an essential part of bandhas, as well as pranayama as it develops the capacity to hold the breath. The period of retention should be gradually increased over a few weeks or months without imposing undue strain on the lungs.

JALANDHARA BANDHA



Jalandhara bandha (the chin lock)

Sit in any of the meditative poses which allow the knees to firmly touch the floor. Sukhasana is thus not suitable. Persons who cannot sit in padmasana, siddhasana, etc., can do jalandhara bandha while standing.

Place the palms on top of the knees.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Inhale deeply, retain the breath inside, bend the head forward and press the chin tightly against the chest (particularly the sternum).

Straighten the arms and lock them into position.

Simultaneously hunch the shoulders upwards and forwards – this will ensure that the arms stay locked.

The palms should remain on the knees.

Stay in the final pose for as long as you are comfortably able to retain the breath.

Then relax the shoulders, bend the arms, slowly release the lock, raise the head and exhale.

Repeat when the respiration returns to normal.

Note

The whole practice can also be performed with the breath retained outside.

Duration

For as long as the practitioner is able to comfortably retain the breath. Repeat up to 10 times.

Concentration

On vishuddhi chakra.

Sequence

Ideally performed in conjunction with pranayama and mudras. If practised on its own, after asanas and pranayama but before meditation.

Precautions

Never inhale or exhale until the chin lock has been released and the head is upright.

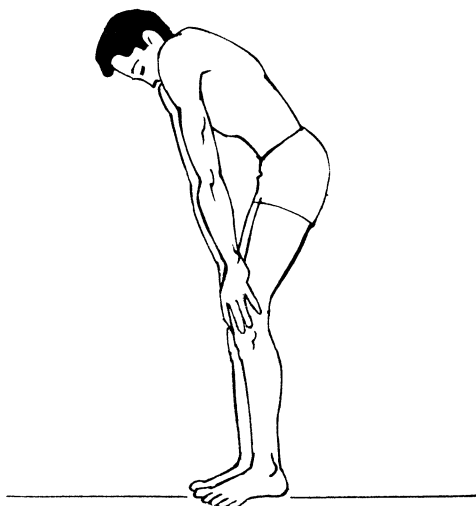
Limitations

Not for persons with high intracranial blood pressure or heart ailments without expert guidance.

Benefits

The chin lock closes the wind pipe and compresses various organs including the sinus receptors which are located in the throat region. These receptors are sensitive to the blood pressure in the jugular vein which supplies blood to the brain. If the pressure is high the receptors send messages to the brain and heart, which are slowed down. If the pressure is low then the heart is speeded up in the same way. The receptors are pressure-sensitive and so the compression they receive during jalandhara bandha slows down the heart and brings tranquility to the mind. The thyroid and parathyroid glands are massaged and their functioning improved. These glands, especially the thyroid, have very wide influence on the human organism, growth and sexual functions. This technique relieves stress, anxiety and anger. It is an excellent preparation for meditative practices.

STANDING JALANDHARA BANDHA



Standing jalandhara bandha

Assume the standing position, with the feet about 1½ feet apart.

Lean forward and place the palms just above the knees.

Exhale (or inhale) deeply and perform the chin lock, retaining the breath.

Straighten the arms to make the chin lock more rigid.

Hold the final pose for as long as you are able to. Then release the chin lock, hold the head up and slowly breathe out or in, as the case may be.

Repeat.

All other details are as given for the sitting form of jalandhara bandha.

MOOLA BANDHA

Moola bandha (the perineum retraction lock)

Sit in a meditative pose with the knees firmly on the ground. The best asanas are siddhasana, siddha yoni asana or the more difficult moola bandhasana, since these press the heel into the perineum and thereby automatically help to improve the performance of the bandha.

Place the palms on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Inhale deeply, retain the breath and perform jalandhara bandha.

Then contract the muscles in the region of the perineum and draw them upwards.

This is the final pose.

Hold this pose for as long as you can comfortably retain the breath.

Release the contraction of the perineum, slowly raise the head and then slowly exhale.

Repeat.

Note

This bandha can be performed by initially exhaling and retaining the breath outside while executing the locks, or while holding the contraction for long periods with normal breathing but the last variation is without jalandhara bandha.

Duration

For as long as the practitioner is able to retain the breath. Repeat up to 10 times.

Concentration

On mooladhara chakra.

Sequence

After asanas and pranayama but before meditation if

performed individually. Ideally practised in conjunction with mudras and pranayama.

Precautions

This bandha must be perfected carefully under expert guidance.

Limitations

Refer to jalandhara bandha.

Preparatory technique

Beginners may find it difficult to powerfully contract the muscles of the perineum and maintain the contraction for the duration of breath retention. They are recommended to practise ashwini mudra regularly. This will make the muscles stronger and develop the practitioner's control over them.

Benefits

In this bandha the region of mooladhara chakra (between the urinary and excretory organs) is contracted and pulled upwards. This forces the apana vayu (vital energy in the abdominal region below the navel) to flow upwards and thereby unite with the prana (vayu, vital energy in the region between the larynx and the base of the heart). This generates vitality and helps to awaken the kundalini.

It aids in the establishment of brahmacharya and the sublimation of sexual energy.

It duplicates the benefits of jalandhara bandha. The pelvic nerves are stimulated and the associated sexual and eliminative organs are toned.

The sphincter muscles of the anus are strengthened and intestinal peristalsis is stimulated. In this way constipation and piles can be effectively removed.

Note

This bandha also symbolizes the ultimate aim of yoga, which is to find and experience the source (*mool*) of creation by restraining the modifications of the mind.

UDDIYANA BANDHA



Uddiyana bandha (the abdominal retraction lock)

Sit in a meditative pose, so that the knees rest on the floor. Place the palms on the knees. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Exhale deeply and retain the breath outside.

Perform jalandhara bandha. Then contract the abdominal muscles as far as possible inwards and upwards. This is the final position. Hold this lock for as long as the breath can be retained outside. Then slowly release the stomach muscles, jalandhara and inhale.

When the respiration has returned to normal the process may be repeated. Practise up to 10 times.

Concentration

On manipura chakra.

Sequence

Before meditation and after asana and pranayama if performed alone. Best practised in co-ordination with pranayama and mudras.

Precautions

Practise only when the stomach and intestines are empty. Release the chin lock before breathing in.

Limitations

Not for persons suffering from heart problems, peptic and duodenal ulcers or for pregnant women.

Benefits

In this bandha the diaphragm is pulled up towards the thoracic cage (chest cavity) and the abdominal organs drawn in towards the spine.

It is the panacea for many abdominal and stomach ailments: constipation, indigestion, worms, diabetes, etc., are all relieved by this practice.

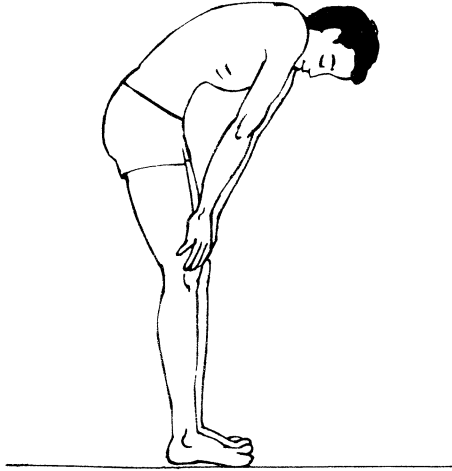
The digestive fire is stimulated and all the abdominal organs are toned and rendered more efficient. The liver, pancreas, kidneys, spleen, etc., are all massaged and made more healthy; associated diseases are removed with regular practice.

The adrenal glands, situated above the kidney, are normalized. This gives vitality to a lethargic person and tranquility to an anxious or overwrought person. The sympathetic nerves of the solar plexus are stimulated. These nerves serve many organs in the body, especially the abdominal organs. The functioning of all these organs is improved for this reason as well as through the massage they receive. Manipura chakra, located in the region of the navel, is stimulated. This is the center of prana in the body so the distribution and flow of prana is increased. Prana is encouraged to rise up sushumna nadi.

Note

Agnisara kriya is a good preparatory technique or substitute for uddiyana bandha.

STANDING UDDIYANA BANDHA



Standing uddiyana bandha

Stand erect with the feet about 1½ feet apart. Bend slightly forward and place the palms on the front of the thighs. Look forward, inhale deeply and then exhale completely. Contract the abdominal muscles and draw in the abdomen. Make the midsection concave and lock it.

Retain for some time.

Then release the lock, inhale slowly and relax.

Note

This standing variation is generally easier and is recommended for beginners.

All other details are as given for the sitting uddiyana bandha.

MAHA BANDHA



vishuddhi

manipura

mooladhara

Maha bandha (the triple lock)

Sit in a meditative pose, preferably siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Inhale deeply and exhale completely.

Perform jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha, and then moola bandha.

Rotate the consciousness by concentrating on each of the following chakras in turn and mentally repeat its name:

mooladhara

manipura

vishuddhi

Remain aware of each chakra for only a few seconds, then move to the next one.

When you have directed your consciousness to all

three, one after the other, return to mooladhara and repeat the process.

Continue to do this until you cannot comfortably hold your breath for a longer period of time.

Then release moola bandha. Release uddiyana bandha. Finally release jalandhara bandha and breathe in slowly.

Breathe in and out once more and then repeat maha bandha.

Note

Most people will have difficulty in locating the exact position of the chakras during the rotation of consciousness. These persons should refer to the appendix for indications of the chakra's whereabouts and concentrate on the approximate region.

This bandha is most effective if the breath is retained outside for as long as possible. The practitioner should therefore endeavour to gently and slowly increase his ability to retain the breath for longer periods. Do not strain.

Duration

Practise up to 9 rounds.

Precautions

As for the three individual bandhas.

People should not attempt maha bandha until they have mastered the other three bandhas.

Limitations

As for the three separate bandhas.

Benefits

All the benefits of the three individual bandhas. Particularly useful for spiritual aspirants, as it is a very powerful method of stimulating the flow of psychic energy and making the mind introverted prior to meditation.

Mudra

INTRODUCTION TO MUDRAS

For thousands of years the knowledge of yogic practices, such as asana and pranayama, has been easily available to the majority of people in India, especially if they are sincere seekers of truth. However, knowledge of higher and more powerful practices has been the treasured possession of a select and evolved few, as handed down from guru to disciple or taken from the Sanskrit texts written by the ancient rishis. But nowadays a large number of people throughout the world are ready and keen to accelerate their spiritual evolution. The seeker of today has a mind full of questions and is looking for the route to self-realization. This new age is characterized by the widespread dissemination of practices that were closely guarded secrets. Some of the most important of these practices are the *mudras* of yoga.

Mudras are said to be even more powerful and important than asanas and pranayama, for they help to arouse the dormant serpent power in man – the *kundalini shakti*. The foremost ancient text dealing with the subject of mudras (and other yogic practices) is the *Gherand Samhita*, which is a treatise on hatha yoga by Rishi Gherand. In this book, Lord Shiva, the lord of yogis, is explaining to his consort and disciple, Parvati, about

yoga, and he says the following: "Oh Devi, I told you about the mudras, knowledge of which alone bestows all siddhis (occult powers)."

There is a total of twenty-five mudras explained in the *Gherand Samhita*, many of which may only be practised under the guidance of a competent guru. Actually it is never advisable to try any higher practices without proper tuition, and so here we explain only a few of the mudras in a somewhat simplified form which should be easily understood by all.

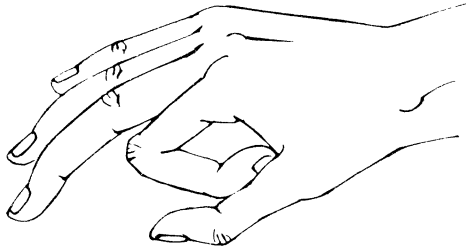
A mudra can be explained as a certain position or attitude which represents the psyche. In the Indian system of classical dancing, mudra means a symbolic gesture of the hands, which evokes a certain mood or emotion in the inner being. Many of the mudras in yoga are also made with the hands, such as yoni mudra and chin mudra. These serve the same purpose as in the dancing techniques, to invoke an introverted spiritual mood within the practitioner. Certain mudras are also utilized to control the involuntary physiological processes, which normally occur outside our day to day consciousness. Mudras allow the practitioner to develop awareness of the currents of vital energy (prana) within the subtle body and eventually to gain conscious control over these forces. This enables him to direct them to any part of the body at will (for the purpose of self-healing) or outside the body (for the pranic or psychic healing of other persons).

Many of the mudras are composed of different bandhas, asanas and pranayamas which are put together to form one practice. These make very powerful combinations, for each of the constituent parts has definite benefits in its own right. Mudras prepare the mind for meditation by encouraging withdrawal of the senses from association with external objects (*pratyahara*) and by

making the mind one-pointed (*ekagrata*).

Although they are primarily spiritual in purpose, many mudras give definite mental and physical benefits which are listed in the descriptions dealing with each individual mudra.

GYANA MUDRA AND CHIN MUDRA



Gyana mudra (psychic gesture of knowledge)

Assume a meditative asana.

Fold the index fingers of both hands so that they touch the inside root of their respective thumbs.

Spread the other three fingers of each hand so that they are slightly apart.

Place the hands on the knees with the palms downwards and the three unbent fingers and the thumb of each hand pointing towards the floor in front of the feet.

Chin mudra (psychic gesture of consciousness)

Chin mudra is performed in the same way as gyana mudra except that the palms of both hands face upwards while placed on the knees.

Duration

One of these two mudras should be performed whenever one assumes any of the meditative poses.

Benefits

Gyana mudra and chin mudra are simple but important psycho-neural finger-locks which make the meditative asanas and other asanas complete and more powerful. By redirecting certain nervous impulses from the hands, they help the practitioner to maintain a relaxed, steady pose for long periods.

SHAMBHAVI MUDRA



Shambhavi mudra (eyebrow centre gazing)

Sit in any meditative pose, make the back erect and place the hands on the knees in either chin or gyana mudra.

Look forward at a fixed point. Then look upward as high as possible, without moving the head.

Concentrate and focus the eyes on the eyebrow centre. Try to suspend the thought processes and meditate on the self (atma) or on the supreme consciousness.

Duration

At first perform for a few minutes. With practice the time can be slowly extended.

Benefits

This is one of the most highly regarded practices in yoga and tantra shastras (ancient texts). One who is proficient can transcend the mind, intellect and ego and enter the spiritual realms of consciousness. It is a powerful technique for awakening ajna chakra.

Physically it strengthens the muscles of the eyes.

Mentally it calms the mind, removing stress and anger and develops the power of concentration.

NASIKAGRA DRISHTI



Nasikagra drishti or Agochari mudra (nosetip gazing)

Sit in any meditative pose with the spine erect and the head facing forward.

Focus the two eyeballs on the tip of the nose.

Breath

If practising for a short period of time the breath may be held inside or outside. In this case the eyes can remain focused on the nosetip while breathing in and out between retentions. If practising for a long time respiration should be normal.

Precautions

Do not strain the eyes. Slowly increase the duration over a period of weeks and months.

Benefits

This mudra, like shambhavi mudra, develops the powers of concentration. It awakens mooladhara chakra, brings about introversion and takes the practitioner into the psychic and spiritual planes of consciousness.

MANDUKI MUDRA

Manduki mudra (the frog mudra)

Sit in bhadrasana and practise nasikagra drishti.
Breathe in and out slowly through the nose.
Concentrate on all smells.

Benefits

Important for awakening mooladhara chakra and the perception of psychic smells in the deeper states of meditation.

Note

This practice is very similar to nasikagra drishti.

BHOOCHARI MUDRA



Bhoochari mudra (nothingness gazing)

Sit in any meditative pose. There should be no obstructions in the whole field of vision in front of the eyes. It is preferable to face a blank wall. Place the left hand on the left knee. Raise the right hand in front of the face with the bent elbow pointing to the right of the body and the whole arm horizontal. The hand should be flat, the palm facing downward and the fingers pointing directly to the left of the body. Rest the thumb against the top of the upper lip and the bottom of the nose. Stare at the little finger of the raised hand. After a few minutes of intense but unstrained concentration on the little finger, remove the hand, but continue to gaze at the space where the little finger was situated. Keep the eyes fixed on the nothingness for as long as possible. Think of no other thing but the nothingness. At first it may be difficult but with practice it becomes easier.

Benefits

Develops the power of concentration and memory. It makes the mind introverted and is an excellent preparation for meditation. Tranquilizes the mind.

AKASHI MUDRA

Akashi mudra (the consciousness of inner space)

Sit in any meditative pose.

Fold the tongue back against the upper palate (khechari mudra).

Practise ujjayi pranayama and shambhavi mudra.

Simultaneously bend the head backward, but not to the fullest extent.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

At first ujjayi pranayama may irritate the throat in this inclined position, but with practice it will become more comfortable.

Note

For diagram refer to moorcha pranayama.

Duration

Maintain the final position for as long as possible.

If the practitioner finds it impossible to maintain for more than a short time, relax ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra and shambhavi mudra. Rest for a short time and then repeat.

Concentration

On ajna chakra.

Precautions

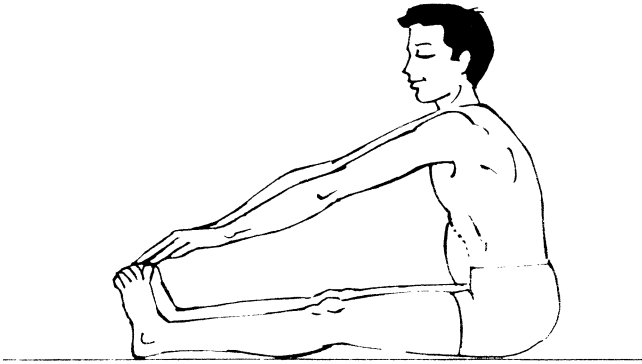
As with all mudras, this practice must be learned slowly, and with expert guidance.

Benefits

This mudra makes the mind go into a trance when it is perfected. This is not a trance in the western sense but in the yogic sense, whereby the practitioner achieves a state of heightened consciousness. It induces calmness and tranquility.

It gives the benefits of ujjayi pranayama, shambhavi mudra and khechari mudra.

TADAGI MUDRA



Tadagi mudra (the barrel abdomen technique)

Sit with the legs stretched forward and feet slightly apart. The legs should remain straight throughout.

Lean forward and grasp the big toes.

Inhale as deeply as is comfortably possible, expanding the abdominal muscles to their fullest extent.

Retain the breath for a comfortable length of time, then relax the whole body and exhale.

Maintain the hold on the toes.

Inhale and exhale in the relaxed position.

Then inhale deeply again. Repeat up to 10 times.

Concentration

On manipura chakra.

Benefits

Tones all the abdominal organs and the stomach.

Improves the digestive process and helps to remove diseases of this region. Stimulates and tones the nerve plexuses in the visceral area which energize many internal organs throughout the body.

Note

The three mudras : tadagi, bhujangini and kaki, are related. They all stimulate the walls of the mouth, esophagus and stomach, and thereby remove many diseases in these areas.

BHUJANGINI MUDRA

Bhujangini mudra (cobra respiration)

Sit in a meditative pose and relax the whole body. Try to `drink` air through the mouth and draw it into the stomach, not the lungs, in a series of gulps as though you are drinking water.

Expand the stomach as much as possible, hold the air inside for a short period of time and then expel it by belching.

Repeat the process.

Duration

Do as many times as you wish, though three to five times is sufficient for most purposes. For specific ailments it may be repeated more times.

Sequence

Can be performed at any time, though it is particularly powerful when performed after the hatha yoga practice of shankhprakashana.

Benefits

This practice rejuvenates the esophagus walls and the glands that secrete the digestive juices. It tones the whole stomach, eliminates stagnant wind from this part of the body and helps to eliminate disorders of the stomach.

Retaining air in the stomach will enable the waterloving aspirant to float for any length of time without sinking.

Note

This mudra imitates the respiration of a snake.

KAKI MUDRA



Kaki mudra (the crow's beak)

Sit in any meditative pose. Make a narrow tube with the lips by pursing them. Concentrate the eyes on the tip of the nose. Inhale slowly and deeply through the mouth. Then slowly exhale through the nose by closing the lips.

Repeat the process for as long as possible.

Benefits

The air which is drawn in through the mouth comes in contact with the walls of the mouth, stimulates the digestive secretions, and aids in the prevention and elimination of many diseases.

Simultaneously gives the benefits of nasikagra drishti and cools the whole system.

Note

The lips are pursed so that they resemble a bird's beak. A crow is said to live for a long time without disease. This mudra bestows longevity.

ASHWINI MUDRA

Stage 1

Ashwini mudra (the horse mudra)

Sit in any meditative pose. Relax the whole body.

Close the eyes and breathe normally.

Contract the sphincter muscles of the anus for a few seconds, then relax them for a few seconds.

Repeat the process as many times as possible.

Stage 2

Inhale while simultaneously contracting the anus.

Retain the breath while holding the contraction of the sphincter muscles.

Exhale and release the contraction of the anus.

Repeat for as long as it is comfortable. Do not strain.

Concentration

Spiritual: on mooladhara chakra.

Physical: on the anus.

Sequence

Any time of the day or during the yoga programme.

Benefits

By practising this mudra one is able to gain control of the sphincter muscles of the anus in the same way that a horse has control. One who is able to perform this mudra perfectly can prevent the escape of pranic energy from the body. Thus the vital force can be conserved and directed upward for spiritual purposes. This is an excellent preparatory exercise for moola bandha.

It is very useful for people suffering from piles or prolapse of the rectum or uterus.

In these cases this mudra is most effective if done in conjunction with any inverted pose.

It stimulates intestinal peristalsis, thus removing constipation.

KHECHARI MUDRA

Khechari mudra (the tongue lock)

Raja yoga technique

Close the mouth. Roll the tongue backward so that the normally lower surface touches the upper palate. Try to take the tip of the tongue as far back as possible without strain.

Perform for as long as possible.

Beginners may feel discomfort after a short time.

They should relax the tongue for a few seconds and then repeat the tongue lock. With practice, the tongue will automatically ascend into the sinuses to stimulate many vital nerve centres in the brain.

Hatha yoga technique

This form of khechari mudra is to be attempted only by advanced practitioners under the guidance of a guru. It requires perseverance and patience. The tendon beneath the tongue must be slowly cut, week by week. Surgical methods or a sharpened stone can be utilized for this purpose. Massage the tongue by milking it for long periods of time daily. Butter, oil, or any other type of lubricant may be used to make this process easier.

Continue for many months until it is possible to touch the eyebrow centre with the tip of the tongue. When the tongue has reached the required elongation, full khechari mudra can be practised.

Fold the tongue toward the back of the mouth.

Carefully slide it through the upper back cavity in the palate, as far as it will go.

In this way, the air passages are effectively blocked, and the centre known as *lalana chakra* is awakened.

Breath

Beginners can breathe normally.

Gradually try to reduce the respiration rate until after about two months or more of regular practice, the number of breaths per minute is only 5 to 8. Under expert guidance, the respiration rate can be even further reduced.

Duration

For as long as possible, preferably at times of peace and relaxation. Can also be performed in conjunction with ujjayi pranayama and other yoga practices.

Precautions

People should not attempt the full form without the guidance of a guru. If khechari mudra is performed during physical exercise, a bitter secretion may be tasted. This can be harmful. The practitioner is therefore advised to discontinue this mudra if a bitter secretion is tasted.

Benefits

This mudra has very subtle influences on the human being. In the back cavity of the palate are various pressure points and glands which have extensive control over the activities of the body. The secretions from these are stimulated by the folded tongue.

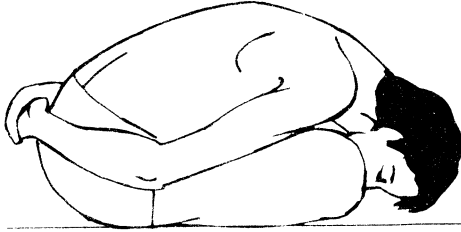
This gives extensive health benefits to the body.

Saliva is also produced which removes the feeling of thirst and hunger. Yogis who are buried under the ground for long periods of time perform khechari mudra for the whole duration. This allows them to retain their breath for as long as they wish without harming themselves.

This mudra awakens the kundalini shakti and also helps to preserve the vital energy of the body.

The practice in its full form can cause the astral body to detach itself from the physical body. The consciousness thereby dwells in akasha, the space between the astral and physical planes. This mudra was regarded as being very important in the ancient yogic texts.

YOGA MUDRA



Yoga mudra (the psychic union)

Sit in padmasana (vajrasana may be used if padmasana is impossible).

Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Exhale slowly; stop the breath and concentrate on mooladhara chakra.

Inhale slowly while simultaneously feeling the breath and consciousness gradually rise from mooladhara to ajna chakra.

Retain the breath for a few seconds and concentrate on ajna chakra.

Exhale slowly while bending forward in harmony with the exhalation, so that the forward movement starts as you begin to exhale and the forehead just touches the floor in front of the body as the air is fully expelled from the lungs.

Simultaneously feel the breath and consciousness gradually move downward from ajna to mooladhara chakra.

Retain the breath outside for a few seconds while concentrating on mooladhara chakra.

Inhale, raise the trunk to the vertical position and feel the breath and consciousness moving upward from mooladhara to ajna chakra.

All these actions should be coordinated.

In the upright position, while holding the breath,

concentrate on ajna chakra.

Then exhale and bend forward again to repeat the process.

Note

The pose assumed is the same as described on page 150. Only the concentration differs.

Duration

Advanced practitioners can perform the mudra for periods of up to 15 minutes or even longer.

Beginners can perform it for a minute or so, then gradually increase the duration.

The respiration should be as slow as is comfortable.

Likewise the internal and external retentions should be for as long as possible without the slightest strain.

Sequence

Before meditation is the best time, though it can be done at any time.

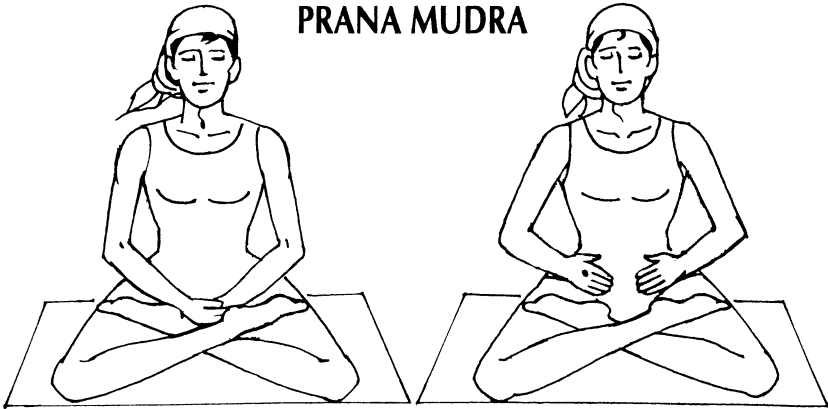
Benefits

This is an excellent preparatory practice for meditation. It develops awareness and control of psychic energy.

It induces tranquility and relieves anger and tension.

It gives all the benefits of yoga mudra (page 150).

PRANA MUDRA



starting position *stage 2*

Prana or shanti mudra (the invocation of peace)

Sit in any meditative pose. Make the spine erect, the head facing forward. Close the eyes and place the hands on the lap.

Stage 1

Inhale and exhale as deeply as possible, contracting the abdominal muscles to expel the maximum amount of air from the lungs. Then perform moola bandha while simultaneously retaining the breath outside and concentrating on mooladhara chakra.

Retain the breath for as long as is comfortable.

Stage 2

Release moola bandha. Inhale slowly and deeply, expanding the abdomen to its fullest to draw as much air as possible into the lungs. Simultaneously raise the hands until they are in front of the navel. The hands should be open with the fingers pointing towards each other (not touching) and the palms facing the trunk. Try to feel the prana or vital energy being drawn from mooladhara chakra to manipura chakra as you inhale from the abdomen. Movement of the hands should be coordinated with the abdominal inhalation.

PRANA MUDRA



stage 4

Stage 3

Continue the inhalation by expanding the chest and raising the hands until they are directly in front of the heart. Try to feel pranic energy being drawn from manipura to anahata chakra as you inhale.

Stage 4

Draw even more air into the lungs by raising the shoulders. Feel the prana being drawn up to vishuddhi, spreading like a wave to ajna and eventually to sahasrara. In coordination with the breath, raise the hands to the front of the throat.

Stage 5

Retain the breath inside, while spreading the arms out to the side. In the final position the hands must be level with the ears, the arms outstretched but not straight. Concentrate on sahasrara. Try to visualize an aura of pure light emanating from the head. Feel your whole being radiating vibrations of peace to all beings. Retain this position for as long as possible without straining the lungs in any way. Then return to the starting position while exhaling and repeat stage 1 to 5, in reverse order.

PRANA MUDRA



stage 5

At the end of exhalation your concentration should be on moola bandha. During the exhalation, feel the prana progressively moving down through each of the chakras.

Relax the body, breathing deeply and slowly.

When one has perfected the practice, the breath may be visualized as a stream of white light ascending and descending within sushumna nadi.

Sequence

Preferably before meditation.

Precautions

Do not strain the lungs. Slowly increase the duration of inhalation, retention and exhalation.

Benefits

Awakens the dormant vital energy (prana shakti) and distributes it throughout the whole body, thereby increasing strength, personal magnetism and health.

VIPAREETA KARANI MUDRA

Vipareeta karani mudra (the inverted attitude)

Perform vipareeta karani mudra.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Practise ujjayi pranayama and perform khechari mudra.

As you inhale slowly feel the breath and consciousness moving from manipura to vishuddhi chakra. While exhaling maintain awareness at vishuddhi. During the next inhalation again feel the breath and consciousness move from manipura to vishuddhi chakra.

Repeat for as long as you are comfortable.

Duration

Slowly increase the duration from a few seconds on the first day of practice to 15 minutes or more.

Sequence

At the end of asana and/or mudra practice, before meditation if possible. Do not perform after vigorous exercise or for at least 3 hours after meals.

Limitations

Not to be practised by people with enlarged thyroid, high blood pressure or serious heart problems.

Benefits

This mudra induces subtle changes in the flow of prana in the body. In particular it encourages an abundant flow of prana from manipura chakra (the pranic centre of the subtle body) to vishuddhi chakra (the centre of purity). This helps to purify the whole subtle body which in turn helps to prevent disease on the physical plane. It is an important practice for the sublimation of sexual energy from the lower to the higher centres.

MAHA MUDRA

ajna

vishuddhi

mooladhara



Maha mudra (the great attitude)

Sit on the floor so that the right heel is under the anus and the left leg is stretched straight in front of the body.

Bend forward just enough to be able to hold the left big toe with the fingers of both hands.

Relax the whole body.

Inhale deeply.

Perform moola bandha and shambhavi mudra.

While retaining the breath inside, rotate the awareness between mooladhara, vishuddhi and ajna in turn. The concentration should only remain at each of these chakras for one or two seconds.

Continue the rotation of awareness: mooladhara - vishuddhi - ajna - mooladhara - vishuddhi - ajna, for as long as you are able to comfortably retain the breath.

Then slowly exhale.

Retain the forward-bent position.

Inhale deeply and repeat the whole process.

Repeat, changing the legs so that the left heel is under the anus.

Note

Persons who find this position difficult may perform maha mudra in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana providing a similar pressure is applied to the anal region with the heel.

Duration

Beginners can do the practice 3 times on each leg. This can slowly be increased to any number that the practitioner desires.

Sequence

Can be performed at any time, though it is especially recommended before meditative practices.

Precautions

The longer one can retain the breath the better, though no strain should be imposed on the lungs.

Benefits

This is an excellent preparatory technique for meditation. It tranquilizes the whole mind and body and stimulates the flow of psychic energy (prana shakti). It helps to remove abdominal disorders.

MAHA BHEDA MUDRA



Maha bheda mudra (the great piercing mudra)

Sit with the left heel under the anus and the right leg forward. Lean forward and grasp the right big toe with both hands.

Inhale fully, then exhale deeply and retain the breath outside. Perform jalandhara, moola and uddiyana bandhas. Fix the eyes on the nosetip.

Concentrate the mind successively on mooladhara, manipura and vishuddhi chakras. Concentrate on each of the chakras, only for one or two seconds, and then move to the next chakra: mooladhara - manipura - vishuddhi- mooladhara - manipura - vishuddhi. Rotate your awareness for as long as you are able to comfortably retain the breath outside. Then release uddiyana bandha, moola bandha and lastly jalandhara bandha.

Benefits

This is a very powerful mudra for uniting oneself with the inner being or Self. *Bheda* means 'to pierce or penetrate'. In this mudra the chakras and psychic channels are pierced by the consciousness.

All other details are as given for maha mudra.

VAJROLI MUDRA

Vajroli mudra (the thunderbolt mudra)

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana. Place the hands on the knees, close the eyes and relax.

Try to draw the sexual organs upwards by pulling and tensing the lower abdomen and contracting the urinary system. This contraction is similar to that which is made when one has an urge to go for urination, but wishes to retain for some time. The testes in the male or the vagina in the female should move up a little.

Advanced form

This is not to be attempted without the guidance of a competent guru or permanent injury may result. A silver tube about 12 inches long can be inserted into the urethra. Through this water is drawn up. When this is perfected, milk is drawn through the tube, then honey and finally mercury is drawn up. After prolonged practice these liquids can be drawn into the urethra without using the tube.

At first the tube or catheter should only be inserted one inch then slowly increased to 12 inches.

Concentration

On swadhisthana chakra.

Benefits

This mudra has a strong influence on the vajra nadi (psychic channel) which supplies the sexual organs with vital energy.

The practitioner is able to control energy that is normally lost with the discharge of semen. When perfected, vital energy can be retained even if semen is discharged. This energy can then be transformed or sublimated for higher yogic practices. This is a good method for establishing brahmacharya.

YONI MUDRA

Yoni or shanmukhi mudra (the psychic source mudra)

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana, preferably padmasana or siddhasana.

Inhale slowly and deeply. Retain the breath.

Close the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers and place the ring and small fingers above and below and lips to close the mouth. While still retaining the breath inside, concentrate on bindu chakra.

Try to perceive any manifestation of sound.

After holding the breath for as long as is comfortable, remove the pressure of the middle fingers against the nostrils and exhale. Keep the other fingers in place. Inhale again and after inhalation close the nostrils with the two middle fingers.

Continue this same process.

For illustration see baddha yoni asana.

Duration

For as long as the practitioner has time available.

Concentration

On bindu chakra.

Benefits

This is a powerful practice for withdrawing the mind from association with sense objects (*pratyahara*). The source of the entire universe is primordial, unstruck sound or vibration. This mudra attempts to take the consciousness of the practitioner through the different manifestations of sound until the most subtle of sounds can be experienced. It stimulates awareness of psychic sound which emanate from bindu chakra in the back of the head.

Note

This is really a technique of nada yoga.

NAUMUKHI MUDRA

Naumukhi mudra (closing the nine gates)

Sit in a comfortable meditative pose.

Relax the whole body.

Inhale slowly and deeply.

Simultaneously feel the breath and consciousness slowly rising from mooladhara chakra to sahasrara.

Concentrate on each chakra for a few seconds in turn: mooladhara - swadhisthana - manipura anahata - vishuddhi - ajna - bindu - sahasrara.

Retain the breath inside.

Close the ears, eyes, nose and mouth in the same way as explained for yoni mudra.

Perform moola bandha and vajroli mudra.

Concentrate on sahasrara while retaining the breath inside. Hold the breath for as long as possible without strain.

Then release the nostrils and slowly exhale.

During this exhalation release moola bandha and vajroli mudra maintaining awareness of sahasrara.

At the end of the exhalation, relax for a few seconds and then repeat the whole process.

Duration

For as long as possible without strain.

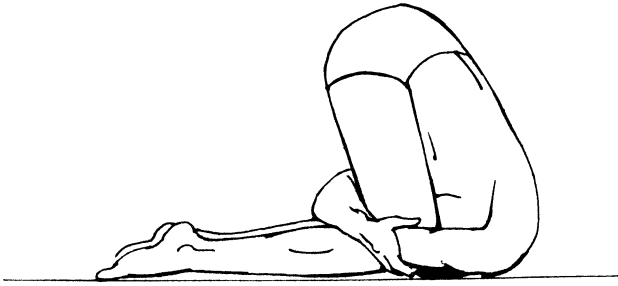
Note

The two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, mouth, anus and urinary passage are referred to as the nine gates in the citadel of the body. By closing these gates and withdrawing the mind inward, one is able to pierce the tenth gate in the crown of the head (sahasrara) known as the gate of Brahma (higher consciousness).

Benefits

The same as yoni mudra, but this is more powerful.

PASHINEE MUDRA



Pashinee mudra (the folded mudra)

Simple form

Assume halasana.

Separate the feet by about half a meter.

Bend the legs at the knees and bring the thighs towards the chest until the knees simultaneously touch the ears, shoulders and floor.

Wrap the arms tightly around the back of the legs and the head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

Concentrate on manipura chakra.

Maintain for as long as possible without discomfort.

Advanced form

Perform dwi pada kandharasana.

Relax the whole body as much as possible and close the eyes. Breathe deeply and slowly.

Concentrate on manipura chakra.

Precautions

Do not strain the back muscles.

Benefits

Brings balance and tranquility to the nervous system, thereby inducing pratyahara.

Stretches the back muscles and stimulates all the spinal nerves in and around the spine. The whole body is thereby influenced and made more healthy.

Massages all the abdominal organs and tones the sexual organs.

TADAN KRIYA

Tadan kriya (beating the kundalini)

Sit in padmasana. The palms should be flat on the floor on each side of the body.

Direct the concentration to mooladhara chakra.

Inhale deeply. Retain the breath inside.

Perform jalandhara bandha.

Then beat the buttocks up and down on the floor by raising the body and dropping it as you bend and straighten the arms.

Maintain concentration on mooladhara chakra.

Beat the buttocks 7 times during this retention.

Then rest the buttocks and exhale deeply and slowly.

This is one round. When respiration has returned to normal, again inhale and repeat the process.

Note

One should not use unnecessary force.

When the body is raised and lowered, the buttocks and back of the thighs should contact the floor at the same time.

Duration

Beginners should do about 3 rounds. The number can be increased up to 10 or even more with practice.

Concentration

On mooladhara chakra throughout the practice.

Precautions

Do not beat the buttocks too hard on the ground, otherwise physical injury can result.

Benefit

This is a very powerful mudra for awakening the dormant kundalini shakti (psychic power) which lies asleep in mooladhara chakra.

This shows itself on a gross level by increased physical energy, strength and endurance.

Shatkarma

INTRODUCTION TO HATHA YOGA

What exactly is the ancient science of hatha yoga? Classically, it encompasses six basic groups of practices and does not specifically mean asanas and pranayama. The Sanskrit word *hatha* originates from the combination of two bija mantras (basic or root sounds) *ha* and *tha*. These are the two opposing currents or forces in the universe, the positive and negative currents which manifest in man as the mental force in ida nadi and the pranic force associated with physical dynamism in pingala nadi. The bija mantra *ha* represents the solar flow in pingala and *tha* signifies the lunar flow in ida nadi. The purpose of hatha yoga is to establish perfect harmony between these two pranic flows. When they are perfectly balanced, prana will begin to flow in sushumna, the most important nadi in the psychic body. In this way the person's consciousness will expand and he will start to tread the path of spiritual enlightenment. Actually, this is the ultimate purpose of all the branches of yoga but hatha yoga is unique.

According to the ancient yogic text the *Gherand Samhita*, there are seven steps which every spiritual aspirant must tread to eventually qualify for the attainment of self realization. These are:

1. Purification of the body through hatha yoga (shodhanam).

2. A steady body/mind through asanas (dridhata).
3. A calm body/mind through mudras and bandhas (sthairyam).
4. Patience and perseverance through pratyahara, disassociation of the sense organs with the external objects (dhairyam).
5. Lightness of the body through pranayama practice (laghawam).
6. Direct perception of the object of meditation through concentration and meditation (dhyana and dharana, pratyaksham).
7. Detachment from sensual experiences through union with the self (samadhi).

So we see that the first step on this noble path is purification of the gross body. Without first eliminating toxins and impurities from the body, it is very difficult to practise the higher yoga techniques. For this sole purpose, six scientific yogic techniques known as *shatkarmas* have been developed by the ancient yogis. These six shatkarmas, nothing else, constitute the branch of yoga called hatha yoga. The shatkarmas are:

Neti : A process of cleansing and thereby purifying the nasal passages. Various methods are given.

Dhauti : A series of techniques for cleaning the whole alimentary canal from the mouth to the anus. It also includes simple methods of cleaning the eyes, ears, teeth, tongue and scalp.

Nauli : A very powerful method of massaging and strengthening the abdominal organs.

Basti : Techniques for washing and toning the large intestine.

Kapalbhati : A simple series of three techniques for purifying the frontal portion of the brain.

Trataka : The practice of intense gazing at an object. This develops the powers of concentration and dormant psychic faculties which we all possess.

JALA NETI



Jala neti (nasal cleansing with water)

Equipment

For this practice a special vessel called a neti lota is used (see diagram). If not available, use a teapot. Fill the vessel with pure lukewarm water, neither too hot nor too cold, but at blood temperature, suitable for pouring into the nose.

Add about one teaspoon of salt per half liter of water, making sure it is completely dissolved.

Technique

Insert the spout gently into the left nostril. Slowly tilt the head to the right, so that water runs into the left nostril. The mouth should be open so that you can breathe through the mouth instead of the nose. The water should flow in through the left nostril and out through the right nostril. This will happen automatically, providing the position of the lota and the angle of the head are correct and the respiration is through the open mouth. Allow the water to flow freely through the nostrils for about 20 seconds.

Then remove the lota and clean the nose by blowing with vigor as in bhastrika pranayama. Do not blow so hard that injury results.

Repeat the same process but tilt the head to the left and pour water into the right nostril.

Drying the nose

Now the nose must be completely cleaned and dried in the following manner:

Stand erect with feet together.

Clasp the hands behind the back.

Bend forward from the waist until the head is upside down. Remain in this position for 30 seconds. This will allow all the water to drain from the nose. While in this position, blow vigorously through the nose 5 times. Then stand erect again.

Close one of the nostrils by gently pressing the side. Breathe in and out vigorously 30 times in quick succession, emphasizing the exhalation to expel the maximum amount of moisture.

Repeat the same process with the other nostril.

Then with both nostrils open.

If water still remains, repeat the drying process until the nose is completely dry.

General advice

At the first attempt, a slight burning sensation may be felt when the water passes through the nostrils. This is only due to the mucus membranes being unaccustomed to contact with water. After performing jala neti a few times this sensation will not occur. The eyes may also become a little red at first but this will not occur after a short time.

Those people who have a structural blockage in the nose and are not able to pass water freely through the nostrils should do sutra neti.

Frequency

Daily in the mornings, or more often for a cold.

Precautions

The water should only pass through the nose. If any water enters the throat or mouth, it is an indication that the position of the head is incorrect. Adjust the head until the water flows only through the nose. Make sure the nose is properly dried after doing jala neti, otherwise the nasal passages may become irritated and manifest the symptoms of a cold.

Do not blow the nose too hard.

Limitations

Persons suffering from chronic hemorrhage in the nose should not do jala neti without expert advice.

Benefits

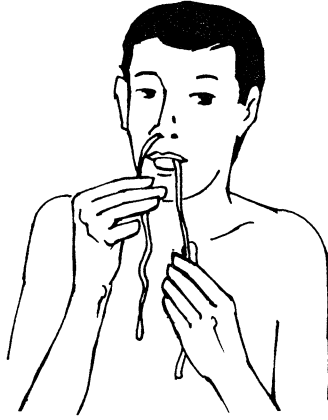
Removes all the dirt and bacteria-filled mucus from the nasal passages.

Aids in relieving colds and sinusitis, together with various disorders of the ears, eyes and throat, such as myopia, certain types of deafness, tonsillitis, inflammation of the adenoids and mucus membranes. Has a cooling and soothing influence on the brain and is beneficial for hysteria, epilepsy, temper tantrums, migraine and depression. Gives a general feeling of lightness and freshness in the head and removes drowsiness. Helps awaken ajna chakra by stimulating the olfactory bulb above the sinuses.

Variations

Advanced practitioners may perform jala neti by drinking water directly through the nose from a glass. Either cold or warm water can be used, although cold water may irritate the nasal membranes. In special cases neti with milk (dugdha neti), ghee of clarified butter (ghrita neti), oil mixed with water (tel neti), or urine can be passed through the nose. Seek the guidance of a yoga teacher for more details.

SUTRA NETI



Sutra neti (nasal cleansing with string)

Traditionally, sutra neti is practised by passing a cotton string, stiffened with wax, into one of the nostrils. Nowadays a thin rubber catheter, available from most pharmacies, is generally substituted.

Techniques

The catheter is passed through one nostril and pulled through the mouth.

Then the catheter is pulled gently to and fro so that it slides backward and forward in the nostril.

Do this about 30 to 50 times. Remove the catheter from the nostril. Perform the same procedure in the other nostril.

Frequency

Daily after jala neti.

Precautions

The catheter should be gently and slowly pushed through the nostrils. Do not attempt this technique without expert guidance.

Benefits

Same as jala neti. Opens up blocked nasal passages.

DHAUTI

The practices of dhauti are general body cleansing techniques. There are many types of dhauti for different parts of the body. They are as follows:

Danta dhauti is concerned with cleaning the parts of the body above the neck. It involves proper care of the teeth by using tooth powder, paste or a neem stick; cleaning the tongue by rubbing with the fingers; (*jihwa dhauti*); cleaning the ears (*karna dhauti*); cleaning the head and scalp (*kapalrandhra dhauti*); and cleaning the eyes with water (*chaksua dhauti*).

Vatsara dhauti is a process of rejuvenating the stomach by swallowing or drinking air through the mouth. The reader should also refer to bhujangini mudra which performs the same action. The air is circulated for some time, then expelled slowly by belching. This practice helps to eliminate many stomach ailments.

Varisara dhauti or shankhprakashalana

The word *shankha* means 'conch' and the word *prakashalana* means 'to wash completely'. The technique is called shankhprakashalana as it washes the conch-shaped intestines.

It is a systematic and gentle method of completely washing the entire alimentary canal from the mouth to the anus. The process is rather long and it is not advisable to attempt it without the guidance of a yoga teacher.

Preparation

On the day of performing shankhprakashalana, no food, tea, coffee, etc., should be consumed prior to commencement of the technique. A clean bucket or similar container should be filled with lukewarm water. Salt must be added (2 teaspoons per liter) so

that the water tastes salty. Wear light and comfortable clothes, for you will be doing exercises. This technique should be done amidst an atmosphere of happiness and relaxation. There should be no tension or trepidation. For this reason it is best done light-heartedly with a group 5 to 10 persons.

Technique

Drink 2 glasses of salty water as quickly as possible. Perform the following 5 asanas 8 times each:

Tadasana (basic form - see page 120).

Tiryaka tadasana (see page 115).

Kati chakrasana (variation 2, see page 110).

Tiryaka bhujangasana (see page 168).

Udarakarshan asana (see page 50).

There are a number of sphincters or valves in the alimentary canal between the stomach and the anus, which open and close to allow the controlled passage of food during the digestive process. The five asanas practised during shankhaprakshalana relax the muscles of these valves and allow the salty water to pass freely and quickly to the anus for discharge. After repeating all 5 asanas 8 times each, drink 2 more glasses of salty water and again perform the 5 asanas 8 times. Repeat this procedure once more. Now go to the toilet and try to evacuate the bowels. Do not strain under any circumstances. Just relax. After a minute or so in the toilet, come out.

Drink 2 more glasses and perform the 5 asanas 8 times again. Then go to the toilet, but do not force. Continue this process, eventually a motion will occur. Do not compare yourself with others. Do not worry if you take a longer time to evacuate or have to drink more water than others.

At first solid stool will be evacuated, then probably water and stool mixed. Carry on drinking 2 glasses of water, doing the asanas and going to the toilet. Eventually only clean water will be evacuated. On

the average between 16 and 25 glasses of salty water must be consumed before clean water is evacuated.

Some will need less and some more.

At this stage shankhaprakshalana is completed.

Additional practices

Kunjali and jala neti should be done immediately after completing shankhaprakshalana.

Kunjali cleans the region from the stomach to the mouth and also removes any remaining salty water from the stomach. Jala neti cleans the nasal passages.

Rest

After completing shankhaprakshalana rest is essential. Lie down or sit quietly for 45 minutes. Do not sleep. During this period the whole digestive system is having the best rest possible.

Special food

45 minutes after shankhaprakshalana a special preparation of rice, pulse (mung dal) or lentils, cooked with ghee (clarified butter) must be taken. This preparation is necessary to activate and lubricate the digestive tract in a gentle manner. Remember, shankhaprakshalana has not only removed all the waste matter from the alimentary canal, but also all the natural and necessary protective layers from the walls of the digestive tract, leaving them bare. The ghee is essential to provide a temporary protective coating until the body provides a new layer.

It is not normal for the intestines to be completely empty, especially for long periods of time without any protective coating. Therefore, while the ghee provides the wall coating, the rice supplies an easily digestible "packing" material and the lentils or dal supply a high protein food. It supplements the carbohydrate from the rice and the fat from the ghee for an all-round nutritious meal.

Food restrictions

For at least on week or longer, all chemically processed, acidic, rich and non-vegetarian foods should be strictly avoided. Milk, buttermilk and acidic fruits such as lemons, grapefruit, oranges, etc., are also restricted. Alcohol, cigarettes, tea, coffee, betel nut preparations such as paan should not be taken for at least one week. The diet should be as pure, simple and neutral (not too acidic) as possible. Remember the whole digestive system has been cleaned. A sudden induction of toxic and poisonous foods might produce bad reactions such as fever, indigestion, constipation and so on. Many ailments occur because of accumulated toxic matter in the intestines which tends to make the bloodstream impure. This has repercussions on the whole body. A complete cleaning of the digestive tract purifies the blood and manifests in a noticeable improvement in the health of the entire body. Most diseases that are associated with the digestive system are relieved. These include diabetes, hyperacidity, chronic dysentery, constipation and conditions arising from toxic blood. It gives a feeling of lightness, a clear mind, cheerfulness and a general exhilaration with life. It is essential for spiritual aspirants to perform this practice prior to the commencement of any higher sadhana, such as kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, or japa anusthana (extended mantra repetitions).

Frequency

Every six months, or more often under special circumstances.

General advice

The rules are extensive but each one has a valid reason for being carried out. Disregarding any rule can cause problems. Though we have given the technique here, it should only be done under expert guidance.

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana (short stomach wash)

Early in the morning, before eating or drinking anything, prepare water in the same way as for shankhaprakshalana. Drink two glasses, practise the same five asanas, eight times each as already described. Then drink two more glasses of salty water and repeat the asanas. Drink two more glasses of water and again repeat the asanas. Now go to the toilet. Usually after the practice there is a very clear bowel movement plus a large quantity of urine.

Time and sequence

This practice should be done early in the morning or on an empty stomach. For therapeutic purposes it may be practised daily without harm. Otherwise once or twice a week is sufficient.

Note

This is for people who are unable to practise the full course of shankhaprakshalana due to lack of guidance or for any other reasons.

Precautions

Wait at least half an hour after completing laghoo shankhaprakshalana before eating anything.

For this practice there are no dietary restrictions.

imitations

Persons suffering from stomach or duodenal ulcers should attempt this only under expert supervision. High blood pressure patients may practise it, but they should use plain water without salt.

Benefits

This is a highly recommended practice for sufferers of chronic constipation, gas, acidity, indigestion and other digestive upsets. It is also good for the kidneys and urinary system as it helps to prevent urinary infections and the formation of kidney stones.

AGNISAR KRIYA



Agnisar kriya or vahnisar dhauti (fire practice)

Simple form

Sit in vajrasana. Keep the toes together and separate the knees as far as possible.

Place the hands on the knees, keep the arms straight and lean forward slightly.

Open the mouth and extend the tongue outside.

Breathe rapidly in and out while simultaneously expanding and contracting the abdomen. The respiration should be in harmony with the movement of the abdomen, and should resemble the panting of a dog.

Breathe in and out up to 25 times.

Advanced form

Assume the same pose as for the simple form.

Exhale as deeply as possible.

Perform jalandhara bandha.

Rapidly contract and expand the abdominal muscles for as long as you are able to retain the breath.

Precautions

Not to be done until at least four hours after meals.

Limitations

Not to be practised by people with high blood pressure, heart problems and peptic or duodenal ulcers.

Benefits

Removes disorders of the stomach and abdomen, such as gas, constipation, sluggishness of the liver, tones all the abdominal organs and stimulates the appetite. It is a preparation for uddiyana bandha and nauli kriya.

HRIDA DHAUTI

The word *hrida* means heart or the chest region. The techniques in this section are concerned with purifying this region of the body. The techniques are divided into three parts : danda dhauti, vastra dhauti and vaman dhauti.

Danda Dhauti (stick cleansing)

This is the method of cleaning the esophagus, the food pipe, from the throat to the stomach, by inserting a specially prepared stick. The stick is usually the soft core of a banana tree stem, being about half an inch in diameter and two feet long.

Technique

Carefully insert the stick down the throat until the end reaches the stomach. Then slowly remove it.

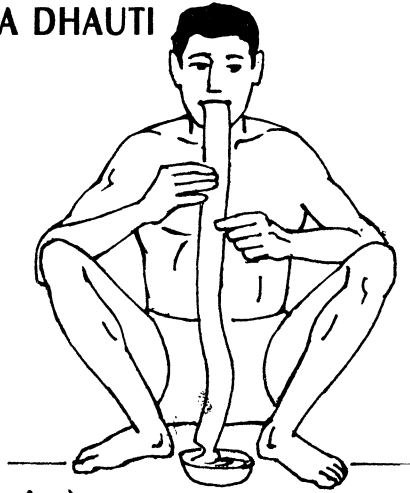
Precautions

Do not attempt this under any circumstances without expert guidance.

Benefits

This practise removes mucus, phlegm, acidity and general impurities from the esophagus.

VASTRA DHAUTI



Vastra dhauti (cloth cleansing)

A specially prepared cloth of fine cotton, approximately two inches wide and several feet long, is used. Put one end of the cloth in the mouth and swallow it slowly and carefully, mixing it with saliva as you would food. By sipping a little warm water the cloth is gradually drawn down, little by little, until only a small portion remains outside. The other end of the cloth should be in the stomach.

Advanced practitioners can now perform nauli.

Remove the cloth within 20 minutes of insertion.

Precautions

Do not attempt this practice unless you have expert guidance.

Perform it only when the stomach is totally empty.

Do not leave the cloth in too long or it will move into the intestines. Do not speak while practising.

Benefits

Essential treatment for asthma, bronchitis, chronic cough and other respiratory tract ailments.

Removes acidity, stomach gas and indigestion.

VAMAN DHAUTI

This is the method of cleaning the stomach by voluntary vomiting. There are two types : *kunjal kriya* and *vyaghra kriya*.

Kunjal kriya (vomiting water practice)

Prepare some tepid water, approximately six glasses per person, and add one teaspoon of salt per half liter of water. Mix the water and salt well.

Drink six glasses or as many as you are able to, one after another as quickly as possible while standing. Immediately after, lean forward and place the middle and index fingers of the right hand as far back into the throat as possible. The fingernails should be short and clean.

Rub and press the back of the tongue. This will induce a strong urge to vomit and the water will come out of the mouth in a series of quick gushes. Press the tongue until the stomach is empty.

Practise early in the morning on an empty stomach. Do not take food for at least 20 minutes after.

Limitations

This practise may be done independently by healthy individuals. Those persons who suffer from specific ailments such as asthma, stomach ulcers, heart problems, hernia, etc., should seek guidance.

Benefits

Removes indigestion, acidity and gas from the stomach. Eliminates excess mucus from the esophagus, helping to remedy coughs, sore throat, mild asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory ailments.

Tones and stimulates all the abdominal organs by inducing strong muscular contractions in the stomach walls.

Vyaghra kriya (tiger practice)

This is similar to kunjla kriya, but is performed with a full or loaded stomach. The word *vyaghra* means tiger. The tiger has the habit of gorging his stomach with his prey and then vomiting out the semi-digested food after three or four hours have elapsed. This technique is a voluntary form of what the body does involuntarily if food is not digestible.

However, this is generally the last resort of the body; it usually tries to digest the impure or excessive food that we have unwisely "dumped" into the stomach. This leads to a lot of heaviness and discomfort for a few hours.

The easiest way to prevent or relieve this is to make the stomach expel the food through the mouth.

Technique

Perform exactly the same procedure as kunjla kriya. All food in the stomach will be removed. Practise when the stomach feels uncomfortable, preferably three to six hours after taking food.

Traditionally, kheer (milk rice pudding) is taken afterwards, but this is not essential.

Precautions

Try not to let the food particles enter the nasal passages. If this occurs, do jala neti.

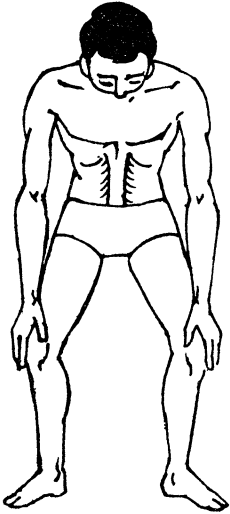
Limitations

This practice is not to be attempted by persons suffering from stomach ulcer, hernia, heart problems or high blood pressure.

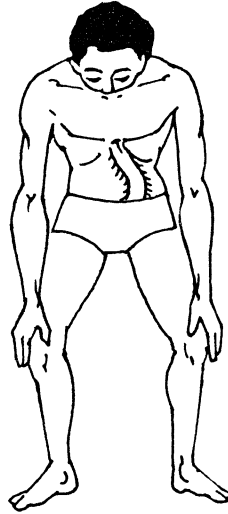
Benefits

When one eats too much food, or bad food, indigestion will result. In such cases modern man's habit is to take a few tablets and hope for the best. However, the best and least harmful method is to utilize the natural processes of the body, and vomit.

NAULI



madhyama nauli



vama nauli

Nauli (abdominal massaging)

Stand with the feet separated by about 3 feet.
Perform uddiyana bandha in the standing position.

Stage 1

Contract the rectus abdominis muscles and isolate them at the center of the abdomen. This is called madhyama nauli. After mastering it, proceed to stage 2.

State 2

Isolate the rectus abdominis muscles at the left side of the abdomen. This is vama nauli.

State 3

Isolate the rectus abdominis muscles at the right side. This is dakshina nauli.

State 4

The practitioner should be able to perform stages 1 to 3 without the slightest difficulty.

In a standing position, practise uddiyana bandha. Then try to churn or roll the rectus abdominis muscles so that they move from the left to the center and then to the right in one smooth motion.

Repeat this movement in quick succession as many times as possible while retaining the breath outside. Then relax the abdominal muscles and breathe in. When respiration has returned to normal, repeat the process but roll the muscles from right to left.

Note

Agnisar kriya and uddiyana bandha are good preliminary practices.

Duration

Practise each round for as long as you can retain the breath. Practise up to 6 rounds, 3 times from left to right and 3 times from right to left.

It takes time and regular daily practice to perfect this technique. If you can do stage 4 within three months, then your progress is good.

Precautions

Best practised under the guidance of a yoga teacher. Do not perform until at least four hours after meals.

Limitations

This practice is not for sufferers of high blood pressure, peptic and duodenal ulcers, hernia or any other serious digestive ailment.

Benefits

This is the most powerful method of removing all abdominal ailments. It stimulates the abdominal organs, keeping them healthy. It removes constipation by encouraging intestinal peristalsis. It helps to eliminate sexual ailments.

Spiritually, it helps awaken manipura chakra.

BASTI

Jala basti (the yogic enema)

Stand in pure water up to the navel. A flowing river is an ideal place.

Lean forward and place the hands on the knees.

Expand the sphincter muscles of the anus and simultaneously perform uddiyana bandha and nauli in such a manner that water is drawn into the bowels. Hold the water in the bowels for some time and then expel it through the anus.

Note

A short tube may be inserted into the anus by beginners to make the practice easier. This technique should be learned under expert guidance.

Benefits

The colon is cleaned and purified. Old stool is removed and gas expelled.

Advanced practitioners of pranayama use basti to cool down the abdominal heat produced by their practises.

Alternative practice

Benefits of basti can also be obtained by sitting in cool, fresh water up to the navel and performing ashwini mudra.

Sthal basti (dry basti)

Sit in the final pose of paschimottanasana.

Perform ashwini mudra 25 times, sucking air into the bowels.

Retain for some time and then expel through the anus.

Benefits are the same as for ashwini mudra.

MOOLA SHODHANAM

Moola shodhanam (root purification)

The soft root of a raw tumeric plant (*haldi* in Hindi) is inserted gently into the anus, rotated and then removed. If tumeric is not readily available the middle finger may be used instead.

The anus should be finally washed with cold water.

Benefits

This technique purifies the anal region.

The tumeric plant has great medicinal value as an antiseptic and blood purifier. It is used widely in India for disinfecting various wounds and cuts.

Hardened stool in the lower colon can be removed very easily.

Peristalsis is stimulated and constipation is thereby relieved.

KAPALBHATI

(a) Vatkrama kapalbhati (air bellowing)

This variety is known as kapalbhati pranayama (see page 318).

(b) Vyutkrama kapalbhati (sinus cleansing)

One must draw water in through the nose and expel it through the mouth.

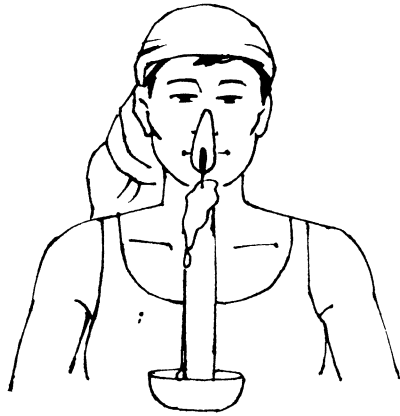
Its practice and benefits are like jala neti.

(c) Sheetkrama kapalbhati (cold bellowing)

This is more difficult. In this practice one must take in water through the mouth and expel it through the nose.

Benefits are as given for jala neti, but more intense.

TRATAKA



Trataka (concentrated gazing)

This practice is traditionally considered to be a part of hatha yoga. Because its technique is more like a mudra it can also be considered as part of raja yoga. This powerful technique can be defined as fixed gazing at one point (the word *trataka* means "to look, or to gaze").

If practised regularly it develops the power of concentration to an almost unlimited degree. From this comes the awakening of latent faculties that are in all of us.

Although there are numerous different techniques, the easiest and most common is the following.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable position, preferably a meditative asana, in a dark room. Place a lighted candle level with the eyes, at a distance of 1 to 2 feet from the face. Straighten the spine, relax the body and close the eyes. Be aware of the physical

body only.

Let the body become still, like a statue. Once you are comfortable try not to move the body in any way or for any reason throughout the whole practice. When you are prepared, open the eyes and gaze intently at the brightest spot of the flame just above the end of the wick or the steady red tip of the wick. With practice you should be able to gaze for a few minutes at the flame without movement of the eyeballs or blinking. Continue to gaze at the flame with total concentration. The whole of your consciousness must become centered in the eyes to the extent that awareness of the rest of the body is lost.

The gaze should be absolutely fixed on one point. As soon as the eyes become tired (perhaps after a few minutes) or if they begin to water, close them and relax. Do not move the body, but be aware of the after-image of the flame in front of the closed eyes. Everyone has looked into the sun or a bright light and seen, on closing the eyes for a few minutes, the clear impression of that light on the retina of the eye.

Likewise, the after-image of the candle flame will be clearly visible. You should practise *trataka* on this image, holding it directly in front or a little above the eyebrow center. As soon as it begins to fade, open the eyes again and continue to concentrate on the external candle flame.

Variations

Trataka can be practised on a small dot, the full moon, a shadow, a crystal ball, the nosetip, water, darkness, the void, (see *bhoochari mudra*), a shiva linga, a shining object that is not excessively bright, and so many other things.

Those who have a personal deity or guru can

practise trataka on photographs of his face, while trying to feel his spiritual presence and grace.

Trataka can also be practised on the rising sun, one's own image in a mirror or the eyes of another person. These should, however, be done under the guidance of a guru, as there are certain risks involved.

There are two divisions of trataka, *bahiranga* (outer) and *antaranga* (inner). The methods briefly mentioned so far are all part of outer trataka.

Inner trataka is internal visualization, perhaps of a chakra or your personal deity. The eyes are generally kept closed. If they are open, the concentration should be directed inward to such an extent that no external object is perceived.

Duration

For general purposes 15 to 20 minutes is sufficient. For spiritual purposes, or to rectify eye defects, the duration should be extended for any length of time. Sufferers of insomnia and mental tension should do this technique for 15 minutes before sleeping at night.

Time and sequence

The best time for trataka is between 4 and 6 a.m. after asanas and pranayama. It can also be practised at virtually any time. The stomach should be empty so that concentration is more intense.

Precautions

There is no danger in the simple form of trataka outlined here (on the candle flame), but one should avoid undue strain in the beginning. The ability to keep the eyes open without blinking will be developed gradually with practice.

Benefits

Physically, trataka corrects weakness and certain defects of the eyes, such as short-sightedness. Mentally, it increases nervous stability, removes insomnia and relaxes even the most troubled mind. Trataka should be done as a sadhana practice. It develops concentration. The eyes are the doorway to the mind. When the eyes are fixed and unmoving, the mind becomes the same. The thinking process automatically ceases as concentration increases. Trataka is one of the most powerful methods of controlling the tempestuous mind and its thought waves.

YOGA'S PSYCHIC PHYSIOLOGY

In this book, together with each asana and other practice, you will find that a particular point is recommended for concentration. Sometimes it is the breath, sometimes a physical part of the body, and often it is one of the chakras. These psychic centers are very essential mediums through which to develop concentration and they have deep significance in themselves. If we wish to relax the mind and gain optimum physical benefits from our yoga practices, it is necessary to concentrate on something. By directing the mind to specific regions of the body or to the breath, the effect of the particular practice is greatly increased.

In a physical sense, chakras are associated with the major nerve plexuses and endocrinal glands in the body. These are the main relay and control centers of the human organism, which have extensive influence on the whole 'being' of the individual. Many asanas have a particularly powerful and beneficial effect on one or more of these glands or plexuses. For example, sarvangasana exerts a strong pressure on the thyroid gland in the throat region, which is associated with vishuddhi chakra. The thyroid is given a good massage and its functioning

improves greatly. However, if the concentration is directed to this area during execution of the asana, then the benefits will be even greater.

In most people these psychic centers are lying dormant and inactive. Modern psychology agrees with yogic philosophy, for it postulates that man normally uses no more than one tenth of the possible capacity of the brain. The untapped faculties lie unconnected to the conscious problems. There are vast, uncharted areas in the brain which are sleeping; there are almost infinite unknown depths within our subconscious and unconscious mind about which we know little or nothing.

By concentrating on the chakras while doing asana or other practices, energy is stimulated to flow through the chakras. This will help to awaken the corresponding faculties in the psychic and mental bodies, allowing the individual to experience higher planes of consciousness, of which he is normally unaware.

The major chakras are seven in number and are located in the region of the spinal cord, from the lowest point in the perineum, to the top of the head. They are connected and energized through a network of psychic channels called nadis, which correspond on a grosser level to the nerves in the nervous system. They are depicted symbolically as lotus flowers, each having a particular number of petals and a characteristic colour.

The petals represent the different manifestations of psychic energy in the chakras and the psychic channels leading in and out of them. Each chakra is the center of an element, having a form, a seed sound (bija mantra) and a presiding deity with its respective vehicle (vahana) and certain qualities associated with it. The following is a more detailed description of each individual chakra.

Mooladhara chakra

Mooladhara is the lowest of the chakras. It is known as the root center (*mool-* root, *adhara* - place). There are also centers below mooladhara, which represent the lower animal levels of consciousness. These are active in animals, but dormant in human beings.

Mooladhara is symbolized by a deep red lotus with four petals, upon which are inscribed the mantras *am*, *vam*, *sham*, *ṣham*, *sam*. In the center is a yellow square and the bija mantra *lam*. In the center of the square is a red triangle with its apex pointing downward. Within the triangle is the smoky coloured swayambhu linga, encircled by a golden serpent with three and a half coils. The triangle is riding on an elephant with seven trunks which symbolizes the stability and solidarity of earth. The presiding deities are Brahma, the creator of the universe, and goddess Dakini, who is the controller of the skin element of the body.

Mooladhara is called the root center because it is the seat or dwelling place of primal energy, kundalini shakti. The kundalini is in the form of a serpent in deep sleep, coiled around swayambhu linga. It is the source of all energy in man and the universe, whether sexual, emotional, mental, psychic or spiritual. Energy (Shakti) is only one, however, the center through which it manifests itself gives it various qualities and attributes. To awaken this energy through self-purification and concentration of mind, and to lead it up to the higher chakras and ultimately to sahasrara, where, as pure energy (Shakti), it unites with the pure consciousness (Shiva), is the aim of yoga.

Swadhithana chakra

Above mooladhara in the spinal region directly behind the genital organ is swadhithana chakra. The literal meaning of the work *swadhithana* is 'one's

own abode (*swa*-self, *sthan*- dwelling place). This chakra is symbolized by a crimson lotus with six petals, upon which are written the letters *bam, bham, mam, yam, ram, lam*. In the center is a white crescent moon and the bija mantra *vam*. They are riding on a crocodile representing the water element. The presiding deities are Lord Vishnu, the maintainer and preserver of the universe, and the goddess Rakini, controller of the blood element in the body.

On the physical level, swadhisthana is mainly associated with the organs of excretion and reproduction. Vitalization of this center can therefore rectify any disorders in these functions.

On a deeper level, swadhisthana chakra is the seat of the unconscious mind, the collective consciousness, storehouse of all *samskaras*, remote ancestral memories. It is the center of man's most primitive and deep rooted instincts. By purifying this center one can rise above the animal nature.

For meditation on this center, one should visualize a deep vast ocean with restless, turbulent waves under a dark sky at night. The tides of the ocean represent the ebb and flow of our own awareness.

Manipura chakra

The word *manipura* means "city of jewels" (*mani*-gem, *pura*- city). This chakra is so called because it is the fire center, the focal point of heat, and is lustrous like a jewel, radiant with vitality and energy. Manipura chakra is depicted as a bright yellow lotus with ten petals, upon which are written the letters : *dam, dham, nam, tam, tham, dam, dham, nam, pam, pham*.

Within the lotus is a red triangle containing the bija mantra *ram* sitting on a ram, a very aggressive beast and symbol of the fire element. The presiding deities are

Rudra, consumer or destroyer of the universe and the goddess Lakini, controller of the flesh element.

The solar plexus is the center chiefly concerned with the vital processes of digestion and absorption of food. The function of the gastric glands, such as the pancreas, gall bladder and the different glands in the stomach, is the production and secretion of enzymes, acids and juices which are necessary for digestion of food prior to its distribution to all parts of the body. Manipura chakra is the subtle center which controls these activities. The adrenal glands located above the kidneys are a gross manifestation of manipura. They secrete adrenaline into the blood during an emergency situation. This has the effect of speeding up all the physiological processes, making the mind sharp and alert, the heart beat faster, the respiration rate more rapid and so on. Generally the body is prepared for a more intense level of activity than normal, in what is commonly called the 'fight or flight' reaction. Those people who suffer from laziness, sluggishness and depression or malfunctions of the digestive system, such as diabetes, indigestion, etc., should concentrate on manipura chakra and try to feel an energy radiating from this region.

In some schools, such as Zen Buddhism, manipura chakra is the most important center and is said to be the seat of kundalini. This is true in the sense that the kundalini goes through a transformation by passing through manipura, and is revealed more in its true light.

Manipura chakra is the center of vitality in the psychic and physical bodies where the *prana* (upward-moving vitality) and the *apana* (downward-moving vitality) meet, generating the heat that is necessary to support life.

Anahata chakra

Anahata literally means the 'unstruck' (*an-not, ahat-struck*). All sound in the manifested universe is produced by the striking together of objects which sets up vibrations or sound waves, but that sound which issues from beyond this material world, the primordial sound, is the source of all sound and is the anahata *nada* (sound). The heart center is where this sound manifests. It may be perceived by the yogi as an internal, unborn and undying vibration, the pulse of the universe.

The anahata chakra is symbolized by a smoky blue lotus with twelve petals inscribed with the letters :
kam, kham, gam, gham, nam, cham, chham, jam, jham, ñam, ãam, ðam.

In the center of the lotus is a hexagram of two interlaced triangles (as in the Jewish Star of David) and the bija mantra *yam* sitting on a swift black antelope, symbol of the air element. The presiding deities of anahata chakra are Isha, the lord in an all-pervading form and the goddess Kakini, ruler of the fat element.

Anahata is associated on the physical level with the heart and lungs, and the circulatory and respiratory systems. Sufferers of diseases like anemia, hypertension, palpitations, tuberculosis, asthma and bronchitis should practise concentration on anahata chakra, preferably while doing asanas or other yogic techniques.

One may meditate on anahata chakra by imagining a dark empty room or cave in the chest region. This is called the space of the heart (*hridayakasha*) and is filled with the expansion and contraction of the breathing process and the rhythm of the heart beat. One should try to visualize the tiny flame of a burning lamp. Imagine it to be steady and unflickering like a flame in a windless place. It is the symbol of the individual soul (jivatma), the indwelling spirit of all being which is undisturbed by

the winds of the world.

Vishuddhi chakra

Vishuddhi chakra is the center of purification (*vishuddhi* means to purify). It is symbolized by a smoky violet lotus with sixteen petals, inscribed with the sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet. These are : *am, ām, im, īm, um, ūm, ṛim, ṛīm, ḷim, ḷīm, em, aim, om, aum, m* and *h*.

In the center of the lotus is a white circle and the bija mantra *ham* seated upon a white elephant. The elephant is symbolic of ether. The presiding deity is Ardhanariswara, the form of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati combined in one body, half male, half female. The goddess of this center is Sakini, presiding over the element of bone.

Vishuddhi chakra influences the vocal cords and the region of the larynx, thyroid and parathyroid glands. Disorders in this area of the physical body can be remedied by concentrating deeply on this chakra.

The throat center is the place where divine nectar *amrita* (the mystical elixir of immortality) is tasted. This nectar is a kind of sweet secretion produced by the gland known as the *lalana chakra*, which is located near the back of the throat. By higher yogic practices such as *kechhari mudra*, the nectar gland is stimulated. It secretes the nectar on which the yogi can exist for any length of time without food or water. Many yogis in India have demonstrated the feat of being buried alive for day on end by virtue of their mastery over *lalana chakra*. Any practice which is utilized to stimulate this gland should not be undertaken without the guidance of a competent guru, for there are certain dangers involved. A bitter poisonous secretion is produced when the aspirant is not

in the proper condition to take up such advanced practices.

One may meditate on vishuddi chakra by trying to feel that the cold sweet drops of nectar are falling down into it giving a feeling of blissful intoxication.

Ajna chakra

This chakra is known as the third eye, gyana chakshu (eye of wisdom), trikuti or triveni (confluence of three rivers), bhrumadhya (the eyebrow center), guru chakra and the Eye of Shiva. The word ajna means `command`.

Through this chakra the disciple, in deeper states of meditation, receives commands and guidance from his guru. This is also where one receives commands from the divine, higher self.

It is depicted as pale grey or white lotus, having two petals with the letters *ham* and *ksham* inscribed on them. These represent the positive and the negative flows of prana (vital energy) which converge at this center. In the center of the lotus is the sacred bija mantra *aum*. The presiding deities of ajna chakra are Paramshiva, the formless consciousness, and the goddess Hakini who controls the element of this chakra, the subtle mind (manas).

Ajna chakra is a very well-known centre which is used for concentration in many systems of meditation. Usually the point used for this purpose is the eyebrow center, though actually the real seat of ajna is within the area of the brain. Its corresponding physical part of the body is the pineal, a tiny pea-sized gland within the brain, which has almost atrophied in the adult human being. On the psychic plane this delicate point is the bridge between the physical, mental and psychic bodies. Through the awakening of ajna chakra one develops supramental faculties such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy and other abilities which are the hidden

potential of every person. Thought energy also has form, being matter of a very subtle variety. When the mind is elevated and made sensitive, it is possible to send and perceive thought energy through ajna chakra. It is like a psychic doorway opening into deeper and higher realms of awareness. In addition, by stimulating ajna chakra one may increase all the faculties of the mind: intelligence, memory, willpower and concentration.

Bindu visarga

At the rear top corner of the head, where the Hindu brahmins grow a small tuft of hair, is a point known as bindu. This is a very mysterious psychic center and is also known as the *soma* chakra. It is symbolized by a tiny crescent moon on a moonlit night. It is also associated with production of semen in the male, the meaning of the word bindu being 'a point or drop'.

In the ancient science of kriya yoga, bindu is a highly important center of concentration used to perceive the psychic sounds which manifest there.

Sahasrara

Sahasrara is not really a chakra but the abode of the highest consciousness. It is visualized as a shining lotus of a thousand petals containing all the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, together with all the power associated with each sound (fifty in number) twenty times over. In the center of the lotus is a shining shivalinga, symbol of pure consciousness. It is in sahasrara that the mystical union of Shiva and Shakti takes place, the fusion of consciousness with matter and energy, the individual soul with the supreme soul.

In yogic and tantric philosophy, the universe comes into manifestation by the separation of these two forces,

which are in essence one and the same. Consciousness is the static force and nature is the dynamic force. First, nature separates in three *gunas* or qualities : *tamas* (inertia, lethargy), *rajas* (activity, energy) and *sattwa* (equilibrium, balance, peace). The three *gunas* pervade the manifested universe. From them evolve the eight elements of nature. Manifestation proceeds in order from subtle to gross, from the ego, buddhi, etc., to fire, water and earth. Earth, being the most gross, is therefore the last to evolve. When the subtle man becomes gross and visible the process of creation is complete.

Thus we see that the five lower chakras are related to finer elements progressing up to ajna which is the subtlest. The highest center, sahasrara, is the abode of pure consciousness and transcendence. When kundalini awakens, it ascends through the chakras to sahasrara, and merges into the source from whence it came. Matter and energy merge into pure consciousness in a state of intoxicating bliss, the goal of yoga. Having attained this, the yogi gains supreme knowledge and passes beyond birth and death.

Nadis

Nadi literally means 'a flow or current'. In the ancient texts it is written that there are seventy two thousand nadis in the psychic body of man. These are visible like currents of light to a person who has developed psychic vision. In recent times the word nadi has been translated as nerve, but actually nadis are not nerves as we know them, for they are composed of astral matter. Like the chakras they are not located in the physical body, though nerves of the physical body can be considered as their corresponding physical manifestations. Nadis are the subtle channels along which the

vital forces of prana flow. Out of the large number of nadis in the psychic body, fourteen are more important, and of these, three are most important. These three are *ida*, *pingala* and *sushumna*. All the nadis are subordinate to sushumna, even ida and pingala. Sushumna nadi runs within the spinal cord, from mooladhara chakra at the bottom to ajna chakra at the top. It is silvery in colour.

Emanating from the left side of mooladhara and passing through each chakra in turn in a curving path, finally ending on the left side of ajna chakra, is ida nadi. It is blue in color. Emanating from the right side of mooladhara and passing in an opposite manner to that of ida, up to the right of ajna, is pingala nadi. Pingala is fiery red in colour.

Ida and pingala are the pathways of the two polar opposites of life force flowing within us.

Quality	Ida	Pingala
breath	left nostril	right nostril
temperature	cold	hot
sex	female	male
quality	mental	physical
metal	silver	gold
colour	blue	red
energy	negative	positive
nerves	parasympathetic	sympathetic
river	Yamuna	Ganges
planet	moon	sun

Ida is negative, and also called the moon (chandra) nadi, while pingala is positive and called the sun (surya) nadi.

These force currents in ida, pingala and sushumna operate alternately and the current that is flowing at any

particular time can be determined by noting the flow of breath in the nostrils. If the left nostril has a greater flow of air, then ida nadi is predominant. When the flow is greater in the right nostril, then pingala is predominant. If the flow is equal, then sushumna is ruling.

If you watch your breath you will find that it is usually flowing more in one nostril than the other. When the right nostril is flowing, then vital energy is more active, allowing the individual to do physical work, digest food and so on. The mind is extroverted and the body generates more heat. When the left nostril (ida) is flowing, mental energy is dominant, the mind is introverted, any kind of mental work; thinking concentration, etc., may be undertaken. Ida nadi also flows mainly during sleep. If pingala flows at night, the person is very restless and finds it difficult to sleep. Likewise, if ida flows at the time of taking food, the digestive process may be inefficient, causing indigestion. All our activities are influenced by the flow of these nadis which alternate approximately every hour. However, it is possible to alter the flow voluntarily by using willpower and certain yogic techniques, such as padadirasana and pranayama. For example, if there is work to be done but one feels sleepy, it is possible to direct the flow of prana to pingala nadi thereby gaining the necessary energy.

There is a science known as *swara yoga* which deals in great detail with the changing flows of the nadis. Also the prime aim of hatha yoga is to bring about a balance of flow between the prana in ida and pingala, (*ha*- sun, *tha*- moon). To do this the body is purified by the six techniques known as the shatkarmas. We should have an even balance between these flows, so that we are neither too mentally, nor too physically orientated. In a day the flow of air through the left nostril should predominate for about twelve hours and through the right

nostril for the other twelve hours.

When these two nadis are purified and balanced, and the mind controlled, the most important nadi, sushumna, begins to flow. Sushumna must be flowing if there is to be success in meditation. If pingala flows, the body will be restless; if ida flows, the mind will tend to think too much. When sushumna flows, kundalini rises through the chakras.

In human physiology, the two nadis correspond roughly to the two halves of the autonomic nervous system— the sympathetic and parasympathetic. Pingala coincides with the sympathetic nerves, responsible for the stimulation and acceleration of activities concerned with the external environment and the deceleration of the organs which tend to utilize a lot of energy internally. The sympathetic nerves speed up the heart, dilate the blood vessels, increase the respiration rate, and intensify the efficiency of the eyes, ears, etc.

The parasympathetic nerves directly oppose the sympathetic nerves, for they reduce the heartbeat, constrict the blood vessels, and slow the respiration so that the individual becomes introverted. The flow of prana in ida and pingala is completely involuntary and unconscious until yogic practices control it.

Conclusion

The descriptions given in the previous text are according to the traditions of yoga and the experience of present day yogis. It is hoped that the spiritual aspirant may find the information useful on his own path. The primary necessity in this science of kundalini yoga is sensitivity in order to locate these chakras and visualize their symbols on the psychic plane. Concentration is

necessary and once the practitioner is able to concentrate on the psychic centres, he will find himself well on the way to spiritual discovery.

MAN'S INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

It is a sad thing, but nevertheless true, that very few of us know how our bodies work. We have extensive knowledge about the external world, and even the outer parts of our own bodies, but it is few people who are aware of what happens inside their own body, although what happens within determines every action and perception of the external world.

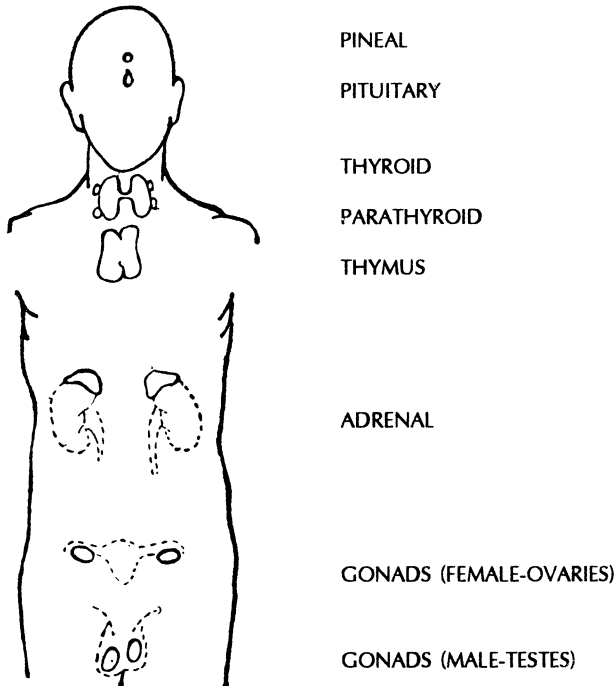
Everyone should have a basic knowledge of the functioning of the body. Many physical and mental problems are caused by ill treatment of our bodies. If we had some rudimentary knowledge and respect for our bodies, we would be less inclined to mistreat them the way we do.

So while this book is not a physiology textbook, we have included the following rudimentary details of certain parts of the body to help the reader understand more about the body, to gain more respect for it, and to enable us to follow the many references to the body given in the description of yogic techniques.

THE ENDOCRINAL GLAND SYSTEM

Most glands within the body have ducts or tubes through which their particular secretions or fluids are passed to other parts of the body, where they carry out some function. For example, the digestive glands pour their secretions, the digestive juices, into the stomach and intestines and the sweat glands pour out their secretions on to the surface of the skin in the form of perspiration.

But there are other types of glands which are entirely different and which have far-reaching influences on the operation of the whole body and mind.



These glands are known collectively as the endocrinal or ductless glands. They have no special ducts of their own, but secrete the chemicals that they produce, known as hormones, directly into the bloodstream. By this process the hormones are distributed to all parts of the body and in particular to organs that respond to the hormones by inducing changes in the activity of the human organism.

These ductless glands include the pituitary, pineal, thyroid, pancreas, adrenals, parathyroids, ovaries and testes. Nearly all them are found in pairs, so that if one is damaged or diseased, the other can carry on and still adequately meet the needs of the body.

These different glands do not work independently; each has a marked influence on the others. Thus any disorder in one of the endocrines will have repercussions on the activity of the other glands.

The *pituitary* is a small pea-sized gland located in the base of the brain. Although it weighs only half a gram, it is the master gland of the whole body. The endocrine system produces very powerful hormones, and it is essential that their rate of production is carefully regulated at all times. This is the duty of the pituitary. It produces a large number of different hormones; some of which act directly on the body, but mostly it controls the activities of the other endocrinal glands.

The pituitary secretes adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), which directs the activities of the adrenal glands. A hormone that stimulates the thyroid gland (read the later description), thyrotrophin (TSH), is also secreted by the pituitary gland. If TSH is not secreted, the thyroid will not work and the entire body and mind will suffer catastrophically.

The pituitary secretes pituitrin hormone which

increases the blood pressure, follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) which causes the female egg to grow and prompts the ovaries to produce estrogen in women, and luteinizing hormone (LH) which causes women to ovulate regularly in their monthly cycle. There are many other hormones secreted by the pituitary gland, too many to be discussed in this brief resume of the endocrinal system.

The *pineal gland* has yet to be understood by medical scientists, for they cannot assign any definite physiological purpose to it. Yoga, on the other hand, says that this gland is the link between the gross physical body and the more subtle psychic body.

The *thyroid gland* is a small butterfly-shaped gland located in the front part of the neck on each side of the windpipe. It produces thyroxin, a powerful hormone that has an influence on practically every cell in the body. Its chief function is to regulate the rate at which oxygen and food are consumed in the different types of cells in the body metabolism. Among other things it has a great controlling influence on the metabolism, stimulates bone growth, increases the sensitivity of the nervous system, regulates the composition of the blood, helps to protect the body from infection and has an activating or deactivating effect on the other organs of the body.

A normally active person produces just the correct amount of thyroxin to meet his particular needs. He is full of energy and able to do his work without undue fatigue, but a sluggish, sleepy person who appears only half alive is likely to be suffering from a lack of thyroxin. This condition is known as hypothyroidism. The rate and process of metabolism is decreased as is the conversion of proteins, fats and carbohydrates. Thus the body temperature is low, the functions of the brain are slow

and the person is usually suffering from anemia. The production of thyroxin requires the presence of the element iodine. This disease is therefore most prevalent in areas of the world where there is little or no iodine in the soil. Lack in production of thyroxin can also be caused by malfunctioning of the thyroid gland itself. It is in this sphere that yoga can help to rectify the operation of the thyroid and encourage it to produce the correct amount of this vital hormone.

On the other hand, a person who is overactive, driving himself too hard, may be suffering from excess thyroxin secretion in the body (a condition known as hyperthyroidism), the result of an overactive thyroid. The process of metabolism becomes over-stimulated and the person becomes thin. The nervous system is rendered more sensitive, resulting in trembling hands, palpitation of the heart and general nervousness. Again yoga can help by making the thyroid gland secrete the correct amount of thyroxin.

The *parathyroids* are four very small glands, two situated on each side of the windpipe. They are completely encased in the thyroid gland but act independently to produce a hormone called parathormone. This hormone activates bone growth and regulates the distribution and amount of calcium and phosphorus in the body.

The *adrenal glands* are two in number and are attached to the top of each kidney. Each gland looks as though it is one organ, but in fact each consists of two distinct sections. There is the central part called the medulla and its outer covering of tissue known as the cortex.

The central part, or medulla, is mainly composed of nervous tissue similar to that of the spinal nerves. Here

two very powerful hormones are produced, adrenalin and noradrenalin. Both tend to raise the blood pressure. The most important, without a doubt is adrenalin, which speeds up the heartbeat, increases the blood pressure by constricting the blood vessels, increases the rate at which oxygen is consumed in the body and speeds up the respiration rate, directs the blood to the body extremities and away from internal organs, reduces the digestive functions, make the sense organs such as the eyes and ears more sensitive, and many other things. It prepares the body for fight or flight, whichever may be the wisest course of action, by making the body more externally aware and motivated. In times of stress or fear, the action of this gland starts from the frontal lobes of the brain. From the brain a signal is first transmitted to the hypothalamus in the midbrain. From there a nerve impulse or signal is sent to the adrenal medulla and the hormone adrenalin is rapidly secreted into the blood. The body is prepared almost instantaneously for the extra boost of energy.

The adrenal cortex, the outer part of each of the two glands, produces several powerful hormones. These are in no way related to the medulla. These hormones, known as steroids, have many functions to perform in the body. Over thirty different types of steroids have now been isolated from the adrenal cortex, all derived from cholesterol. It produces hormones which act on the liver, kidneys, sexual organs etc. The kidneys are acted on by hormone cortisone, which increases the reabsorption of sodium and the excretion of potassium. If the adrenal gland is underactive, there is increased potassium in the cells and less sodium in the blood. This results in a lower blood volume and a low blood pressure. This hormone cortisone is probably the most important hormone

produced by the adrenal cortex, for it also controls the rate at which the proteins of the body are changed. It further governs the speed at which the cells of the body utilize glucose (blood sugar) and fats.

The *pancreas* as such is not really an endocrinal gland. However, collections of cells in the pancreas, known as the islets of langerhans, show endocrinal characteristics. They secrete a hormone called insulin. It is a vital hormone that lowers the blood sugar level. Deficiency in the production of insulin causes the wellknown and widespread disease, diabetes. This lack of insulin results in a very high level of blood sugar that spills over in the urine. Actually the pancreas is not the only part of the body concerned with this disease. The adrenals, pituitary and thyroid all have some part to play, as well as the kidneys and nervous system. Keeping the blood-sugar level more or less constant is a complex process that requires normal functioning of the entire endocrinal system. The main function of the pancreas is to produce digestive juices.

The *gonads (or sexual glands)* consist of the testes in men and the ovaries in women. In both men and women, the endocrinal system is essentially the same – what is different are the sex hormones that are produced.

In children, it is the ovaries which transform a growing girl into a woman, while the testes transform a boy into a man. Any interference with this process may result in abnormal growth patterns and lack of sexual maturity.

The male testes secretes a powerful hormone called testosterone. It is this hormone that changes a boy into a man. It gives rise to male hair growth, powerful muscles, deep voice etc., all the distinctive male characteristics.

In the female, the sex glands are the ovaries. They

have two very important functions : to produce the egg (ova) and to produce and secrete two essential female sex hormones. Both of these hormones, estrogen and progesterone, prepare the uterus (or womb) for development of the embryo (baby before birth). They also encourage the development of the placenta, a tube-like structure which provides the blood supply to the egg if it is fertilized. These two hormones have an extensive influence on the life of a woman.

The *thymus* is located in the chest and it is a moot point as to whether it should be included here as an endocrinal gland. It is very large in children and helps to regulate the growth pattern. In adults it becomes progressively smaller. It is important for the body's fight against infection.

A healthy endocrinal system through yoga

The various yoga techniques given in this book stretch and massage certain areas of the body. This restores and ensures sound nerve connections to the organs, including the endocrinal glands.

Also certain pranayama practices, such as nadi shodhana, alternately stimulate and inhibit the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. The endocrinal glands connected with these nerves are therefore voluntarily relaxed and activated; since these glands are constantly in a state of operation, these practices give them a needed rest which allows them to work more efficiently.

The hatha yoga practice of shankhprakhshalana relaxes the endocrinal system. When the entire alimentary canal has been completely washed, many of the endocrinal glands, especially those concerned with digestion and metabolism, are able to rest for 45

minutes until food is again taken. This short rest is beneficial to the whole body and can work wonders in cases of diabetes. The offending glands can start to work again, even though they might have ceased to do so many years before. Inverted asanas also improve the endocrinal function by bringing a fresh flow of blood to the pituitary gland.

THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

The food we eat cannot be assimilated directly into the body. Therefore it must undergo a process of conversion into substances which can be directly absorbed into the bloodstream. This process is called digestion. When food enters the mouth, digestion begins. By chewing, food is broken down into smaller fragments to allow the digestive juices to carry out their work more completely.

Salivary glands in the mouth secrete a digestive juice known as ptyalin which is mixed with the food. Ptyalin starts to break down the starches into more simple forms of carbohydrates known as sugars.

The stomach is a large, hollow, muscular organ which is capable of holding a considerable quantity of food. Its walls are much thicker than any other part of the digestive tract. It is designed for the purpose of kneading and churning food with gastric and digestive juices. The glands in the wall of the stomach pour out large amounts of these digestive juices – several litres every day on an average. The amount of gastric juices which are secreted depends on the person's appetite. Tasteless, monotonous food produces less gastric juices than pleasant, tasteful food which encourages copious outpourings of these juices. One's mental attitude also influences the secretion of these digestive juices – calmness being conducive to good digestion, and tension and anger conducive to indigestion.

The gastric juices contain pepsin, hydrochloric acid and rennin. Pepsin and hydrochloric acid are responsible for the breakdown of protein, while rennin coagulates certain types of food so that they can be exposed for a longer period of time to the action of the digestive juices. Another enzyme which is present in the

gastric juices is pepsinogen which terminates the action of the saliva and destroys any germs.

Water and some other liquids do not remain in the stomach for more than a few minutes. They pass almost immediately into the duodenum (first part of the small intestine) and are quickly absorbed. Solids need to be mixed with the digestive juices for a longer period of time.

The stomach mixes food by vigorously contracting and frequently changing shape. The most vigorous activity takes place near the pylorus, which is the opening from the stomach leading to the small intestines (duodenum). Peristaltic waves are continually passing over this area, hastening the process of digestion. From time to time the pyloric valve opens and allows small amounts of the now liquefied material to pass into the duodenum. Within the duodenum, further digestive juices are added to the food from various glands within the gastro-intestinal system.

The pancreas is one of the most important glands which supply digestive juices to the intestines. It is located behind the stomach and is almost encircled by the duodenum. Its secretions are poured into the duodenum through a small duct or tube. The pancreatic juices contain very powerful enzymes which are capable of digesting all types of foodstuff – proteins, fats and carbohydrates.

The pancreatic enzyme that breaks down carbohydrates such as sugar and starches is known as amylase or diastase. The fat-splitting enzyme is lipase, which works in conjunction with bile. Trypsin breaks down proteins. The pancreatic juices do not work well unless the food has already been thoroughly mixed with hydrochloric acid in the stomach.

Another important digestive gland is the liver. It is the biggest single gland in the body and it has a considerable number of functions to perform. The liver is concerned with food materials before and after their absorption into the blood. In the liver most of the food is changed and stored as glycogen. When it is required in any part of the body, it is converted into glucose (blood sugar) and discharged into the bloodstream. The liver produces a clear, golden coloured liquid called bile. This is stored in the gall bladder where it becomes more concentrated. The concentration turns it into a dark green colour. It has the important role of assisting the pancreatic juice, lipase, to break down fats. It also stimulates peristalsis in the intestines and thereby keeps the food moving along the intestines.

The walls of the small intestines contain large numbers of tiny glands, which all produce enzymes that further aid digestion. These enzymes include maltase, sucrase, lactase, nuclease, phosphatase and enterokinase.

The inner lining of the small intestines looks and feels like velvet. Under the microscope, large numbers of tiny villi can be seen in the walls. These are small branching protrusions in which there are many blood vessels. In this way the small intestines increase their surface area so that food materials can be easily absorbed and transported to the liver by means of the bloodstream.

In the intestinal walls are various muscles which can relax and contract under the influence of special nerves in what is called intestinal peristalsis. During the digestion process, the small intestines are in constant motion under this peristalsis, which progressively moves the food along the intestinal tract and into contact with other enzymes.

The term `small intestines´ is actually confusing, for the total length is over twenty feet. (The word `small´ refers to the smaller diameter compared to the large diameter of the colon or large intestines). Food must gradually travel along the whole length of the small intestines while undergoing great changes. Eventually the small intestines pour their contents into the large intestines through the ileocacal valve, which prevents the small intestines from emptying too quickly and stops back-flow.

The large intestine, or colon, is about five feet in length. One of its main functions is to reabsorb water into the body for further use.

The undigested, unabsorbed waste matter which remains, slowly proceeds to the rectum. From there it eventually leaves the body in the form of fecal matter or stool.

There are many yogic practices which are particularly useful for digestive ailments as well as for keeping the internal organs in good condition.

THE RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

The first need of all living creatures on the earth is oxygen. Nothing can live without it. Without respiration, the cells of the body would die. Their oxygen is brought to them by the blood, and carbon dioxide is carried away from them and expelled from the body. This transportation of oxygen from the outside air to the cells and the carrying away of carbon dioxide is known as respiration. It is in the tissues and cells of the body that the oxygen is actually being used, not in the lungs. The oxygen is continually being consumed or burnt within the living cells of the body. This process is known as oxidation and has been aptly called the flame of life, for materials are truly burnt as in an open fire.

To assure a constant supply of oxygen, we must have an adequate pipeline in the body. This is the windpipe or the trachea. We must also have a mechanism for keeping the air moving in and out of the body. This smooth flow is due to expansion and contraction of the chest, diaphragm and abdomen.

The trachea begins just below the voice box and extends to the top of the chest where it divides, one branch going to the left lung and the other to the right lung. These are called the bronchi. Each bronchus then splits up into smaller branches and these again split up into smaller branches, called bronchioles. These bronchioles carry the air to myriads of even smaller sacs called alveoli. These are microscopically sized air sacs that look like the cells of a honeycomb. The alveoli or air cells provide an enormous inner surface over which air can pass. If they were spread flat, they would cover an area of one thousand square feet, more than twenty times the surface of the external skin of the body.

Each of these tiny air cells is profusely covered with capillaries, the smallest of the blood vessels. The walls of these capillaries are so thin that oxygen in the air can easily pass through them and enter the blood cells in the blood system. As the oxygen combines with the red blood cells, the blood changes from bluish purple to bright red. The oxygen is then distributed to all parts of the body via the heart. Carbon dioxide is simultaneously expelled from the blood and the body during exhalation.

Normally we breathe about fifteen times every minute, inhaling about half a litre of air each time. The lungs normally hold about three litres of air, so that one-sixth of the air is exchanged each time we breathe. During strenuous exercise a great deal more is exchanged.

Inhalation is performed in two ways: (1) by expanding the ribs outward and upward (2) by expanding the front wall of the abdomen outward; this pulls the diaphragm downward.

The overall result of these two movements is the expansion of the chest cavity. The lungs follow the movement of the chest cavity very closely. In deep breathing the above movements are accentuated. This increases the volume of the lungs which draws in as much as two litres air.

The exhalation can also be accentuated by contracting the ribcage or chest cavity, and the abdomen as much as possible. This expels an extra quantity of air which may be up to one and a half litres. In deep breathing, therefore instead of breathing in and out about half a litre of air, the total volume may be four litres or more. Even after the deepest exhalation, however, there is always some air left in the lungs; this residual air is generally about one and a half litres.

The central nervous system is responsible for the action of respiration; it is normally an automatic process, though it can become voluntary and conscious if the individual breathes deeply or holds the breath.

The lungs have the same shapes as the thorax, in which they are contained. The thorax is conical in shape, narrow above and broad below. The floor of the thorax is formed by the diaphragm, the dome-shaped muscle that is so important in respiration.

The lungs are separated from each other by the heart. Except for its attachment to the heart and the root of the trachea, each lung is free to move without restriction. The lungs are divided into lobes or chambers, the right lung into three lobes and the left into two lobes. The outer surface of each lung is covered with a smooth, moist membrane called the pleura. The same pleura also covers the inside surface of the thorax (on the outside of the lungs), together with the diaphragm. The pleura is kept wet by a special lubricating fluid which helps the lungs to expand and contract inside the chest.

The air that we breathe must be changed before it enters the lungs, for it is generally too dry and often too cold. Such air would quickly dry out the lung tissue. Further, in the surrounding air there are large quantities of smoke and dust, as well as millions of germs. Many of these impurities must be removed before the air enters the lungs, otherwise we would be easily susceptible to lung infection, or the lungs would become hopelessly blocked with dust and dirt. To guard against such dangers, the body is provided with an air purifying and conditioning system which begins in the nose. Hair at the entrance of the nose face forward and screen out

large particles of dust. Deeper passages of the nose moisten and warm the air. Special bone structures are covered with a thick, spongy mucus membrane through which circulates a large rich supply of blood. As air passes over these nose tissues, it is warmed and moistened to the exact degree if temperature and humidity required.

In spite of the large number of hair in the front of the nose, the incoming air still contains a considerable amount of dust. To remove this potential cause of trouble, the whole respiratory tract is lined with mucus membrane and tiny hair-like projections called cilia, as well as vast numbers of mucus glands. These produce a thin film of sticky mucus on which dust particles are trapped. The microscopic cilia vibrate back and forward about twelve times every second. This action pushes the mucus upward to the throat from where it is swallowed. Any germs are then quickly destroyed by the hydrochloric acid and digestive juices in the stomach and are eventually eliminated from the body.

Coughing is an important protective mechanism of the respiratory system. A cough is merely a blast of air which clears obstructions from the air passages.

It is essential that we breathe through the nose and also from the abdomen and chest. Too many of us breathe in short, quick pants. Correct breathing allows the respiratory system to work with full efficiency, and to provide sufficient oxygen for the life of the body.

THE HEART AND CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

The great throbbing center of all human activity is the heart. Every other part of the body, without exception, is dependent on the heart. If it stops working, the whole body ceases to function. Continually, day and night, your untiring heart beats. When you rest, it beats quietly and slowly, conserving its reserve powers for a time or situation when it is badly needed. If an emergency arises, your heart will immediately quicken its pace to increase the rate of the blood flow to any part of the body where it may be required.

The heart is an efficient muscular pump. Its power depends on the fibers in its muscular walls. Anything that damages these fibers will produce striking changes in the blood circulation. Many factors are responsible for maintaining the volume and pressure of the blood. These include the condition of the heart valves, the influence of the nervous system in controlling the internal diameter or bore of the blood vessels, and the amount of fluid in the bloodstream. All these are important but the condition of the heart muscles itself is of primary concern.

The most common cause of heart problems arises from degenerative conditions. Many people eat far too much and then do not take enough exercise. Some people live under constant emotional stress and do not get enough rest. Both these situations tend to weaken the body and hamper the normal blood circulation. The arteries are the largest type of blood vessel. They distribute the blood from the heart to the smaller blood vessels called the capillaries. The arteries may become hardened so that the elastic tissue in their walls loses its flexibility. This can constrict the arteries, increase the blood pressure and the work of the heart.

Luckily, the heart is built of tough materials that can bear a lot of extra strain. The heart muscles, are unique in their design and are far more durable than any other muscles in the body. This is absolutely necessary for no other organ works as long and as hard as the heart.

The inside of the heart is composed of four chambers. Blood arrives from the lungs, containing a rich supply of oxygen to be distributed to the whole body, and enters the left atrium, or upper chamber. From the left atrium the blood flows into the left ventricle. This is the chamber upon which most of the blood circulation depends. The instant the left ventricle begins to contract, the mitral valve snaps shut, closing the connecting door to the left atrium. Almost at the same instant, another door called the aortic valve opens. This allows the blood to rush into the aorta and from there to the main arteries of the body.

All main arteries of the body branch off from the aorta. The first major branches are known as the coronary arteries. There are two of them, one supplying the right side of the heart and the other the left side. These are most important arteries, for if one of them goes wrong the whole circulatory system may fail. These two arteries are not large in bore, about an eighth of an inch, and are only about five inches long, yet their responsibility is enormous, for they supply blood to smaller blood vessels in the heart itself, which in turn nourish the muscle fibers of the heart with the blood. In a normal, healthy person there is always sufficient blood circulation for these arteries to meet the needs of the heart but sometimes arteries become partially or totally blocked because of degeneration in the artery walls. It is in these cases that heart failure can occur. This

degeneration of the blood vessel walls is known as arteriosclerosis. Its cause is related to an animal fat diet, cigarette smoking and excessive stress. Regular practice of yoga can definitely relieve and prevent this disease by removing most of the unnecessary tension from our lives. Indirectly it also encourages us not to smoke and to improve our dietary habits.

The right atrium and the right ventricle operate in a similar manner to the left atrium and left ventricle, but they pump oxygen-depleted blood (rich in carbon dioxide), to the lungs. This blood that has deposited its oxygen in the cells of the body flows back to the right side of the heart, from where it is pumped to the lungs. In the lungs it expels the carbon dioxide, picks up a fresh supply of oxygen, and then flows back to the left side of the heart to be pumped out to the cells of the body again.

The amount of work done by the heart in one day is almost beyond belief. It beats on average seventy times every minute. A little mathematics will tell you that this amounts to one hundred thousand contractions in one day, or thirty seven million times in one year. In an average lifespan of seventy years, this adds up to two and a half billion beats. No man-made machine is as durable.

If it has been damaged by disease it will repair itself while it works. If its valves become thickened because of disease such as rheumatic fever, the heart will thicken its muscular walls to try to compensate for any lack of efficiency. Under stress of some acute disease it will keep on working, pumping at two or three its normal speed to help the body overcome the crisis.

The speed at which the heart beats is governed by

the pacemaker, a small fragment of special tissue fixed near to the right hand side of the heart. It is a miniature radio transmitter that broadcasts signals over the upper chambers of the heart. From there they are sent to all the muscle fibers. The rhythm of the heart is therefore controlled by impulses from the pacemaker, which is in turn governed by the body's needs at any particular time.

Circulation

Circulation of the blood throughout the whole body is achieved by a vast network of tiny tubes, most of them too small to be seen by the unaided eye. If they were all placed end to end, they would stretch about two and a half times around the world.

There are a few large tubes in the body which are called arteries. They are not very long and branch into smaller and smaller vessels until they eventually become very small and are called capillaries. All these blood vessels, like the heart, are made of muscle cells and flexible elastic fibers.

The circulation begins with the heart from where blood is pumped to the arteries and then to the capillaries. In this way the life giving, oxygen enriched blood is distributed to each and every cell in the body. After each vigorous contraction, the heart relaxes and momentarily rests. At that very instant the aortic valve closes and the stream of blood gushes out through the aorta to the other arteries. The walls of the arteries are very elastic; they expand as the volume of the blood passes through them to the smaller blood vessels. You can feel this pulse wave by laying your fingers lightly over the inside of your wrist.

To keep the blood in circulation, it must be pumped

under a certain amount of pressure. If it were not pressurized, all the blood would collect in the feet and none would ever reach the brain.

The arteries are always stretched. At the instant when the heart contracts, the pressure in the arteries rises to an average of 120 millimeters of mercury. During the brief moment when the heart relaxes and rests, the pressure in the arteries drops to about 70 or 80. It remains at this pressure until the next heartbeat when it again rises. It is the lower or diastolic pressure that is most important. A tendency for this to remain at a high level may indicate the beginning of high blood pressure or hypertension. Many different conditions may change your blood pressure. Emotional reactions have a large influence; in moments of anger or fear the pressure may rise far above normal. Eating food will raise the blood pressure slightly. Vigorous exercise will raise the blood pressure. When a person rests, his blood pressure will fall to its basic lower level. These normal fluctuations in the blood pressure occur everyday.

Several mechanisms in the body control the blood pressure. The adrenal glands (see section on endocrine glands) produce a powerful hormone called adrenalin. This chemical constricts the smaller blood vessels which in turn causes a higher pressure. The carotid sinuses, two small organs located in the neck slightly below the level of the jaws, control the blood pressure and flow. If the blood pressure begins to fall, these carotid sinuses immediately send an alarm signal to the brain which instantly responds by ordering the capillaries to contract. This increases the blood pressure again. If the blood pressure is too high, the opposite occurs. The brain relaxes the capillaries; they expand and the pressure of the blood

drops. All these mechanisms are continually at work to keep the circulation correct for the needs of the body.

Many people suffer from high blood pressure. What causes high blood pressure? There can be many causes, though the most common is continual tension and stress. Certain people are abnormally affected by the ordinary ups and downs of life. Nervous stimulation causes the capillaries to contract too vigorously. If this nervousness is permanent, then the blood pressure will remain permanently too high. The problem is not actually the higher blood pressure, but the damage it causes to the brain, heart, kidneys, eyes and other organs. Being overweight does aggravate high blood pressure, though in fact this is really an extension of the nervous problem. If a person eats too much it is generally due to some form of nervousness.

Yoga practices definitely help high blood pressure sufferers, for they bring about calmness in the mind and help to reduce the tension and nervousness that is the root cause. Ofcourse, some yoga exercises should not be attempted by people with high blood pressure, but most can be safely performed. The asanas and pranayamas which do not noticeably increase the heartbeat can be safely practised, whereas usual forms of physical exercise can be dangerous.

THE BRAIN AND NERVOUS SYSTEM

The *brain* is made up of myriads (estimated at 15 billion) of nerve cells or neurons. Each has its own duty or function to perform, and yet each is related in some way to all the other cells. The brain is the great central intelligence agency working very much like a giant computer. It receives messages from the outside world via the eyes, ears etc., as well as from the body itself – the internal organs, muscles etc. The brain decides how we must act according to previous experiences and memory.

Although the brain is a delicate organ, it is very durable in other respects. The brain never rests. Like the heart and lungs it is continually on the job, night and day. Without its constant vigil, the whole body might suffer irreparable damage. The brain governs all automatic responses. Hidden mechanisms decide how fast our hearts will beat and how often we will breathe. Others govern the functions of the digestive organs, kidneys, endocrine glands and every other part of the body.

The size of a person's head is no indication of his ability to think, nor is it a reliable guide for judging intelligence. Circulation of blood is far more important. Any interference with the blood supply to the brain brings about tragic changes in the ability to think and to reason. Age has little influence on the thinking power, providing there is good circulation of blood to all parts of the brain. Remember, the human brain is only about one-fifteenth of the size of the whole body. It needs more than one – fifth of the total blood supply from the heart to keep it in good condition. Each nerve or brain cell requires an abundant supply of blood. If a nerve cell is

deprived of blood for more than two seconds it will stop working; if it is without blood for over five minutes it will surely die.

The three main divisions of the human brain are: the upper, middle and lower. At the lowest level, the automatic functions are carried out. These are the forces that govern the speed of the heart, the depth and rate of breathing, the temperature of the body and so on. The midbrain acts like an intricate switchboard. It receives messages from all over the body, sorts them out and passes them on to the higher levels. The upper brain or cerebral cortex receives these impressions and acts upon the information that enables us to think, to reason and to draw sensible conclusions.

The brain itself is composed of nerve tissue, one type called grey matter and the other known as white matter. The grey matter consists of the nerve cells and the white matter of nerve fibers. The combination of nerve cells and nerve fibers form the so-called neurons. If the cells die, then fibers also die, and vice versa. The nerve fibers connect different cells to each other and may consist of many branches which can be more than twenty inches in length in certain cases. The total number of incoming and outgoing fibers in the brain has been estimated at two hundred million. Internal connections between the cells have been estimated to be 500,000.

The following is a brief description of the major areas of the brain:

The *frontal lobes* lie in the front portion of the brain, behind the forehead. This is the so-called 'silent area' where our senses of justice, morality, truth, honesty, good judgement etc., are located. Any disease or injury of this region may cause the individual to become careless or

lose all sense of values, or become mentally depressed, anxious, apprehensive etc. It is the center of our personality. Certain types of insanity are believed to be due to the backfiring of nerve impulses from the frontal portion of the brain to the thalamus and hypothalamus where decisions are translated into actions.

The *cerebellum* is situated in the back and lower part of the brain. It maintains the correct muscle tone conditions by supplying the motor nerves of the muscles throughout the whole body with a continuous stream of nerve impulses. These impulses maintain muscles in their proper state of partial contraction. It also co-ordinates fine movements harmonizing all the different muscles. The process is automatic although it can be consciously influenced.

The *thalamus* is at the top of the spinal cord in the middle portion of the brain. It is a relay station which transmits information to the higher centers of the brain. It is also a region where the so-called protopathic senses reach consciousness. These protopathic senses are the cruder, more primitive type of instinctive signals which indicate pain, pleasure etc., in different parts of body, without any form of discrimination regarding their importance, meaning etc. The other type of more sensitive sensory signals are known as the epicritic; these are more discriminative and become conscious in the cerebral cortex.

The *hypothalamus* is connected to the thalamus, from which it receives nerve impulses responsible for emotional states. When the functions of the hypothalamus are free of the inhibitory effect of the higher brain centers, one can become very angry, happy, sad etc., without any conscious reason. The hypothalamus contains a reward (pleasure) area and a punishment (pain)

area, the former being larger than the latter. It is also the primary center of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

The center of wakefulness lies in the posterior lobes of the hypothalamus and consists of sympathetic nerves. The center of sleep lies in the anterior lobe of the hypothalamus and consists of parasympathetic nerves.

The *memory* is situated, it is believed, in the lower part of the brain to the rear of the frontal region. Electrical or nervous stimulation of a given point can call past experiences to consciousness.

The nerve channels

The nervous system does not only consist of the brain, but includes the spinal cord with its many branches leading out to all parts of the body. Messages pass to and from the brain, bringing all the organs and muscles of the body into communication with the brain. Some of the messages are carried on a conscious level, though most of them are not.

Different types of nerves are needed in order to carry on the communication system of the body. One group, the sensory nerves, tell us about our physical conditions, pain, the state of the world around us and so on. Each type of sensory perception requires a special type of receptor. The feel of objects, pain and pleasure, depend on the nerve sensors, which cannot detect other types of sensation. All these different sensory nerves lie extremely close to each other in the skin. The nerve impulses that travel from these sense detectors all go to the brain, where they are redirected to the particular center that controls that one type of sense. They are interpreted according to the previous memories. When

a decision is reached, the other group of nerves, called motor nerves, come into play. These carry explicit directions from the brain to the muscles, telling them to move, where to move etc. For example, our eyes are attracted to something interesting (perhaps this book) and we want to know more. A series of messages is sent to the muscles of our fingers, hands and arms, directing them to turn the pages of the book for more information.

The *spinal cord* is an extension of the central nervous system which lies inside the vertebral column. Its average length is seventeen inches and it extends from the first or atlas vertebra at the top of the spinal column to the second lumbar vertebra at the level of the loins. The nerves inside the vertebral column divide into two columns; the dorsal roots, which are the sensory nerves, and the ventral roots, which are the motor nerves.

The *autonomic nervous system* is constantly on guard, whether we are awake or asleep, keeping watch over our vital functions and protecting us from danger. Most of these functions are completely autonomic. We never give them a moment's thought. The autonomic nervous system does it for us. This system consists of two opposite forces, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

The sympathetic nerves prepare the body for external action. They increase the functional rate of those organs, muscles etc., which allow the individual to relate and react to the external environment. The parasympathetic nerves act in exactly the opposite way, conserving the body's reserve energy and allowing the internal organs to perform their tasks.

This autonomic nervous system acts like a parliamentary government, with one side opposing the

other. For smooth operation of the body, both parts of the autonomic nervous system must be well co-ordinated with each other as well as working efficiently itself.

The practices of yoga provide a huge variety of different types of nervous stimulation, many of which are never encountered in life. This stimulation opens unused nerve channels and increases the efficiency of the brain and nerves. In yoga, this process is known as 'nerve toning'.

RECOMMENDED YOGA PROGRAMS

The purpose of this section is to guide those people who wish to choose a yogic practice program. The choice should be made according to time availability, age, experience, condition etc. These are recommendations based on our experience with thousands of students. The reader should use them as a guideline and use commonsense to omit or add practices.

People who have specific ailments should refer to the section on yogic therapy and choose their yoga program accordingly. In all cases, however, we advise serious practitioners to seek individual guidance from a qualified teacher who has the experience that a book can never offer.

CONVALESCENTS, INVALIDS AND ELDERLY PEOPLE

Pawanmuktasana part I (avoid exercise 6 & 10) to be done slowly and with concentration.

Relaxation asanas (any).

Abdominal breathing in lying position.

Ujjayi pranayama in a comfortable position.

Sheetali and sheetkari pranayama sitting or lying.

Higher practices, especially those such as yoga nidra, ajapa japa and antar mouna should be practised daily.

BEGINNERS COURSES

A. Short course for beginners with stiff bodies

Pawanmuktasana part I.

Shakti bandha exercises.

Shavasana.

Practice of yogic breathing (see the introduction to pranayama).

B. More comprehensive course for beginners

Pawanmuktasana parts I & 2.

Shakti bandha exercises.

Vajrasana, marjariasana.

Shavasana.

Nadi shodhana pranayama stages I & 2.

Sheetali and sheetkari.

C. More advanced program for beginners

Surya namaskara.

Pawanmuktasana parts I & 2 (choose the exercises to suit the time available and the parts of the body that require loosening).

Vajrasana, shashankasana, shashank bhujangasana tadasana, trikonasana, bhujangasana, ardha shalabhasana, saral dhanurasana, pada hastasana, meru wakrasana, poorwa halasana, followed by shavasana.

Nadi shodhana pranayama stages I & 2.

Bhramari pranayama.

GENERAL INTERMEDIATE COURSES

A. Short daily program (variation 1)

Surya namaskara. Shashankasana, ushtrasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, dhanurasana, paschimottanasana, ardha matsyendrasana, eka pada pranamasana, bhumi pada mastakasana, followed by shavasana.

Nadi shodhana and mild bhastrika.

B. Short daily program (variation 2)

Surya namaskara. Shashank bhujangasana, trikonasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, janu sirshasana, parivritti janu sirshasana, garudasana, moordhasana, shavasana.

Nadi shodhana and mild bhastrika.

C. More comprehensive program (variation 1)

Surya namaskara. Shashankasana, supta vajrasana, tadasana, utthita lolasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, dhanurasana, paschimottanasana, kandharasana, ardha matsyendrasana, sarvangasana, halasana, ushtrasana. Shavasana. Nadi shodhana, bhastrika. Uddiyana bandha. Yoni mudra.

D. More comprehensive program (variation 2)

Surya namaskara. Shashank bhujangasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, grivasana, paschimottanasana, prishthasana, pada hastasana, dhanurasana, ardha matsyendrasana, baka dhyanasana, vashishthasana, hamsasana, sarvangasana, halasana, sirsha padasana. Shavasana. Pranayama, bandhas and mudras given in course C.

E. A short but all round course for busy people

Surya namaskara. Paschimottanasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, dhanurasana, ardha matsyendrasana, sarvangasana, halasana and matsyasana.

Shavasana with ujjayi pranayama. Uddiyana bandha.

F. Program for children between 5 and 13 years

Surya namaskara. Simhasana, tadasana, lolasana, parvatasana, chakrasana, pada hastasana, prishthasana, ardha matsyendrasana, dhanurasana, bhujangasana, baka dhyanasana, baddha padmasana, nataraja asana. Shavasana.

G. Program for people who want to develop concentration

Surya namaskara (done specifically with concentration on the breathing or chakras).

Padadirasana (with concentration on the breath), prishthasana, niralamba paschimottanasana, sarvangasana, halasana, grivasana, eka pada pranamasana, baka dhyanasana, ardha padma padmottanasana, sirshasana, (then if possible vrishchikasana).

Shavasana with concentration on the breath.

Nadi shodhana, bhastrika, moorcha pranayama.

Bhoochari, vipareeta karani and naumukhi mudras.

Trataka and higher meditational practices.

H. Course for busy housewives

Surya namaskara. Pawanmuktasana part 2, vajrasana, marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, vyaghrasana, trikonasana, bhujangasana, pada hastasana and kandharasana. Shavasana.

Nadi shodhana and bhramari pranayama.

I. Course to prepare for meditational practice

Pre-meditative asanas.

Ananda madirasana, development of any of the meditative asanas, yoga mudra asana, chakrasana, paschimottanasana, sarvangasana, sirshasana and tadasana. Nadi shodhana, bhastrika, bhramari and moorchha pranayama.

Yoga mudra, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, naumukhi and prana mudra. Meditational practices and trataka to suit available time.

ADVANCED YOGA COURSES

A. Short course for advanced practitioners (variation 1)
Surya namaskara. Parvatasana, chakrasana, paschimottanasana, ardha matsyendrasana, (poorna matsyendrasana if possible), vashishthasana, koormasana, sirshasana, tadasana. Shavasana.

Nadi shodhana and bhastrika. Maha bandha.

B. Short course of advanced practitioners (variation 2)
Surya namaskara. Yoga mudra asana, prishthasana, pada hastasana, pravritti janusirshasana, baka dhyanasana, dwi hasta bhujangasana, sirshasana (or similar asanas such as oordhwa padmasana, kapali asana etc.), tadasana. Shavasana.

Nadi shodhana and bhastrika.

Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra.

C. More comprehensive course for advanced practitioners

Surya namaskara. Baddha padmasana, matsyasana, janu sirshasana, pada prasar paschimottanasana, dhanurasana, ardha matsyendrasana, sarvangasana, halasana, chakrasana, vatayanasana, sirshasana, (or any variation), vrischikasana and tadasana. Shavasana.

Nadi shodhana, bhastrika and kapalbhati.

Maha bandha, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra and prana mudra.

D. Special course for adepts

Poorna bhujangasana, poorna shalabhasana, poorna dhanurasana, dwi pada sirshasana, vrischikasana, koormasana, poorna matsyendrasana, mayurasana, hanumanasana, brahmacharyasana, astavakrasana, sirshasana (or variations), tadasana. Shavasana.

Nauli and pashinee mudra.

ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF DISORDERS, REMEDIES AND PARTS OF THE BODY

Abdomen : (general toning and strengthening). For details of specific ailments look under relevant heading. Pawanmuktasana exercises 17-21, shakti bandha exercises, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, ushtrasana, trikonasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, tolangulasana, any backward or forward bending asanas, ardha matsyendrasana, halasana, druta halasana, merudandasana, niralamba paschimottanasana, hamsasana, mayurasana, brahmacharyasana.

Agnisar kriya, uddiyana bandha, nauli. Shankhaprakshalana and kunjla.

Abortion: See miscarriage.

Acidity: See abdomen. All those exercises are useful. Vajrasana for at least 10 minutes after every meal. Diet control is necessary together with relaxation and cultivation of mental tranquillity— refer to the section on anxiety.

Acne: Surya namaskara (as many rounds as possible). Sarvangasana, vipareeta karani mudra, halasana. Pranayama (all types) and shankhaprakshalana. Diet control. Avoid excessive coffee, tea, sweets, greasy food, etc.

Adenoids: (enlargement) Simhasana, ujjayi pranayama with khechari mudra. Neti.

Adrenal glands: (general toning) Surya namaskara, marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, ushtrasana, trikonasana. Backward bending asanas especially dhanurasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana and chakrasana. Forward bending asanas, especially paschimottanasana, pada hastasana, ardha matsyendrasana, poorna matsyendrasana, halasana, merudandasana, niralamba paschimottanasana, hamsasana, mayurasana, pashinee mudra, dwi pada sirshasana. Bhastrika, agnisar kriya, uddiyana bandha, nauli.

Anemia: Improved diet.

Surya namaskara, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, sarvangasana, halasana, matsyasana, paschimottanasana, sirshasana. Nadi shodhana, sheetali, sheetkari pranayama, ujjayi in shavasana (without khechari).

Anger: Shashankasana, yoga mudra, paschimottanasana, garbhasana, koormasana, pashinee mudra, moola and maha bandha. Nadi shodhana, bhramari, sheetali, sheekari, kalpalbhati, ujjayi pranayama.

Bhoochari mudra, akashi mudra, yoga mudra, prana mudra, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, yoni mudra, naumukhi mudra, pashinee mudra.

All meditation and relaxation practices.

Angina pectoris: (pains in the heart)

Shavasana, ujjayi pranayama, yoga mudra, ajapa japa, antar mouna and any other relaxation techniques.

Learn under the guidance of a yoga teacher.

Anxiety: (and nervous tension)

Surya namaskara, some of vipareeta karani mudra, sirshasana, sarvangasana, koormasana, shashankasana, yoga mudra, ananda madirasana, paschimottanasana, pashinee mudra, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, halasana, garbhasana and shavasana.

Nadi shodhana prayaoama, kapalbati, bhastrika, bhramari, moorchha, sheetali and sheetkari. Shambhavi, bhoochari, yoga, prana and yoni mudras, trataka.

Apoplexy: (stroke or brain hemorrhage)

Practise pawanmuktasana exercises I - 16.

Simple and gentle pranayama in a lying position.

This condition can be partly attributed to prolonged stress, anxiety and tension. As a preventative measure the patient should do meditation and relaxation techniques.

Appetite: All yoga practices promote a healthy appetite, especially forward and backward bending asanas, agnisar kriya, uddiyana bandha, nauli.

Arms: Pawanmuktasana exercises II - 15, shakti bandhas I - 6, akarna dhanurasana, lolasana, surya namaskara, baka dhyanasana, vashishthasana, dwi hasta bhujangasana, santolanasana, dhanur akarshanasana, gomukhasana, vrischikasana, mayurasana.

Arteriosclerosis: (hardening of the arteries) Diet control is essential. Especially avoid animal fat foods which are rich in cholesterol. The patient should stop smoking. All yoga practices can be beneficial particularly yoga nidra and breath awareness. The guidance of a yoga teacher is recommended.

Arthritis: The affected joints must be exercised, even if it is painful. Pawanmuktasana exercises I - 16 are especially useful. Before commencing these exercises the patient should soak his limbs in cold and/or warm salty water to encourage the circulation of blood.

People who are confined to bed should try deep abdominal breathing – at least ten deep respirations every hour. Pranayama (according to the patient's condition) especially nadi shodhana.

Massage therapy can be done.

A positive frame of mind should be cultivated through yoga relaxation and meditation.

Asthma: Slow performance of surya namaskara. All asanas that encourage deep and relaxed respiration from chest and abdomen.

Sarvangasana, supta vajrasana, marjariasana, ushtrasana, hasta uttanasana, utthita lolasana, dwi konasana, matsyasana, backward bending asanas, pada hastasana and baddha padmasana.

Shavasana with breath awareness. Deep abdominal breathing at all times. See the introduction to pranayama. Nadi shodhan, bhastrika, kapalbhati pranayama. Vastra dhauti, kunjai, shankhprakashana. Mild attacks of asthma can often be immediately relieved by kunjai.

Asthma is a psychosomatic disease; the patient should therefore do practices such as yoga nidra, ajapa japa, antar mouna etc., to remove the source of nervousness. Refer to our publication *Yogic Management of Asthma and Diabetes* for full details.

Backache: The following is a general remedy for causes that result from poor postural position, nervous tension and general stiffness (not, sciatica).

Surya and general pawanmuktasana exercises 6, 16, 20, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, vyaghrasana, kati chakrasana, tadasana, utthita lolasana, meru prishthasana, dwi konasana, trikonasana, dolasana, yoga mudra asana, all forward backward bending and spinal twist asanas.

Baldness: Inverted poses, especially sirshasana.

Blood pressure: Refer to our publication *The Effects of Yoga on Hypertension*.

High: Pawanmuktasana exercises 1 - 16, ananda madirasana and any relaxation poses.

Gentle and easy pranayama, especially nadi shodhana (stage 1 & 2), sheetali, sheetkari, ujjayi, bhramari.

Meditation and relaxation practices.

Vegetarian diet recommended. Avoid salt, heavy food.

Low: Surya namaskara and regular practice of asanas. All pranayama, especially bhastrika, kapalbhati and surya bheda.

All bandhas and vipareeta karani mudra.

Boils: These may result from impure blood. See acne.

Breasts: (development)

Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercise, 15, shakti bandha exercises 1 - 6, all standing and bending asanas, matsyasana, lolasana, all backward bending asanas, all inverted asanas and gomukhasana.

Bronchitis: Treatment is the same as for asthma.

Bursitis: Gentle movement of the offending limbs without force. Pawanmuktasana exercises 1 - 16.

Cancer: Seek expert guidance and combine medical and yogic treatment.

Pawanmuktasana I - 16. Nadi shodhana pranayama.

Meditation and relaxation techniques.

Chest: (general toning and strengthening)

Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercises I - 6, supta vajrasana, ushtrasana, standing and bending asanas, matsyasana, lolasana, kukkutasana, backward bending asanas (especially chakrasana and dhanurasana), baddha padmasana, baka dhyanasana, nataraja asana, vrischikasana and astavakrasana.

Cold or cough: (prevention) Surya namaskara and regular practice of asanas and pranayama. Simhasana is especially recommended, and also neti. During a cold the symptoms can be removed by doing kunjala and neti. Only simple asanas should be attempted.

Concentration: All yoga techniques done correctly, particularly inverted and balancing poses.

All pranayama, especially nadi shodhana, bhastrika and ujjayi.

All mudras are intended to be done with concentration. Trataka is exceptionally powerful.

Meditations etc. require and develop the powers of concentration.

Constipation: Even the most long standing cases can be relieved by a sensible diet consisting of fresh fruit, vegetables, plenty of water (at least 5 glasses every day) and daily practice of yoga techniques.

Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercises 17 - 21, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, ushtrasana, trikonasana, tadasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, all backward and forward bending asanas, all spinal twist asanas, halasana, druta halasana, mayurasana.

Sit in vajrasana for at least 10 minutes after every meal.

Uddiyana and maha bandha. Ashwini mudra. Agnisar kriya, nauli and basti.

Shankhaprakshalana under guidance. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana can be performed every morning. Other yogic practices which bring about mental tranquility, such as yoga nidra etc.

Contagious diseases: The body has great power to fight germs. Yoga helps the latent capacity of the body to fight infections and prevent disease.

Coronary thrombosis: see arteriosclerosis and blood pressure.

Cushings syndrome: see adrenal glands.

Deafness: Inverted asanas and neti can help in certain cases. Bhramari pranayama may also bring results.

Drpression: Yoga is a great help. See recommended program under anxiety.

Dermatitis: see eczema.

Diabetes: A full course of treatment can be given at ashrams of the International Yoga Fellowship Movement, or refer to our *Yogic Management of Asthma and Diabetes*. Practices include surya namaskara, tadasana, yoga mudra, shashankasana, supta varjrasana, paschimottanasana, bhujangasana, ardha matsyendrasana, halasana, sarvangasana, matsyasana, gomukhasana, dwi hasta bhujangasana, vatayanasana, shavasana. Nadi shodhana, bhramari, bhastrika, ujjayi pranayamas. Ajapa japa, yoga nidra and shankhaprakshalana.

Food restrictions should be followed.

Diarrhoea: also see dysentery.

Generally diarrhoea is the body's way of quickly removing impure or excess food which it is unable to absorb. In this case do not worry, though fasting for a day or two might be a good idea. Chronic diarrhoea may be caused by intestinal parasites, such as worms. Shankaparakshalana is highly recommended. This ailment could also be caused by chronic indigestion, intestinal weakness or excessive mental nervousness.

Disposition: Yoga promotes calm, optimistic and harmonious disposition throughout the diverse circumstances of life. See headings such as anger etc.

Dizziness: See vertigo.

Dropsy: See kidneys.

Duodenum: For toning, see abdomen; for duodenal ulcer, see ulcer.

Dysentery: Both varieties, amoebic and bacillary, can be greatly relieved by shankhaprakshalana.

A short fast is highly recommended.

Dyspepsia: (chronic indigestion) This is often caused by nervous stress and strain. See anxiety.

This condition can also result from a weak digestive system. This is generally caused by impure, heavy and badly cooked food, as well as overeating. The remedy lies in sensible eating habits. See the exercises listed under abdomen.

Fasting, daily kunjai and laghoo shankhaprakshalana before starting the yogic programme.

Dystrophy: See muscular dystrophy.

Dullness: See fatigue.

Eczema: This is a general term that describes itching rashes on the skin. The causes are various, the most common being nervous tension.

Elephantiasis: All yoga practices are useful as they make auto-therapeutic powers of the body more capable of fighting parasites.

Epilepsy: All practices of yoga which particularly reduce tension and worry. See anxiety. It is amenable to cure, as our success in treatment has shown us.

Eyes: See chapter entitled *Exercises for Eyes*.

Face: A clear complexion and a glowing youthful face can be achieved by doing surya namaskara, all inverted asanas, especially sarvangasana, vipareeta karani mudra asana and halasana, as well as simhasana. Fasting is highly recommended. Also see acne.

Fatigue: General lack of vitality, both mental and physical, providing it is not caused by heart disease, can be treated by yogic practices. Common causes

- a) depression, lack of sleep and nervous tension – see anxiety.
- b) anemia—see anemia.
- c) diabetes—see diabetes.
- d) lack of proper exercise and bad blood circulation. All yogic exercises, especially surya namaskara, bhujangasana, ushtrasana, chakrasana, dhanurasana and uddiyana bandha.

Fat deposits: For general removal of fat deposits all asanas are useful, especially surya namaskara, dynamic pada hastasana, druta halasana, inverted poses and vigorous pranayama.

For obesity due to gland problems, see thyroid gland. For fat deposits in particular parts of the body do the relevant pawanmuktasana exercises. Avoid heavy or starchy foods.

Feet: Pawanmuktasana exercises 1,2,3 & 4, tadasana, eka pada pranamasana, vatayanasana; pada angushthasana.

Female sex organs and glands: See reproductive organs.

Fingers: See hands.

Fits: See epilepsy.

Flatulence: See wind.

Genitals: See reproductive organs.

Goiter: See thyroid gland.

Gout: See exercises given under kidneys. Reduce consumption of meat. Drink plenty of water. Practice pawanmuktasana exercise 1 - 16.

Growth: To encourage normal growth in under - developed children:

Surya namaskara; hasta uttanasana, dhanurasana, trikonasana, chakrasana and paschimottanasana, tadasana, pada hastasana, ardha matsyendrasana, sirshasana, sarvangasana (particularly important), halasana

jalandhara bandha.

Gums: See pyorrhea.

Hair: See baldness.

Hands: Pawanmuktasana exercises II, 12 & 13. All exercises for the arms.

Hardening of the arteries: See arteriosclerosis.

Hay fever: The symptoms of this ailment may be alleviated by simhasana, pranayama (bhastrika, kapalbhati), kunjla and neti.

Headache: The primary cause is prolonged bad postural position, mental tension and worry, and general stiffness. These are closely related to backache. See exercises for backache.

Nadi shodhana pranayama, bhramari pranayama, neti and 5 or 10 minutes in any of the relaxation poses. Eyestrain should be avoided. Practise eye exercise I. Other causes of headache may be constipation, sinusitis, menstrual irregularity etc. See relevant headings.

Heart: See blood pressure and arteriosclerosis, All yoga practices help to keep the heart in good condition.

Hemorrhoids: See piles and varicose veins.

Hoarseness: See throat.

Hydrocele: Surya namaskara – slowly, according to the patient's capacity, vajrasana for as long as possible, all inverted poses, garudasana, vatayanasana and brahmacharyasana.

Moola bandha, ashwini mudra, vipareeta karani mudra, vajroli mudra.

Hypertension: See blood pressure.

Hypotension: See blood pressure.

Hysteria: See anxiety.

Impotence: Many cases of impotence are due to emotional factors, rather than to any lack of hormones or other organic disorders. The practices under anxiety will

be very useful. If the cause is due to childhood trauma, then the yogic practices of meditation etc. can remove the root problem. Also see reproductive organs.

Impure blood: See kidneys, the blood purifying organs, Surya namaskara until profuse sweating occurs.

A pure fruit and vegetable diet without salt.

Shankhprakashana before commencing the yogic programme.

Indigestion: See dyspepsia.

Insomnia: This is caused by an overactive mind and the inability to relax the mind and body. See exercises prescribed for anxiety, especially 15 minutes trataka and 15 minutes yoga nidra before sleep.

Intestines: See abdomen.

Itching: See eczema.

Joints: (stiffness) Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercises 1 - 16.

Kidneys : (toning and removal of ailments)

Surya namaskara, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, vyaghrasana, trikonasana, matsyasana, all backward bending asanas, paschimottanasana, ardha matsyendrasana, halasana, gomukhasana, ushtrasana, merudandasana, hamsasana, mayurasana, koormasana, dwi pada sirasana. Agnisar kriya, uddiyana bandha, nauli. Bhastrika pranayama.

Shankhprakashana is especially recommended. In case of urinary difficulties, reduce the intake of salt and drink more water.

Legs: (general toning and strengthening of the nerves and muscles) Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercises 1-10, 17 and 18, udarakarshan asana, utthanasana, shalabhasana, dhanurasana, setu asana, sirsha padasana, ardha chandrasana, all forward bending asanas, eka pada pranamasana, garudasana, vashishthasana, bakasana, vatayanasana, nataraja asana,

utthita hasta pada angushthasana, koormasana, mayurasana, eka pada sirasana, hanumanasana, dwi pada sirasana and dwi pada kandharasana.

Leucorrhoea: (vaginal discharge) See menstruation.

Liver : (general toning and removal of certain associated disorders e.g. sluggish liver etc.)

All exercises for the abdomen especially paschimottanasana, merudandasana, utthita merudandasana, ardha padma padottanasana, shankhaprakshalana.

Lumbago: See backache.

Lungs: (general improvement and the removal of associated disease) Surya namaskara, supta vajrasana, ushtrasana, hasta uttanasana, utthita lolasana, matsyasana, baddha padmasana, all backward bending asanas, sarvangasana. All pranayamas. Deep yogic breathing as much as possible. Also see asthma.

Male sex organs: See reproductive system.

Memory: (development)

Concentration will increase memory power.

Menopause: Often causes mental and physical distress. Yoga restores equanimity.

All inverted asanas, especially sirshasana, as well as surya namaskara, bhujangasana, dhanurasana, mastsyasana, paschimottanasana, uddiyana bandha, moola bandha, ashwini mudra, vajroli mudra, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra. All meditational practices, yoga nidra, ajapa japa etc.

Menstruation: Problems include abnormal pain, excess bleeding, insufficient bleeding. irregularity and white discharge.

The following relieve cramps: vajrasana, shashankasana, marjariasana and abdominal breathing in shavasana. The following practices help normalize the menstrual cycle: surya namaskara, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, dhanurasana, paschimottanasana, kandharasana,

chakrasana, ushtrasana, inverted asanas in general, especially sirshasana, sarvangasana and halasana, hanumanasana. All bandhas, especially moola bandha. Ashwini, vipareeta karani and vajroli mudras.

Mental disorders: See anxiety.

Migraine: See anxiety and headache.

Miscarriage: This is generally due to weak uterine muscles. See exercises for general toning of the reproductive organs as a preventative measure.

Muscles: Underdeveloped muscles can be strengthened by performing the pawanmuktasana exercises. Surya namaskara is particularly good for strengthening almost all the muscles in the body.

Internal muscles (heart, lungs etc.) can be developed and strengthened by doing asanas and bandhas for the relevant part.

Muscular dystrophy: Regular exercise is essential. Pawanmuktasana exercises I - 16.

Neck: (general toning, muscular weakness, aches, nerve stimulation) Pawanmuktasana exercise 16, supta vajrasana, matsyasana, grivasana, kandharasana, sirsha padasana, all spinal twist asanas. Inverted asanas can be done providing the neck is not too weak.

Nervousness: See anxiety.

Nerves: (general toning) All asanas and bandhas tone nerves. Nadi shodhana pranayama, bhastrika, kapalbhati. Yoga mudra, prana mudra, vipareeta karani mudra, maha bheda mudra, yoni mudra, naumukhi mudra.

Neural dermatitis: Relaxation exercises. See anxiety.

Nose: (ailments) Sinusitis, frequent colds, catarrh and general nose blockages can be prevented and removed by the following:

Pranayama, especially bhastrika and kapalbhati. Neti. Also see cold or cough (prevention).

Obesity: See fat deposits.

Pancreas glands: (general toning) See diabetes.

Paralysis: See polio, muscular dystrophy and also apoplexy.

Parathyroid: See thyroid.

Pelvis: (general toning) See exercises for reproductive organs.

Peptic ulcer: See ulcers.

Personality: See disposition.

Piles: If piles are associated with chronic constipation, the patient should first take steps to correct the constipated condition.

Inverted asanas release the pressure and drain the offending blood. Sarvangasana of vipareeta karani mudra should be done for extended periods. Ashwini mudra or moola bandha should be performed while in the inverted position.

Asanas which stimulate intestinal peristalsis are very important, such as pawanmuktasana exercises 17-21, supta vajrasana, shashankasana, shashank bhujangasana, ushtrasana, matsyasana, paschimottanasana, its variations and all practices for constipation.

Shankhaprakshalana, laghoo shankhaprakshalana and basti. Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra.

Pituitary and pineal glands: (general health) Surya namaskara, all inverted asanas, particularly sirshasana, yoga mudra, matsyasana, sumeru asana, pranamasana, pada hastasana. Pranayama, especially bhramari and kapabhati, shambhavi mudra, maha mudra, prana mudra, trataka and neti.

Pleurisy and pneumonia: See lungs.

Poliomyelitis: (treatment and remedy) A course of treatment for polio is taught at all ashrams and centres of Bihar School of Yoga. Practices include dhanurasana, bhujangasana, padmasana, shalabhasana, janu sirshasana, paschimottanasana, merudandasana, sarvangasana, halasana, koormasana, ardha matsyendrasana, vajrasana, padmasana and its variations, khandharasana, trikonasana,

sirshasana, ashwa sanchalan asana, hanumanasana, vatayanasana, yoga mudra. Nadi shodhana pranayama, nasikagara drishti, prana vidya.

Pregnancy: See reproductive organs.

Prostate gland: For general toning see reproductive organs. For enlargement see also reproductive system. Particularly practise moola bandha, maha bandha, maha mudra, bheda mudra and vajroli mudra. Sit in vajrasana whenever possible.

Pyorrhea: Inverted asanas, especially sarvangasana and vipareeta karani mudra direct a fresh blood supply to the region of the mouth.

Sheetali and sheetkari pranayama.

Regularly massage the gums with the fingers. Use a mouthwash every two or three hours (tincture of myrrh—add 10 drops to half a glass of water). Scrupulous cleaning of the teeth.

Reproductive organs: (general toning and removal of ailments)

Female: (also see menopause and menstruation troubles). Surya namasakara, pawanmuktasana exercises 7 - 10 & 17-21, shakti bandha, all the relaxation asanas, all asanas performed in or from vajrasana (especially shashankasana, marjariasana, shashnak bhujangasana, ushtrasana, vyaghrasana), kati chakrasana, tadasana, meru prishthasana, utthanasana, trikonasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, tolangulasana, all backward bending asanas, ardha matsyendrasana, inverted asanas, garudasana, vashishthasana, pada angushthasana, dhanurakarshan asana, hanumanasana.

These asanas are useful for preparing and strengthening the muscles and organs for childbrith and for reconditioning the uterus (womb) after delivery. Pregnant women can do these asanas for the first three months of pregnancy. During the later months of pregnancy very simple

pawanmuktasana exercises can be done, and practices such as yoga nidra, ajapa japa, meditation, will promote relaxation during and after pregnancy.

Male: (also see impotence). The same exercises as in the female section for sexual problems as well as general toning. Also mayurasana and brahmacharyasana. For prostate problems, see prostate.

General exercises for both male and female: All bandhas, agnisar kriya and nauli. Ashwini mudra, vajroli mudra, vipareeta karani mudra, maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, pashinee mudra.

Note : pregnant women should not do uddiyana bandha, agnisar kriya or nauli.

Many sexual problems arise because of tension, stress, worry or emotional disturbance. See anxiety.

Respiration: See lungs.

Rheumatism: See arthritis.

Sciatica: Pawanmuktasana exercises 1 - 5, all relaxation poses, especially matsya kridasana, makarasana, all backward bending asanas. No forward bending asanas.

Senility: This is a mental deterioration that can come with age. If this is the case it can be prevented. Practise meditation.

Sexual ailments: See reproductive organs.

Sexual glands (both male and female): Surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana exercises 7, 8, 9. All asanas in or from vajrasana, especially marjariasana, shashank bhujangasana, vyaghrasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, trikonasana, utthasana, backward bending asanas especially shalabhasana, kandharasana and chakrasana. All inverted asanas, especially sirshasana and sarvangasana, garudasana, vashishthasana, vattyanasana, pada angushthasana, vrischikasana, mayurasana, hanumanasana, brahmacharyasana, moola bandha asana. Mool and maha

bandhas. Ashwini, vipareeta karani, maha bheda, vajroli and maha mudras.

Shoulders: See chest and arms.

For general stiffness, pawanmuktasana exercise 15. For round shoulders, especially in children, makarasana for long periods, supta vajrasana, ushtrasana, dwi konasana, badha padmasana, surya namaskara and all backward bending asanas.

Sinusitis and sinustroubles: See nose.

Skin: See acne and eczema

Sleep: See insomnia.

Slipped disc: No forward bending asanas should be done. Relaxation or sleeping in advasana, jyestikasana or makarasana for long periods of time is highly recommended. If the condition is not too severe, the patient can slowly, carefully and gently try to do bhujangasana (especially the variation known as the sphinx), meru wakrasana, bhu namanasana.

Smoking: (stopping) People who do regular practice of yoga tend to stop smoking or have no desire to start. Yoga practices like yoga nidra can increase your will power to stop smoking by planting the idea in your subconscious mind.

Spine: (disorders and general toning)

Sufferers of slipped disc and sciatica, see relevant heading. For removal of backache and general toning of the back and spinal cord, see backache.

Spleen: See abdomen.

Stammering and stuttering: This condition usually results from tension and suppressed feelings from childhood. See exercises listed under anxiety, especially naukasana, all balancing asanas and mayrasana. Practise bhramari pranayama.

If the cause is due to an organic defect in the tongue,

jaws etc., practise simhasana, sheetali and sheetkari pranayama as often as possible.

Stress and strain: See anxiety.

Stroke: Refer to apoplexy.

Stomach: See abdomen.

Throat: (removal of ailments and irritations)

Pawanmuktasana exercise 16, simhasana, inverted poses. Supta vajrasana and matsyasana, (ujjayi, sheetali and sheetkari can be performed in these two asanas or by themselves.) Practise the above pranayamas as much as possible. Neti and kunjaj.

Thyroid (and parathyroid): (general toning) Surya namasakra, inverted asanas, especially halasana and sarvangasana, pawanmuktasana exercise 16, matsyasana, supta vajrasana, yoga mudra, padma sarvangasana, all backward bending asanas, especially sirshapadasana and grivasana.

All pranayamas, especially bhastrika with bandhas and moorchha pranayama. Jalandhara bandha, pashinee mudra.

Toes: See feet.

Tonsillitis: for prevention or remedy, see throat.

Tuberculosis: The exercises given under the heading 'Lungs' can help in certain cases; however we strongly suggest that the patient seeks expert guidance from a yoga teacher before undertaking them.

Ulcers: (peptic and duodenal)

Calm down. The reason for the occurrence of ulcers is the inability to relax or to stop worrying.

Regular practice of any relaxation pose at any time of the day is particularly useful. Shashankasana can be performed. Mild pranayama, such as nadi shodhana, sheetali, sheetkari and bhramari.

Bhoochari, akashi, maha, yoni and naumukhi mudras.

Trataka. Ajapa japa, yoga nidra, antar mouna and other relaxation techniques.

An easily digestible bland diet is recommended which includes milk food products, liquid or semi-liquid foods and soft fruits. Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol, raw vegetables, spices, fats and heavy foods in general.

Urinary system: (toning and removal of ailments)

See the exercises given under kidneys and the reproductive organs.

Varicose veins: All inverted asanas. These allow the stagnant blood in the legs to drain back into the heart and thereby allow the damaged veins to repair themselves. During pregnancy, lying on the side aids the drainage of blood, or one can lie flat on the back and raise the legs against a wall or some other support. Practise pawanmuktasana exercise 18.

Verigo: Any balancing asanas, shashankasana and its variations. Also practise trataka.

Vocal cords: To develop an harmonious and melodious voice, simhasana, bhramari, ujjayi, sheetali and sheetkari pranayama are recommended. Also see throat.

Wind: (intestinal-removal)

Pawanmuktasana exercises 17 - 21, shashankasana, supta vajrasana, shashank bhujangasana, kati chakrasana, yoga mudra asana, matsyasana, all forward bending asanas, halasana, druta halasana, hamsasana, mayurasana and uttha prishthasana.

Uddiyana bandha, agnisar kriya and nauli.

Bhastrika, and kapalbhati. Tadagi mudra.

Shankhaprakshalana, laghoo shankhaprakshalana, basti, kunj. Sit in vajrasana at least 10 minutes after meals.

Worms: Shankhaprakshalana is most useful for removing all types of intestinal worms. Naukasana is also helpful.

Wrinkles : See face

ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF PRACTICES

	Practice		Page No.
A	Abdominal breathing	... ..	302
	Advanced asanas	... ..	272
	Advasana	... ..	59
	Agnisar kriya	... ..	379
	Akarna dhanurasana	... ..	108
	Akashi mudra	... ..	346
	Ananda madirasana	... ..	85
	Animal relaxation pose	... ..	64
	Ankle bending	... ..	19
	Ankle crank	... ..	21
	Ankle rotation	... ..	20
	Ardha baddha padmottanasana	... ..	249
	Ardha chandrasana	... ..	182
	Ardha matsyendrasana	.. ..	208
	Ardha padma halasana	... ..	233
	Ardha padma padottanasana	... ..	248
	Ardha padma paschimottanasana	... ..	197
	Ardha padmasana	... ..	76
	Ardha shalabhasana	... ..	171
	Ashwa sanchalanasana	... ..	135,254
Ashwini mudra	... ..	350	
Astavakrasana	... ..	290	
3	Baddha padmasana	... ..	157
	Baddha yoni asana	... ..	77
	Baka dhyanasana	... ..	245
	Bakasana	... ..	242
	Balancing asana	... ..	237
	Bandhas	... ..	323
	Basti	... ..	386
	Bending asanas (backward)	... ..	162
	" " (forward)	... ..	189
	" " (standing & bending)	... ..	105
	Bhadrasana	... ..	87
	Bhastrika pranayama	... ..	316
	Bhoochari mudra	... ..	345
	Bhramari pranayama	... ..	314

	Bhujangasana	... ..	164
	Bhujangini mudra	... ..	348
	Bhumi pada mastakasana	... ..	216
	Bhunamanasana	... ..	212
	Brahmacharyasana	... ..	286
	Butterfly half	... ..	24
	" full	... ..	26,27
C	Chakki chalana	... ..	45
	Chakrasana	... ..	184
	Chest breathing	.. ...	303
	Chin mudra	... ..	341
	Chopping wood	... ..	47
	Crow walking	... ..	28
	Cycling	... ..	37
D	Danda dhauti	... ..	380
	Danta dhauti	... ..	374
	Dhanurakarshan asana	... ..	278
	Dhanurasana	... ..	173
	Dhauti	... ..	374
	Distant & near viewing	... ..	56
	Dolasana	... ..	129
	Druta halasana	... ..	232
	Dwi hasta bhujangasana	... ..	264
	Dwi konasana	... ..	122
	Dwi pada kandharasana	... ..	235
	Dwi pada sirasana	... ..	293
	Dynamic paschimottanasana	... ..	193
	Dynamic spinal twist	... ..	23
E	Eka hasta bhujangasana	... ..	265
	Eka pada baka dhyanasana	... ..	247
	Eka pada padmottanasana	... ..	206
	Eka pada pranamasana	... ..	239
	Eka padasana	... ..	243
	Eka pada sirasana	... ..	291
	Elbow bending	... ..	31
	Eye exercises	... ..	51
F	Forward bending asanas	... ..	189
	Front and sideways viewing	... ..	53

G	Garbhasana	...	...	160
	Garudasana	..	...	240
	Gomukhasana	...	...	187
	Gorakshasana	...	...	288
	Grivasana	...	...	177
	Gupta padmasana	...	...	156
	Gyana mudra	...	...	341
H	Halasana	...	...	230
	Hamsasana	...	...	269
	Hand clenching	...	...	29
	Hanumanasana	...	...	285
	Hasta pada angushthasana	...	...	201
	Hrida dhauti	...	...	380
I	Inverted asanas	...	...	213
J	Jalandhara bandha	...	...	326,328
	Jala basti	...	....	386
	Jala neti	...	...	370
	Janu sirshasana	...	...	196
	Jyestikasana	...	...	60
K	Kaki mudra	...	...	349
	Kandharasana	...	...	178
	Kapalbhati	...	...	387
	Kapalbhati pranayama	...	...	318
	Kapali asana	....	...	224
	Kati chakrasana	...	...	110
	Khechari mudra	...	...	351
	Knee bending	...	...	22
	Knee crank	...	...	22
	Knee rotation	...	...	25
	Koormasana	...	...	276
	Kukkutasana	...	...	159
	Kunjal kriya	...	...	382
L	Laghoo shankhprakhshalana	...	...	378
	Leg lock posture	...	...	38
	Leg rotation	...	...	36

	Lolasana	... ..	158
M	Madhyama nauli	... ..	384
	Maha bandha	... ..	334
	Maha bheda mudra	... ..	361
	Maha mudra	... ..	359
	Makarasana	... ..	61
	Manduki mudra	... ..	344
	Marjariasana	... ..	93
	Matsya kridasana	... ..	62
	Matsyasana	... ..	152
	Mayurasana	... ..	281
	Meditative poses	... ..	65
	Meru akrashanasana	... ..	202
	Merudandasana	... ..	252
	Meru prishthasana	... ..	118
	Meru wakrasana	... ..	211
	Moola bandha	... ..	329
	Moola bandhasana	... ..	287
	Moola shodhanam	.. ..	387
	Moorchha pranayama	... ..	321
	Moordhasana	... ..	217
	Mudras	... ..	337
N	Nadi shodhana pranayama	... ..	308
	Namaskara	... ..	48
	Nasikagra drishti	... ..	343
	Nataraja asana	... 259,260,261	
	Natavara asana	... ..	258
	Naukasana	... ..	41
	Nauka sanchalana	... ..	44
	Nauli	... ..	384
	Naumukhi mudra	... ..	364
	Neck movement	... ..	33
	Neti	... 369,	370
	Niralamba paschimottanasana	... ....	268
	Niralamba sirshasana	... ..	222
O	Oordhwa padmasana	.... ..	223

P	Pada angushthasana	...	...	267
	Padadiransana	...	...	86
	Pada hastasana	...	...	199
	Pada prasar paschimottasanasana	...	...	194
	Padma mayurasana	...	...	284
	Padmasana	...	...	68
	Padma sarvangasana	...	...	228
	Palming	...	...	51
	Parivritti janusirshasana	...	...	210
	Parvatasana	...	....	136
	Paschimottanasana	...	...	191
	Pashinee mudra	...	...	365
	Pawanmuktasana	...	...	17
	Poorna bhujangasana	...	...	169
	Poorna dhanurasana	...	...	176
	Poorna matsyendrasana	...	...	273
	Poorna shalabhasana	...	..	172
	Poorwa halasana	....	...	229
	Pranamasana	...	...	96
	Prana mudra	...	355,356,357	
	Pranayama	...	...	295
	Pre-meditative poses	...	...	63
	Pre-pranayama exercises	...	...	304
	Prishthasana	...	...	186
	Pulling the rope	...	...	46
R	Relaxation postures	...	...	57
	Rocking and rolling	...	...	39
	Rotational viewing	..	...	54
S	Salamba sirshasana	...	...	221
	Samakonasana	...	...	121
	Santolanasana	...	...	266
	Santolana parvatasana	...	...	251
	Saral dhanurasana	...	...	175
	Sarpasana	...	...	167
	Sarvangasana	...	...	225
	Setu asana	...	...	180
	Shakti bandha	...	...	43
	Shalabhasana	...	...	170

Shambhavi mudra	...	...	342
Shankhprakhshalana	...	...	374
Shanmukhi mudra	...	...	363
Shashankasana	...	...	91
Shashank bhujangasana	...	...	94
Shat karmas	...	...	368
Shavasana	...	...	58
Sheetali pranayama	...	...	312
Sheetkari pranayama	...	...	313
Sheetkrama kapalbhati	...	...	387
Shoulder socket rotation	...	...	32
Siddhasana	...	...	70
Siddha yoni asana	...	...	72
Sideways viewing	...	...	52
Simhasana	...	...	81
Sirsha angushtha yogasana	...	...	198
Sirsha padasana	...	...	181
Sirshasana	...	...	218
Spinal twist asanas	...	...	207
Stambhan asana	...	...	234
Standing & bending asanas	...	...	105
Sthal basti	...	...	386
Sukhasana	...	...	75
Sumeru asana	...	...	1000
Supta vajrasana	...	...	89
Surya bheda pranayama	...	...	320
Surya namaskara	...	...	131
Sutra neti	...	...	373
Swastikasana	...	...	74
Tadagi mudra	...	...	347
Tadan kriya	...	...	366
Tadasana	...	...	112
Thoracic breathing	...	...	303
Tiryaka bhujangasana	...	...	168
Tiryaka tadasana	...	...	115
Toe bending	...	...	19
Tolangulasana	...	...	161
Trataka	...	...	388
Trikonasana	...	...	123

U	Udarakarshan asana	... ..	50
	Uddiyana bandha	... ..	331, 333
	Ujjayi pranayama	... ..	319
	Up and down viewing	... ..	55
	Ushtrasana	... ..	97
	Utthanasana	... ..	120
	Uttha eka pada sirasana	... ..	292
	Uttha prishthasana	... ..	183
	Utthita hasta merudandasana	... ..	254
	Utthita hasta padangusthasana	... ..	262
	Utthita janu sirshasana	... ..	203
	Utthita lolasana	... ..	117
V	Vahnisara dhauti	... ..	379
	Vajrasana	... ..	79
	Vajroli mudra	... ..	362
	Vaman nauli	... ..	384
	Vaman dhauti	... ..	382
	Varisara dhauti	... ..	374
	Vashishthasana	... ..	255
	Vastra dhauti	... ..	381
	Vatayanasana	... ..	256
	Vatkrama kapalbhati	... ..	387
	Vatsara dhauti	... ..	374
	Vayu nishkasana	... ..	49
	Veerasana	.... ..	83
	Vipareeta karani mudra	... ..	227, 358
	Vrischikasana	... ..	279
	Vyaghra kriya	... ..	383
	Vyaghrasana	... ..	102
	Vyutkrama kapalbhati	... ..	387
W	Wrist bending	... ..	29
	Wrist joint rotation	... ..	30
Y	Yoga mudra	... ..	150, 353
	Yogic breathing	... ..	303
	Yoni mudra	... ..	363

INTERNATIONAL YOGA FELLOWSHIP MOVEMENT

A charitable and philosophical movement founded by Paramahansa Satyananda at Rajnandgaon in 1956 to disseminate the yogic tradition throughout the world.

Medium of conveying the teachings of Paramahansa Satyananda through the affiliate centres around the world.

Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the first Paramacharya of the International Yoga Fellowship Movement.

Provides guidance, systematised yoga training programme and sets teaching standards for all the affiliated yoga teachers, centres and ashrams.

A Yoga Charter to consolidate and unify the humanitarian efforts of all sannyasin disciples, yoga teachers, spiritual seekers and well-wishers was introduced during the World Yoga Convention in 1993.

Affiliation to this Yoga Charter enables the person to become a messenger of goodwill and peace to the world, through active involvement in various far-reaching yoga related projects.

BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA (BSY)

A charitable and educational institution founded by Paramahansa Satyananda at Munger in 1963 to impart yogic training to all nationalities.

Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the Chief Patron of BSY.

Focal point for a mass return to the ancient science of yoga.

The original school, Sivanandashram, is the centre for the Munger locality.

The new school, Ganga Darshan, established in 1981, is situated on a historical hill with a panoramic view of the river Ganga.

Yoga Health Management, Teacher Training, Sadhana, Kriya Yoga and other specialised courses are held throughout the year.

Provides trained sannyasins and teachers for conducting yoga conventions, seminars and lecture tours throughout the world.

Has a well-staffed research library, scientific research centre and a modern printing press.

Renowned for its excellent sannyasa and yoga training and the initiation of female and foreign sannyasins.

SIVANANDA MATH

A social and charitable institution founded by Paramahansa Satyananda at Munger in 1984 in memory of Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh.

Head Office now situated at Rikhia in Deoghar district, Bihar.

Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the Chief Patron of the institute.

Aims to facilitate growth of the weaker and underprivileged sections of the society, especially the rural communities.

Activities include: distribution of free scholarships, clothing, farm animals and food; the digging of tube-wells and construction of houses for the needy; assistance to farmers in ploughing and watering their fields.

A small dispensary has been established for the provision of medicine, and veterinary services are also provided.

Tribhuvan Office, a three storey complex to deal with Sivananda Math's activities, will also house the satellite dish system for providing global information to the villagers.

All services are provided free and universally to everyone regardless of caste and creed.

YOGA RESEARCH FOUNDATION

A scientific, research-oriented institution founded by Paramahansa Satyananda at Munger in 1984.

Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the Chief Patron of the institute.

Aims to provide an accurate assessment of yoga practices within a scientific framework, and to establish yoga as an essential science for the development of mankind.

Conducted a symposium of over 100 medical professionals from India and abroad with a view to consolidating interest and work in yoga research and health investigation at Munger in 1988 and 1989.

At present conducting international research on the effects of yoga on respiratory disorders involving 10,000 subjects worldwide.

Future plans include literary, scriptural, medical and scientific investigations into other little-known aspects of yoga for physical health, mental wellbeing and spiritual upliftment.

SRI
PANCHDASHNAM
PARAMAHAMSA
ALAKH BARA

Sri Panchdashnam Paramahansa Alakh Bara was established in 1990 by Paramahansa Satyananda at Rikhia, Deoghar district, Bihar.

It is a charitable, educational and non-profit-making institution.

It upholds and propagates the highest tradition of sannyasa, namely vairagya (dispassion), tyaga (renunciation) and tapasya (austerity).

It propounds the tapovan style of living adopted by the rishis and munis of the vedic era and is intended only for sannyasins, renunciates, ascetics, tapasvis and paramahamsas.

Alakh Bara does not conduct any activities such as yoga teaching or preaching of any religion or religious concepts.

The guidelines set down for the Alakh Bara are based on the classical vedic tradition of sadhana, tapasya and swadhyaya or atma chintan.

Paramahansa Satyananda, who now resides permanently at the Alakh Bara, performs the Panchagni Vidya and other vedic sadhanas, thus paving the way for future paramahamsas to uphold their tradition.

BIHAR YOGA
BHARATI
(BYB)

Bihar Yoga Bharati was founded by Paramahansa Niranjanananda in 1994 as an educational and charitable institution for advanced studies in yogic sciences.

It is the culmination of the vision of Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Paramahansa Satyananda.

Bihar Yoga Bharati is the first institute in the world of its kind to impart comprehensive yogic education with provisions to grant higher degrees in yogic studies such as MA, M Sc, M Phil, D Lit, and Ph D to the students.

Bihar Yoga Bharati is due to receive *deemed* status as a University by the University Grants Commission, Ministry of Education, New Delhi.

It will offer a complete scientific, yogic education and training according to the need of the present times, through the Faculties of Yoga Philosophy, Yoga Psychology and Applied Yogic Science.

BYB proposes to offer residential courses of two years in a gurukula environment, so that along with yoga education, the spirit of seva (selfless service), samarpan (dedication) and karuna (compassion) for humankind is also imbibed by the students.



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