Yoga Therapy for Pelvic Floor Dysfunctions

Presented to:

Dr. Kelly Jirschele

Urogynecologist

Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgeon

Presented by:

Ms. Vinny Garg

Yoga, Meditation, Reiki Master Teacher

GoInwards.com

January 2022

Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3
2. PROGRAM PROPOSED 4
3. PROGRAM BENEFITS 5
4. PROGRAM OVERVIEW 7
5. RELAX 8
5.1 Relaxation Practice 9
6. HEAL 11
6.1 Diaphragmatic Breathing 12
7. STRENGTHEN 14
7.1 Mountain Pose 15
7.2 Tree Pose 19
7.3 Garland Pose 22
7.4 Chair Pose 24
7.5 Warrior II Pose 27
7.6 Happy Baby Pose 30
7.7 Locust Pose 32
8. PRACTICE PREPARATION GUIDELINES 35

Tables

Table 1: PFD Statistical Data 3
Table 2: Unified benefits of yoga on body systems 5

Figures

Figure 1: Therapeutic effects of yoga 4
Figure 2: Imbalance of organ system functions 6
Figure 3: Mind, body, awareness, wellness cycle 7
Figure 4: Function of breath work on the lungs 12

Postures*

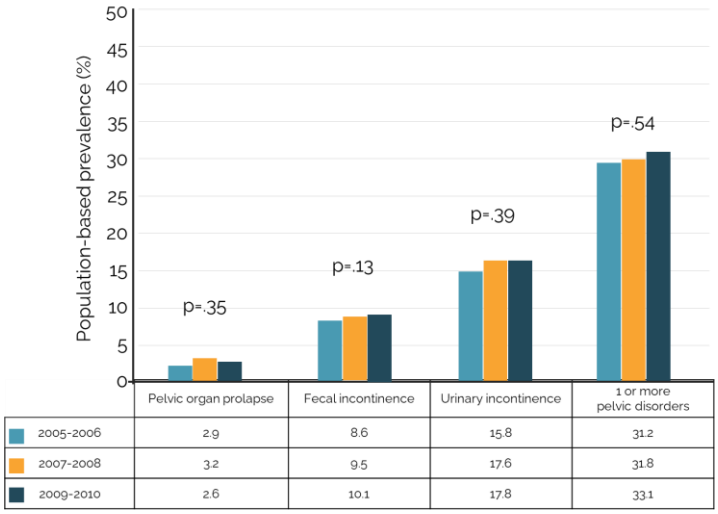
Posture 1: Mountain Pose 15
Posture 2: Mountain Pose - Muscles Engaged 18
Posture 3: Tree Pose 19
Posture 4: Tree Pose - Muscles Engaged 21
Posture 5: Garland Pose 22
Posture 6: Garland Pose - Muscles Engaged 23
Posture 7: Chair Pose 24
Posture 8: Chair Pose - Muscles Engaged 26
Posture 9: Warrior II Pose 27
Posture 10: Warrior II Pose - Muscles Engaged 29
Posture 11: Happy Baby Pose 30
Posture 12: Happy Baby Pose - Muscles Engaged 31
Posture 13: Locust pose 32
Posture 14: Locust pose - Muscles engaged 33

** Posture drawings provided by Alan Leon* *https://www.linkedin.com/in/alan-leon-3532656/*

1. Executive Summary

A National Institute of Health (NIH) study reveals that one quarter of adult U.S. women reporting at least one pelvic floor disorder. Pelvic floor disorders, which include urinary incontinence, fecal incontinence, and pelvic organ prolapse, are highly prevalent conditions in women, affecting almost 25% of women in the United States.

Table 1: PFD Statistical Data



	Pelvic organ prolapse	Fecal incontinence	Urinary incontinence	1 or more pelvic disorders
2005-2006	2.9	8.6	15.8	31.2
2007-2008	3.2	9.5	17.6	31.8
2009-2010	2.6	10.1	17.8	33.1

Pelvic floor disorders significantly increase with age. An aggregated survey data highlights that 40% of women aged 60–79 and 53% of women 80+ suffer from at least one symptomatic disorder. It is likely the prevalence of these disorders will increase, given the fact that the U.S. population 65 years and older is expected to double from 40.2 million in 2010 to 88.5 million in 2050.[1]

There are several factors associated with the prevalence of pelvic floor disorders, such as aging, the obesity epidemic disorders, the increase of surgical procedures for urinary incontinence and prolapse. Higher Body Mass Index and hysterectomy are significantly associated with an increased prevalence of each type of disorder.

Studies have shown that a third or fourth-degree anal sphincter tear, and an instrumented delivery consistently increased the odds of having post-partum fecal incontinence. The association of obesity with pelvic floor disorders highlights the importance of addressing weight loss in obese women, and of screening for these disorders in overweight women.

These estimates also underscore the importance of training providers to care for the multitude of women, who are currently suffering from pelvic floor disorders, or at the risk of developing symptoms. Furthermore, understanding the prevalence of these disorders provides useful information regarding the need to address these symptoms proactively with the patients, as well as to train the healthcare providers to manage these disorders.

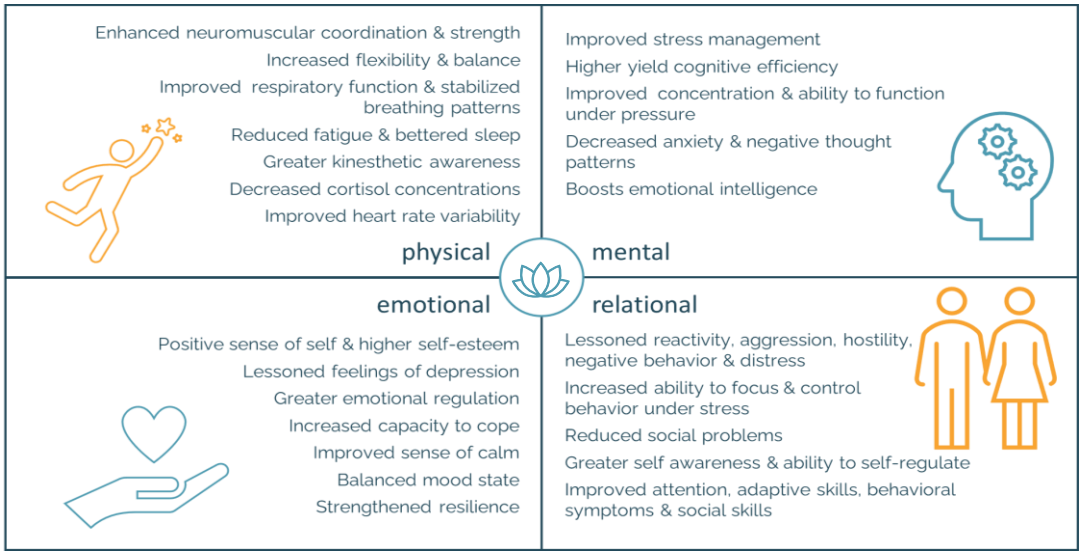
[1] Source: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3970401/

2. Program Proposed

As participation rates in mind-body fitness programs such as yoga continue to increase, it is important for healthcare professionals to be informed about the nature of yoga and the evidence of its many therapeutic effects. Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice, to the treatment of health conditions to prevent, reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional pain, suffering or limitations.

Results from a recent study to explore the therapeutic effects of yoga, and its ability to increase quality of life, demonstrates that yogic practices enhance muscular strength and body flexibility, promote, and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, promote recovery from and treatment of addiction, reduce stress, anxiety, depression and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, enhance overall well-being, and improve quality of life.[2]

Figure 1: Therapeutic effects of yoga



Yoga is regarded as a holistic approach to health and is classified as a form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Therefore, it is beneficial for healthcare professionals to understand the impact of mindful-based yoga therapy on various pelvic health conditions. Physiotherapists with the knowledge of pelvic floor dysfunctions, can successfully integrate yoga into the therapy regime, as yoga therapy is a non-invasive solution to strengthen and reinforce the entire network of pelvic floor muscles through this integrative practice.[3]

[2] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3193654/
[3] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34364737/

3. Program Benefits

Yoga has been suggested to be useful in managing a range of medical conditions that affect various systems of the body, such as the urogenital, cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, endocrine, immune, and nervous system of the body. Yoga also addresses facets of quality-of-life issues, through potential effects on depression, stress, and anxiety, to optimally help manage the physical, emotional, mental, and relational aspects of well-being.

Table 2: Unified benefits of yoga on body systems

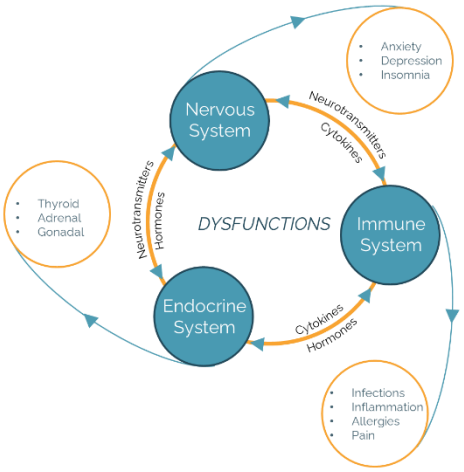
Body System	Unified Benefits
Urogenital	Yoga is a noninvasive practice that may improve Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms (LUTS) by increasing the strength of pelvic floor muscle, regulating the autonomic nervous system, and activating the central nervous system.
Muscular	There is an overall improvement in the strength of the muscles by increasing the area of cross section, and the ability to stretch the muscles, by the addition of sarcomeres in series.
Skeletal	Yoga can be beneficial for people with osteoporosis. Practicing yoga increases bone density if done consistently and properly. Yoga also improves balance and flexibility, which can prevent falls and therefore prevent fractures.
Cardiovascular	Activation of parasympathetic system decreases the heart rate and improves the cardiac contractility; hence decreases the blood pressure levels. There is also a decrease in triglyceride and Low-Density Lipoproteins (LDL) and increase in High Density Lipoproteins (HDL) levels.
Respiratory	Direct effect on the pulmonary system, strengthens the respiratory muscles and diaphragm. Improved function of the lungs leads to an increase in the vital capacity, forced expiratory volume, peak expiratory flow rate, etc.
Digestive	Postures and controlled breathwork improves the hormonal functions of the gut, with increased space availability to the various organs of the gut and hence improvement of the peristalsis and digestion.
Immune	Psycho-neuroimmunology confirms influence of thoughts via immunity. With overall decrease in levels of cortisol and pro-inflammatory cytokines in the body, the immune function improves.
Nervous	Controlled breathwork and relaxation activates parasympathetic nerves. It also improves focus and memory by default mode network activation. There is overall improvement of pain tolerance and beneficial effect on psychiatric conditions.
Endocrine	Postures, breathwork, and meditation progressively balances the hormones. There is improved hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis function and regulation of the various hormonal levels in the body, analyzed via salivary, blood and urinary cortisol levels.

Yoga also leads to improvement function of the parasympathetic nervous system, as it leads to an increased relaxation of the body, and by the activation of the default mode network helps improve memory, focus and concentration. It also helps regulate the various neurotransmitters such as dopamine, acetylcholine, serotonin in the body, and hence has effects on the pain thresholds, as well as the various neural and psychological disorders.

The various yoga postures, called asanas improve the contractile strength of the muscles and improve the mobility of the joints of the body. It also strengthens the back by improving the blood supply of the intervertebral joints and decreasing the pressure on the intervertebral discs which improves the symptoms of prolapsed discs and lower back pain. This all in all helps improve the posture of the body.

The beneficial effects of yoga-centric techniques are also effective on the cardio-respiratory systems. There is an overall improvement of the various capacities and volumes of the lungs, decrease in the blood pressure levels, decrease in the LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels, increased HDL cholesterol levels, along with improvement in cases of lymphedema. Apart from this, yoga also decreases various stress hormones of the body such as cortisol and the pro-inflammatory cytokines, and improves the levels of endorphins in the body; hence improving symptoms of the various pathologies across the body.

Figure 2: Imbalance of organ system functions



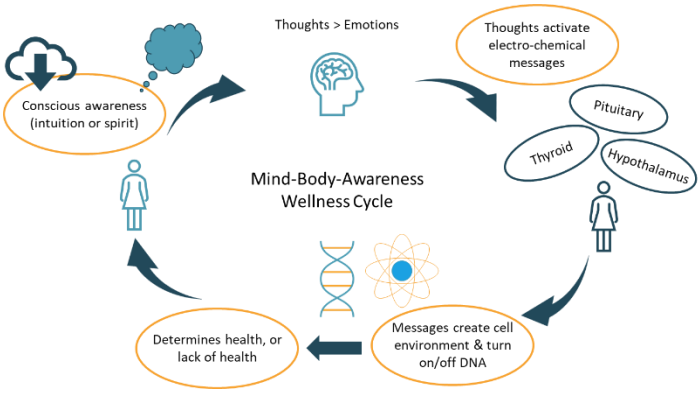
Controlled breathwork known as Pranayama has shown miraculous effects on the respiratory system by improving the alveolar ventilation, increased oxygen transport across the alveolar capillary membrane, and improved dilation of the trachea and bronchioles. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system, improves blood pressure levels, and promotes enhanced contractility of the heart muscles. The practice also improves the learning ability and memory and helps combat various psychological disorders such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Also, with increased awareness, it also mellows down the levels of anxiety promoting neurotransmitters, hence improving the symptoms of anxiety disorder.

Mediation helps activate the parasympathetic system and hence leads to the various beneficial effects on the various systems of the body such as respiratory, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal. Apart from the organ and tissue level, meditation also works at a cellular level. It has an enhancing effect on telomerases and hence combats various senile and age-related changes. It also helps decrease the levels of the pro-inflammatory cytokines as well as the reactive oxygen species and increases the levels of anti-inflammatory cytokines, neurotrophins and endorphins which helps improve immunity.

4. Program Overview

The proposed program is based on 'Mind-Body Awareness' which includes progressive, flexibly paced sessions to facilitate a comfortable, supportive and nurturing learning environment. The postures, if done correctly, in a non-competitive and relaxed atmosphere, not only relaxes the muscles of the body, but these relaxing impulses travel back to the brain and relaxes the mind.

Figure 3: Mind, body, awareness, wellness cycle



By integrating the awareness of mind, body, and breath synchronization, attentive faculty of the mind is made active, as the practice is more mental than physical. The proposed regimen is of preventative and curative value, as it helps tune up the autonomic nervous system, balance the hormonal functions, and activities of the internal organ and corresponding systems.

This program has been curated based on the methodology to Relax, Heal and Strengthen. A regular practice of yoga may have neuroprotective effects against whole brain age-related grey-matter decline.[4] The sessions comprise of neuroplasticity-based healing practices that encompass the following:

- Mindful-based repetitive movements to enhance brain-body functions, improve balance, increase mobility, and build endurance.
- Awareness-based breathing techniques to improve pulmonary functions, activate the parasympathetic nervous system, strengthen, and tone the polyvagal system.
- Meditation practices to include sound and hand gestures, to develop confidence and restructure belief systems around any perceived limitations.
- Self-guided techniques to include lymph massage and body tapping to stimulate the circulatory system and develop empathy and self-care.
- Guided relaxation with body-scan and visualization to create new neuropathways, re-establish the brain-body connection, and rebalance the autonomic nervous system.
- Mind-Body-Breath based exercises to include seated, standing, and reclined postures, which can be tailored based on individual needs.
- Solidly built on specific yoga and mindful-based practices, the sessions avail the flexibility to be welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all participants.
- All aspects of this class will be adapted for greater support or challenge based on individual patient needs, and can be modified for seated, reclined, or standing practice.

[4] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4428135/

5. Relax

Relaxation causes cells to release micro-puffs of nitric oxide, a gas that dilates blood vessels and stabilizes the immune system.



5.1 Relaxation Practice

Learning to consciously relax is what we call as 'systematic relaxation', a powerful self-help tool. Relaxation helps to release physical and mental tension, decrease stress hormones, and calm the sympathetic nervous system. This 61-point-guided relaxation practice is centered around a series of sweeping breaths, which accompanies your awareness from point to point through the body. The practice works on a subtle level, as you combine your mind and breath awareness, with the corresponding nerve endings of your body.

5.1.1 Relaxation practice instructions

This practice is centered around a series of sweeping breaths which accompany your awareness from point to point through your body. An upward flowing awareness accompanies each inhalation, and a downward flowing awareness accompanies each exhalation.

As soon as your inhalation or exhalation reaches its natural completion, you reach the destination point and begin your next breath to return to the next point. As you travel from point to point, be aware of the key points (ankles, knees, perineum, navel, heart, throat, forehead) which you may pass through on the way to/from your crown.

- Lay down flat on your back on a firm surface, legs naturally spread apart, arms a comfortable distance away from your body, palms up with your fingers slightly curled.
- Support your head and neck with a thin pillow and cover yourself with a light blanket if you desire.
- Feel the space your body occupies, and the unique self-awareness which fills that space.
- Take a few complete breaths and establish an energetic awareness of the space which your body occupies from crown to toes.
- Bring your awareness to your toes to begin.
- Inhale from toes to crown, and exhale from crown back to toes 10 times.
- Inhale from ankles to crown, and exhale from crown to ankles 10 times.

Throughout the entirety of this practice, there should be a seamless flow of breath, with no pause between each inhale/exhale or each exhale/inhale.

- Inhale from knees to crown, and exhale from crown to knees 5 times.
- Inhale from perineum to crown, and exhale from crown to perineum 5 times.
- Inhale from navel to crown, and exhale from crown to navel 5 times.

- Inhale from heart to crown, and exhale from crown to heart 5 times.
- Inhale from throat to crown, and exhale from crown to throat 5 times.
- Inhale from center of the forehead to crown, and exhale from crown to center of the forehead 5 times.
- Inhale from opening of the nostrils to the center of the forehead, and exhale from the center of the forehead to the opening of the nostrils 25 times.
- Release your awareness of inhalation and exhalation to/from any point and experience the space which your body occupies. Feel each breath as a pulsation of prana from within this space.
- When you are ready to conclude, deepen your breath to bring your awareness outward. Bring some small movements in your fingers and toes. Roll over onto your left side before coming upright into a seated posture.
- Take a few breaths and gently open your eyes.

6. Heal

Allow the body to heal itself by re-generating new neurogenesis cells by leveraging the proposed tips to promote healing.



6.1 Diaphragmatic Breathing

The deep abdominal breathing taught in yoga is crucial to pelvic floor rehabilitation. As you begin the systematic relaxation process by stilling the body and establishing diaphragmatic breathing, the smooth, even breathing that you work with, begins to regulate your physiology. More specifically, it begins to regulate the autonomic nervous system, that regulates the involuntary functions, such as your heart rate, breath rate, digestive organs, the secretion of digestive enzymes, endocrine system, etc.

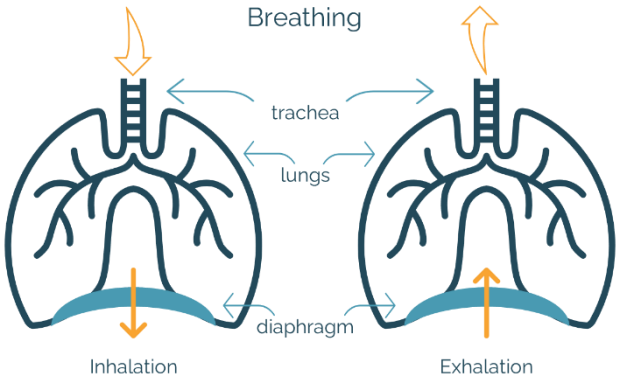
It's interesting to note that breathing is a function that we don't think about all the time. So much of the time it is being controlled by the autonomic nervous system. However, nature has given us a gift, in that we can actually consciously control our breath pattern, and that gives us the ability to control and regulate the autonomic nervous system.

This diaphragmatic breathwork is practiced by enhancing the action of the diaphragm, and minimizing the action of the rib cage. The diaphragm is a domed shape muscle that separates the lungs from the abdominal cavity and when functioning correctly, promotes the most efficient type of breathing. It is the effect of the diaphragm, which is experienced, as the stomach rises and falls. Sensitivity to the muscle itself, however, will come with practice.

During inhalation, the diaphragm muscles contract, compressing the abdominal organs down and outward towards the pelvic floor. In response, the pelvic floor relaxes to accommodate this downward pressure creating a passive stretch on these muscles. During exhalation the diaphragm moves upward, and the abdominal contents move inward, as these muscles passively return to their starting position.

Movement of the diaphragm signifies that the lower lobes of the lungs are being utilized. The proper use of the diaphragm causes equal expansion of the alveoli, improves lymphatic drainage from basal parts of the lungs, massages the liver, stomach, intestines, and other organs beneath it, exerts a positive effect on the cardiac functions and coronary supply, and improves oxygenation of the blood and circulation.

Figure 4: Function of breath work on the lungs



6.1.1 Diaphragmatic breathing practice instructions

- Lay down in corpse pose and relax your entire body.
- Observe your spontaneous breath, without controlling it in any way.
- Let your breath be absolutely natural.
- Place your right hand on the abdomen, just above the navel, and the left hand over the center of the chest.
- Continue observing your natural breath for some time.
- The right hand will move up with inhalation and down with exhalation.
- The left hand should not move with the breath.
- There should be no tension in the abdomen.
- Do not try to force the movement in any way.
- Try not to expand the chest or move the shoulders.
- Feel the abdomen expanding and contracting. Continue breathing slowly and deeply.
- Inhale while expanding the abdomen as much as possible, without expanding the rib cage.
- At the end of the inhalation, the diaphragm compresses the abdomen, and the navel will be at its highest point.
- On exhalation the diaphragm moves upwards, and the abdomen moves downward.
- At the end of the exhalation the abdomen is contracted, and the navel compressed towards the spine.
- Continue this breathwork for a few minutes.

6.1.2 Diaphragmatic breathing benefits

- Diaphragmatic breathing relaxes and calms the mind by decreasing the tone of the sympathetic nervous system.
- Puts the intercostal muscles and the diaphragm to exercise, hence increasing the overall chest wall expansion and enhances lung ventilation.
- Improves exercise performance and overall respiratory function.

7. Strengthen

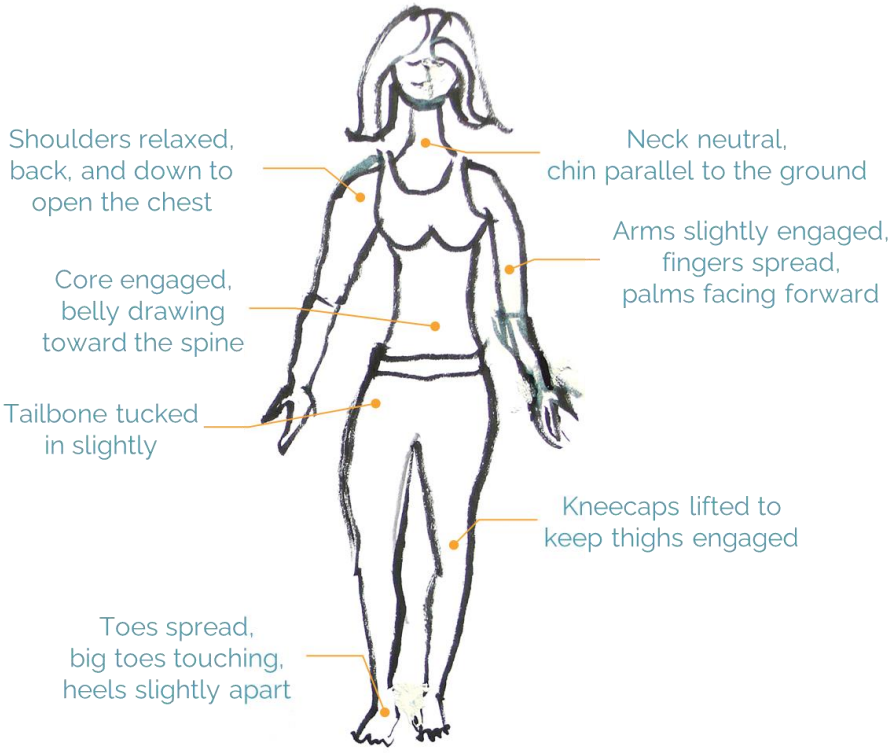
Reinforce the network of pelvic floor muscles and enhance the quality of life through the integrative practice of yoga therapy.



7.1 Mountain Pose

Mountain Pose is the foundation for all standing poses, so correctly learning this posture is essential. Though it might seem simple, one needs to be aware of the minuscule movements to truly embody this pose. Immense attention is required in this seemingly straight-forward posture. On the physical level, it improves the posture, strengthens the thighs, knees, ankles, firms the abdomen and buttocks, relieves sciatica, and reduces flat feet. Mentally, this posture helps with focus and concentration. This pose also enhances stability and promotes self-esteem and inner strength.

Posture 1: Mountain Pose



7.1.1 Mountain pose practice instructions

- Stand upright, with feet facing forward.
- The feet are parallel to each other, a few inches apart.
- Hips, knees, and ankles should stack evenly over one another.
- Lift and spread the toes and balls of your feet, then lay them softly back down on the floor.
- Rock gently back and forth and side to side.

- Gradually reduce the swaying to a standstill, with your weight balanced evenly across your feet.
- Place a yoga block between your thighs for deep engagement.
- Engage your inner thighs and try to lift the block upwards.
- Feel the energy draw from the feet up through your core.
- Check the position of your pelvis to level with the tailbone in a neutral position, following the natural curve of the spine.
- Without pushing your lower front ribs forward, lift the top of your sternum straight towards the ceiling.
- Keep the shoulders open and widen your collarbones.
- Allow the shoulder blades to draw towards each other, and down the back, away from the ears.
- Let the arms relax beside your torso, palms facing forward.
- Balance the crown of your head directly over the center of your pelvis, with the underside of your chin parallel to the floor.
- Throat soft, tongue wide, and flat on the floor of your mouth.
- Soften your eyes. Breathe.

7.1.2 Mountain pose benefits

Stretches, strengthens, lengthens – The block between the thighs provisions an isometric contraction of the inner thigh muscles (hip adductors), along with the stretching of the gluteus, hamstrings, and muscles of the back. While stretching and lengthening is mainly of the spine and legs, it is done with the support from contraction of the core, and the pelvic floor muscles. Additionally, muscles of the hips, pelvis, core, hip flexors, hip adductors and back are also strengthened. Toning of the thigh and buttocks happens due to action of holding and squeezing of the yoga block.

Awareness, focus and alignment – Placing a block between the thighs builds awareness and focus. The focused squeezing of the block between the thighs helps engage the hip adductors, encouraging internal rotation of the hips, which helps keep the hips and pelvis stable. Aligning the block, and placing the feet parallel to each other, helps engage the leg muscles, adding to a well-toned thighs and buttocks. The squeezing of the block helps open the sacrum, which further helps lengthen the spine.

Chest, diaphragm, and breath – Interestingly, the use of the block helps better breathing. The block ensures the thighs are rolled inwards, which further brings the hips in an internal rotation. The internal rotation of the hips create space for the sacrum, lengthening the spine. When the spine is lengthened, the pelvis moves forward, opening the chest, as the shoulders roll back. Thus, the block ensures a strong and stable spine, creating space for the chest and rib cage to expand. The expansion of the diaphragm, improve oxygen intake by the lungs.

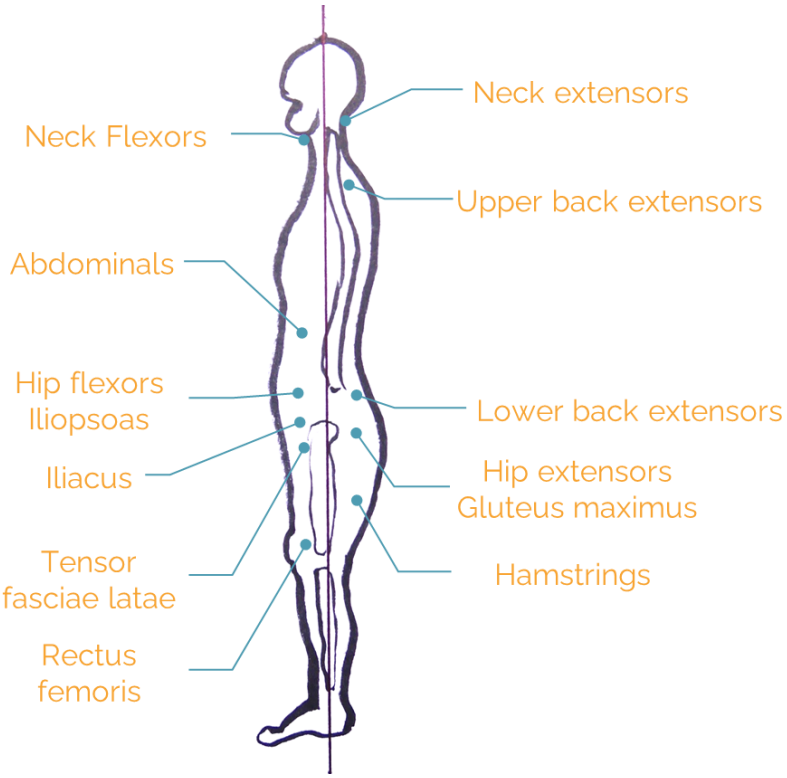
Energizing, de-stressing, and relaxing – When the intake of oxygen is increased, the energy levels in the body also increases. Active squeezing of the thighs helps release any tension in the psoas muscles. These muscles are known for storing emotions, stress, and tension, and this posture helps release tension. The block can be a great support to move in a forward bend at ease, allowing for better range of motion of the hips. The contracting and releasing of the hip flexors (psoas and iliopsoas) can help release tightness at the hips and relax the body.

Stimulation, circulation, and balance – This simple standing posture helps bring balance, both in the physical and physiological body. With squeezing of the block, the pelvic muscles activate, which in turn help stimulate the reproductive organs. And the squeezing action of the block also ensures the lymph nodes in the groins are stimulated, and helps improve lymphatic drainage in the body. With better flow of blood and lymphatic fluid, optimal balance is gained, both physically and emotionally.

Therapeutic healing – Mountain pose can be included in therapy yoga to address many physical ailments. It can help improve the condition of the spine, like kyphosis, by tucking the tailbone in. It can also help in the healing process, post a hip replacement surgery, and is beneficial for backpain related issues. The engaging of the gluteus, psoas, core, and hip adductors can together help address sciatica.

7.1.3 Mountain pose muscles engaged

Posture 2: Mountain Pose - Muscles Engaged



7.1.4 Mountain pose contraindications

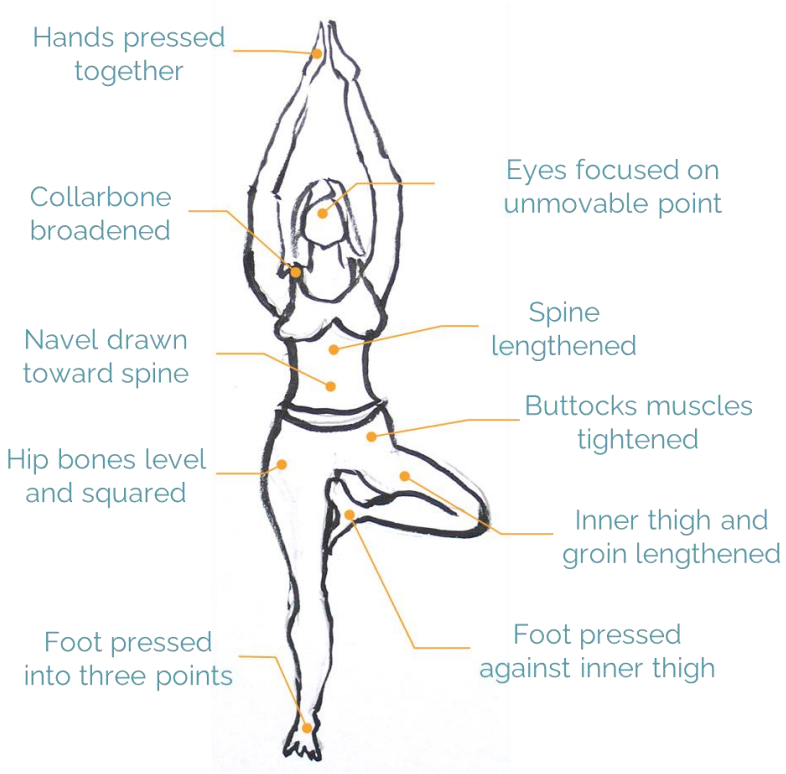
People with following symptoms must avoid this pose:

- Individuals with severe headaches, low blood pressure, insomnia, or dizziness, are advised against practicing the posture for long periods of time.
- Women who are menstruating and pregnant are advised to practice this pose with their back against the wall.

7.2 Tree Pose

Tree pose is a combination of balance, stability, strength, and a complete focus driven practice. A classic standing posture, tree pose establishes strength and balance in the legs, and helps feel centered, steady, and grounded. This posture requires proper weight distribution, which can help provide stability to the groin, thighs, hips, pelvis, and strengthen the core. This pose involves tucking one leg into the other, while the hands are in a prayer position above your head, resembling a tree. Tree pose also helps stretch and strengthen the ligaments and tendons in the feet and improve balance.

Posture 3: Tree Pose



7.2.1 Tree pose practice instructions

- Stand in front of your mat.
- Spread your toes, root down through your feet, and firm your leg muscles.
- Raise your front hip to point toward your lower ribs until you feel a gentle lift in your lower belly.
- Inhale deeply, floating your chest up.
- And exhale as you draw your shoulder blades down your back.
- Look straight ahead with a steady gaze.
- Place your hands on your hips and raise your right foot high onto your left thigh.

- Press your right thigh open as far as you can until your pelvis begins to rotate with the leg.
- Open the knee and then bring your pelvis back to neutral, squared towards the front.
- If you feel stable, stretch your arms overhead, like tree reaching towards the sun.
- Step back into mountain pose and repeat on the other side.

7.2.2 Tree pose benefits

Stretches, strengthens, lengthens – Tree pose stretches and strengthens muscles of the legs, hips, back, core, arms, and shoulders. At the beginner level, this hip opener posture helps bring stability in the pelvic girdle.

Flexibility and range of motion – This balancing pose involves the joints of the hips, knee, ankles, and shoulders to engage together, thus keeping the body stable. The external rotation of the hips, extension of the knee, and upward rotation of the shoulders, prepares for counter movements in other poses.

Chest, diaphragm, and breath – During the practice of tree pose, when the arms are stretched upwards, this movement expanses the chest, rib cage, diaphragm, and the intercostal muscles. Active use of these muscles helps take in more air into the lungs, thus ensuring efficient use of the lungs. With the efficient use of the diaphragm and lungs, breathing is improved, and also impacts the stability and balance while in the pose.

Awareness, focus and concentration – Paying attention to your breath helps merge body and mind awareness, and helps create a state of physiologic equilibrium. Maintaining a straight look during this pose aids in mindfulness. In order to achieve balance and strength, one must bring their awareness initially to their pelvis and shoulders, as this is the foundation of the pose. With the pelvis stable, the awareness can move towards the rest of the body, like the legs, core, back, and arms to complete the posture. With time, improved focus and concentration can help gain confidence in other balancing poses.

Alignment of posture – Balancing in this pose without disturbing the flow of breath, requires having a clear understanding on the alignment aspects. Placement of foot in the groin, outward movement of the hips and knees, grounding action of the five toes pointing towards the front, placement of the hips and pelvis, alignment of the shoulders with the hips and foot, along with raised hands, together help in completing this posture, and gain maximum benefit. With repeated practice, the spine elongates, hips and pelvis are stabilized and aligned, adding to an overall good posture. When the posture is improved, breathing is also improved.

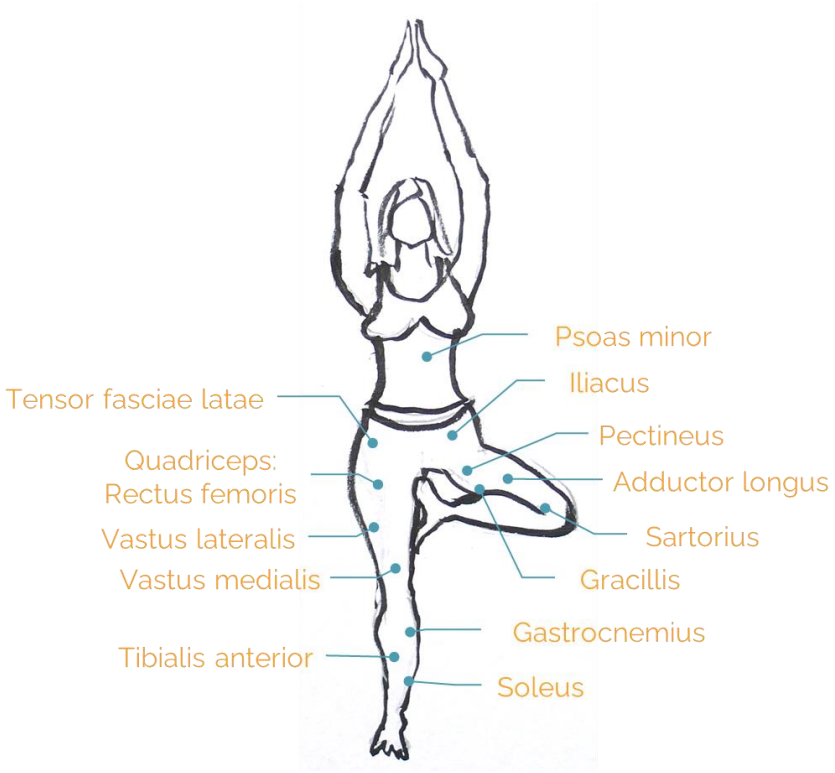
Physical and emotional balance – When it comes to learning to balance, your mental condition is as important as your physical ability. Your body is likely to be disoriented, if you are nervous or your mind is distracted. The tree pose helps bring balance in the physical body and in the mental state of mind, and can be considered as a meditative practice.

Energizing, de-stressing, relaxing – Since most of the joints and muscles are engaged in the practice of tree pose, especially the chest, core, back and pelvis, the flow of energy is increased. With the regulation of breath, the mind is controlled; thus calming the nervous system. The increase in energy flow brings balance in the body-breath-mind, and develops a sense of calmness deep within. It teaches the practitioner how to be strong and flexible at the same time, and how to be rooted, without being rigid.

Stimulation of organs – As a meditative pose, keeping the gaze at one point, and with breath awareness, the source of intuitive wisdom and creativity is enhanced. The pressure at the lower back and the spine, and with grounding action of the pelvis and foot, the root energy center is stimulated, which provides stability and security. At a subtle level, engaging of the core muscles stimulates the internal organs. Additionally, being a hip opener, with engaging of the pelvis, it impacts the reproductive system; thus bringing hormonal balance.

7.2.3 Tree pose muscles engaged

Posture 4: Tree Pose - Muscles Engaged



7.2.4 Tree pose contraindications

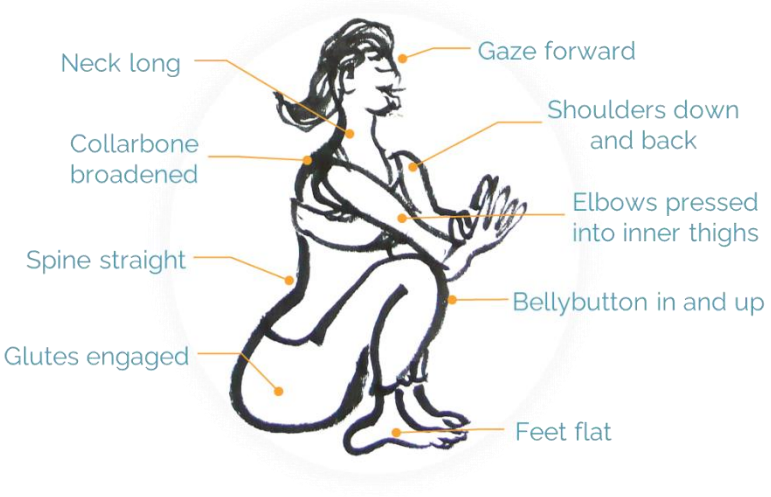
Tree pose is not recommended if you have following ailments:

- Elevated blood pressure, insomnia, headaches, insomnia, vertigo, or dizziness.
- Avoid this pose if you have ankle or knee pain, or recently had an injury or surgery.

7.3 Garland Pose

Garland Pose is an excellent facilitator of good pelvic floor health, as it stretches the ankles, groins, and back while stimulating proper digestion. Known as Malasana, in Saskrit, it stretches the thighs, groin, hips, ankles, and torso. It tones the abdominal muscles and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination. Malasana pose increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy. It also improves balance, concentration, and focus.

Posture 5: Garland Pose



7.3.1 Garland pose practice instructions

- Squat with your feet as close together as possible. Keep your heels on the floor if you can; otherwise, support them on a folded mat.
- Separate your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs.
- Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms to together in Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal), and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen your front torso.
- To go further, press your inner thighs against the sides of your torso. Reach your arms forward, then swing them out to the sides and notch your shins into your armpits. Press your fingertips to the floor or reach around the outside of your ankles and clasp your back heels.
- Hold the position for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then inhale, straighten the knees, and stand into a standing forward bend, Uttanasana.

Variation

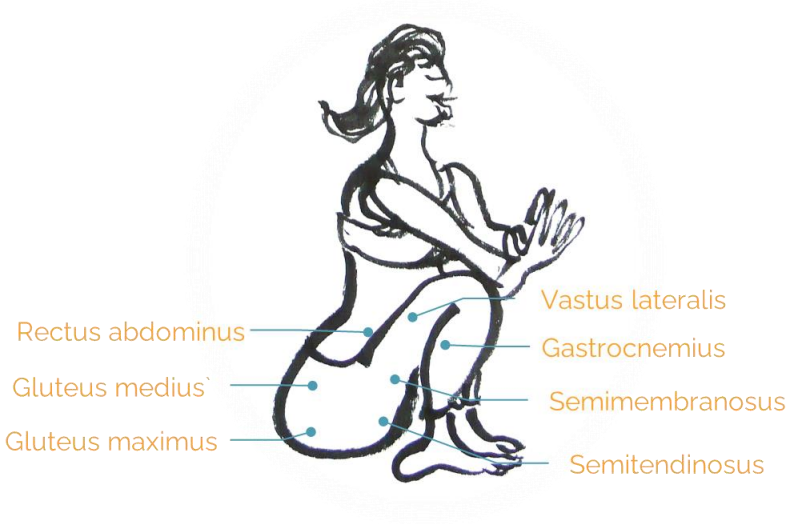
If squatting is difficult, sit on the front edge of a chair seat, thighs forming a right angle to your torso, heels on the floor slightly ahead of your knees. Lean your torso forward between the thighs.

7.3.2 Garland pose benefits

- Garland pose stretches the thighs, groin, hips, ankles, and torso.
- Tones the abdominal muscles, and improves the function of the colon to help with elimination.
- Increases circulation and blood flow in the pelvis, which can help regulate sexual energy.
- Improves balance, concentration, and focus.

7.3.3 Garland Pose Muscles Engaged

Posture 6: Garland Pose - Muscles Engaged



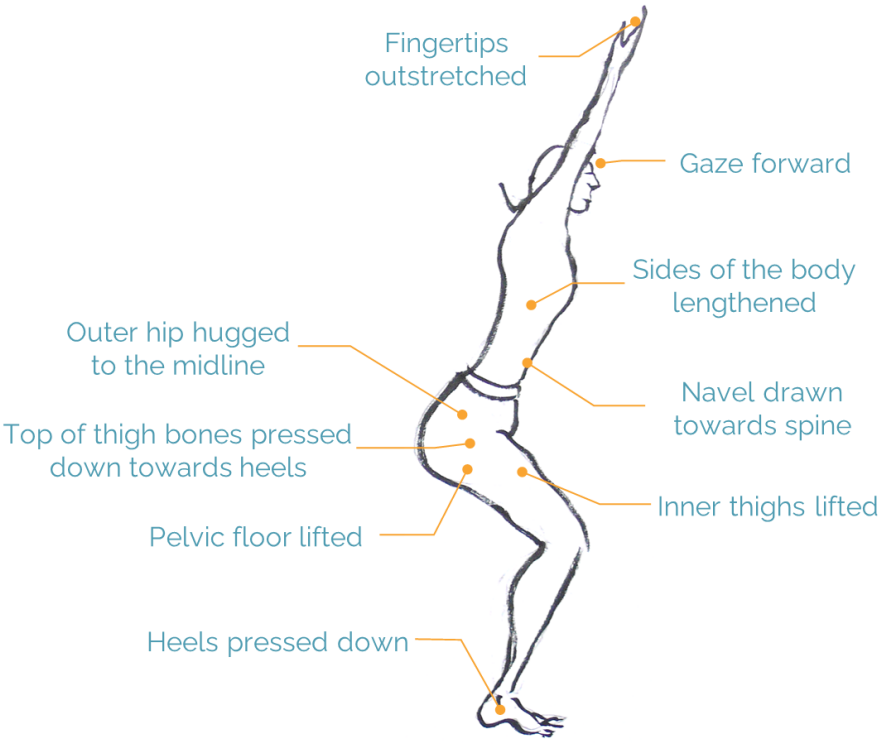
7.3.4 Garland Pose Contraindications

- Injury to knees or ankles: This pose brings tremendous amount of pressure on knees and ankles, so someone with an injury at the knee or ankle should avoid this pose.
- Pregnancy: This pose puts a lot of pressure on the abdominal area and must be avoided by pregnant women.
- Do not practice this pose if you have chronic lower back pain.

7.4 Chair Pose

Chair pose is a powerful strengthening pose, that brings all parts of your body together, as it provides a cohesive stretch throughout the body. This meditative posture embodies determination and perseverance. To successfully perform the chair pose, you must seamlessly unite the strength of the legs, arms, and torso, as you lift your core muscles, and lengthen the spine. The deep squat engages the strength of your legs, back and ankles. At the core level, this pose teaches you how to find your seat of power within your pelvis, at the center of your body.

Posture 7: Chair Pose



7.4.1 Chair pose practice instructions

- Start in Mountain Pose with arms stretched upwards, and tips of the fingers lengthened towards the ceiling.
- Bend your knees, keeping your back as straight as possible, and push your hips back into a squat, as though you are sitting down into a chair.
- Keep your heels connected to the floor, without hips dipping any lower than your knees.
- Hold the posture for a couple of breaths.
- Try to lift your pelvic floor upwards, as though you were trying to hold in a wee.
- Straighten up again slowly.
- Repeat as many times as you feel comfortable.

7.4.2 Chair pose benefits

Strengthening of the hips – The position of the hips in this pose, bears weight of the upper body, and with practice, the muscles around the hips gain strength, and tones the muscles.

Stretches upper body – The entire upper body, shoulders, chest, spine, neck, middle and upper back are stretched in this pose, while the lower body gets strong.

Strong joints, knees, and ankles – While the upper body at the hips bend, the lower body bears some weight, giving the knee and ankle joints the required pressure; thus improving the joints.

Strong and sturdy legs – While bending of the knees adds a slight stretch to the thighs, quadricep muscles, hamstring muscles and the calves, it strengths the entire leg too.

Massages abdominal muscles – Chair pose also helps the core muscles, by tightening of the abdominal muscles, while holding the pose. Pulling the tummy in, while trying to bring the navel close to the spine, tightens the abdominal muscles.

Enhances breathing – The stretching of the shoulders brings an expansion of the chest, and helps the diaphragm to expand, improving the breathing. A conscious effort is needed to understand the movement of the body, while deep slow breathing happens in this pose.

Improves nervous system – Considering the joints are activated and toned in this pose, and also with deep stretch of the entire spine, the entire nervous system improves.

Improves stamina and immune system – With the expansion of the chest, the breathing improves, which stimulates the immune system. While building endurance, holding the pose for a longer duration builds stamina too.

Improves balance and builds focus – To stay in chair pose, the strength of the muscles plays a pivotal role to balance the body. To remain in balance, focus plays a great role here. In all, balance and focus go hand in hand, as this pose is both physically and mentally stimulating.

Modifications

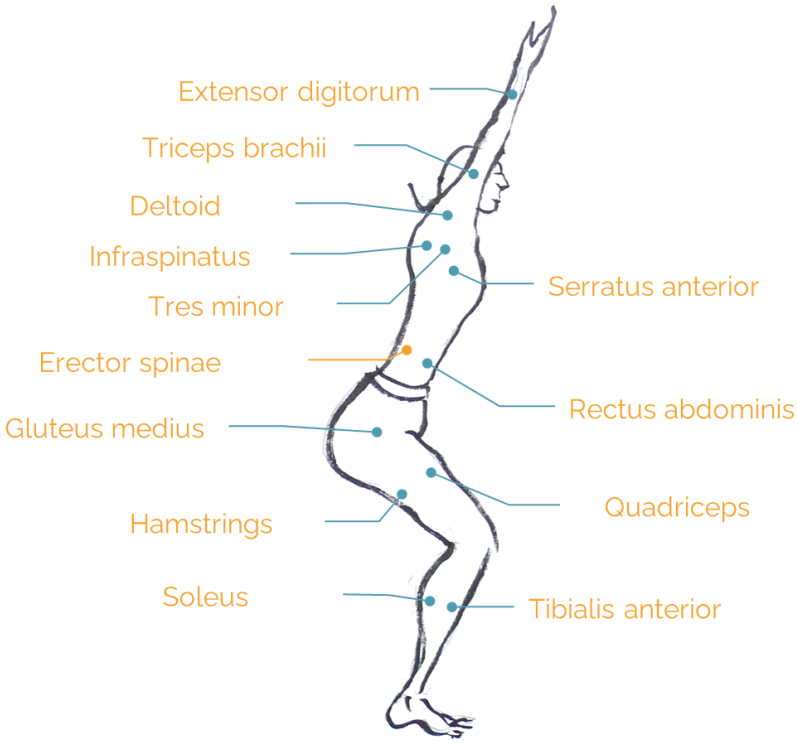
- Reduce the bend in the knees and place your hands at the heart center, instead of overhead, to reduce intensity of the pose, and to gradually build strength.
- Position the feet slightly apart, and place knees parallel for optimal balance.
- Engage the abdominal muscles and tilt the pelvis forward slightly if the spine is too concave.

Props

- Place a block between the thighs and squeeze it while in this pose.
- Place a block between the hands and squeeze to further engage the shoulders.
- Practice the squat with your back against the wall for more stability.

7.4.3 Chair pose muscles engaged

Posture 8: Chair Pose - Muscles Engaged



7.4.4 Chair pose contraindications

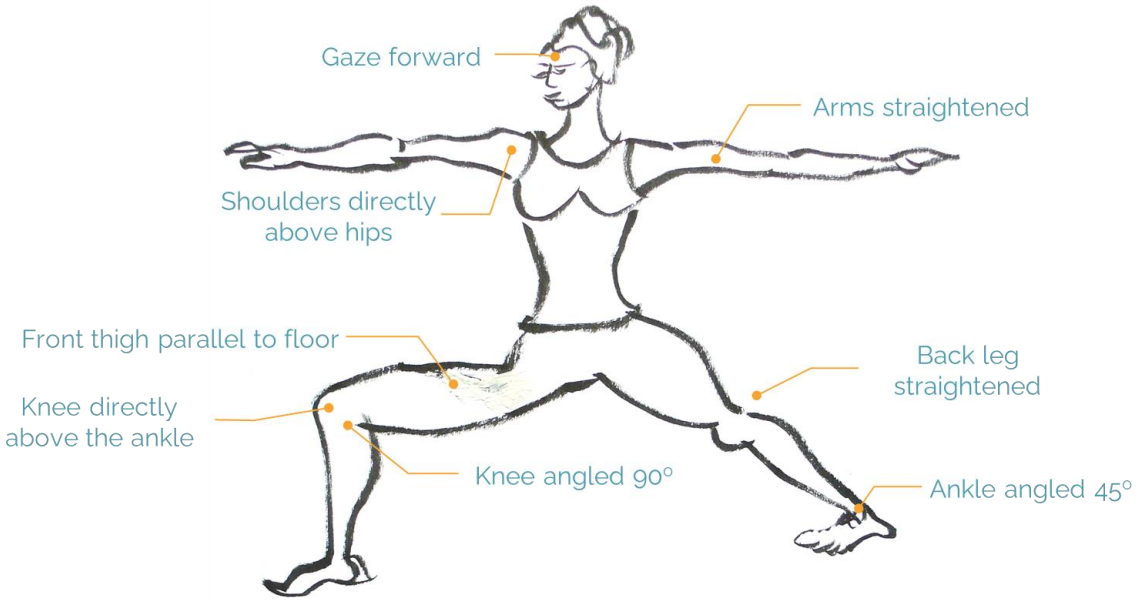
There are certain situations one should avoid while practicing the chair pose, such as:

- High or low blood pressure.
- Respiratory complications, as this posture requires increased oxygen consumption.
- Low back pathologies.
- Ankle, knee, hip, or shoulder injury.

7.5 Warrior II Pose

Warrior II pose is a standing strengthening posture, meant to energize the body and mind, while increasing concentration and stamina. The posture strengthens and stretches the legs and ankles, as it opens up the chest and hips. While practicing this pose, one feels having the strength, stability, confidence, and power of a warrior. Regular practice of Warrior II pose increases flexibility in the hips, as it strengthens and tones the legs, ankles, and feet. Additionally, it stimulates the abdominal organs and relieves backaches.

Posture 9: Warrior II Pose



7.5.1 Warrior II practice instructions

- Start in Mountain Pose.
- Step your right foot forward, with your front and back foot about one meter apart.
- Lift your arms straight out to the sides, so they are parallel to the floor.
- Keep your right foot straight, but turn your left foot out slightly, so that your toes are pointing away from your body.
- Bend the right knee over the right ankle, keeping your left leg straight.
- Tighten your tummy as though you are pressing your belly button towards your spine and pull up the pelvic floor.
- Hold for about thirty seconds, then straighten the right leg.
- Hold and repeat as many times as you feel comfortable, and then try the other side.

Consideration: The weight of the body must not fall entirely on the knee and the foot. The art of balancing the body and evenly distributing the weight must be kept in consideration.

7.5.2 Warrior II pose benefits

Stretching of hamstrings – In Warrior II pose, the focus is mainly on the legs and hamstrings. With bending of the knee and rooting of the foot firmly into the floor, stretches the upper thighs, as the flexion movement expansively stretches the hamstring muscles.

Flexing of hips – While it is important not to place the entire upper body weight on the hips, adjusting the hips, with alignment of the shoulders and feet, brings greater flexibility with practice. The hips flexion enables the lower part of the body into deep expansion of the legs, which works on strengthening of the hips, thus making it flexible.

Stretches knees, ankles, and feet – Flexing of the hips and stretching of the thighs, also stretches the knees, ankles, and the feet, and also helps strengthen the legs.

Expansion of chest and lungs – With the upper body raised, and the arms stretched out at the shoulder level, it opens the chest, giving room for deep breathing, by filling maximum air into the lungs. The expansion of the chest helps improve the lung capacity, while toning the upper abdomen muscles.

Expands and strengthens shoulders and arms – With arms stretched out at the shoulder level, this pose gives a great opening to the shoulders, with maximum expansion of the arms. This expansion strengthens the shoulders blades and the arms, while making it more flexible.

Stimulation of internal organs – With the flow of blood slightly constricted at the knees, the blood flows towards the upper body; hence increasing it. This supply of blood benefits the intestines, liver, and stomach; thus stimulating the entire abdominal area and internal organs.

Heals lower back pain – This posture is considered to heal the stiffness around the lower back, closer to the hips. Stretching of the muscles around the lower back, with flexing of the hips expands the muscles around the lower back. This action helps reduce tightness and stiffness, while healing back pain and rigid lower back.

Boosts stamina – Repeated practice of this pose boosts concentration and stamina, as it also builds stability and strength.

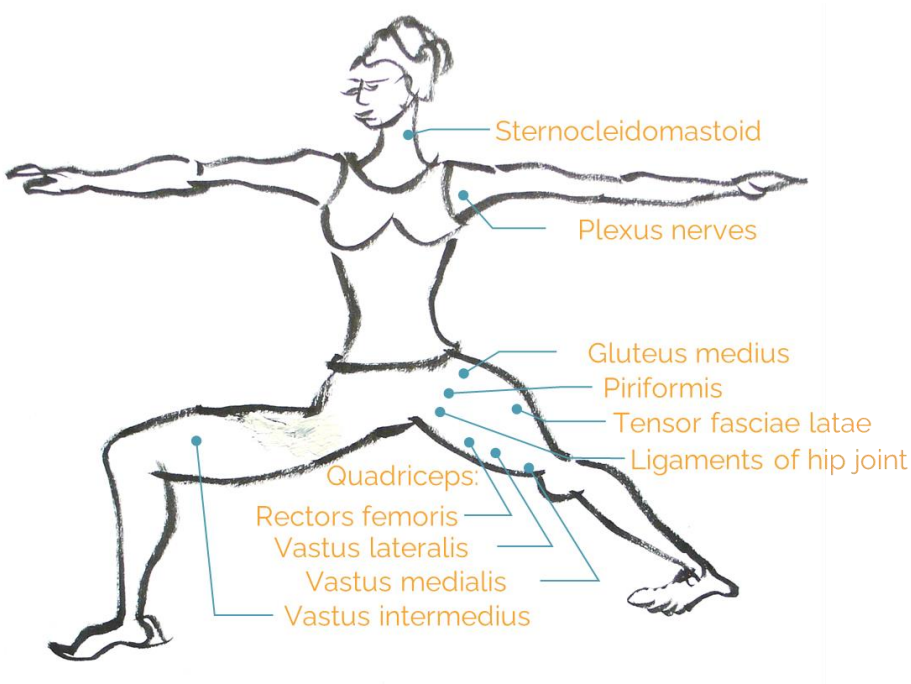
Promotes body alignment – Alignment of the feet, thighs, hips, and shoulders are paramount to attain optimal benefits. This pose builds shape and tones the entire body.

Tones leg muscles – Stretching of the thighs, knees, calves, and foot, helps tone the entire leg muscles, making them strong.

Awareness and balance – Warrior II like most poses bring awareness of the body, if the breathing is controlled and rhythmic. This awareness helps to improve the posture and hence master the pose gradually.

7.5.3 Warrior II Muscles Engaged

Posture 10: Warrior II Pose - Muscles Engaged



7.5.4 Warrior II pose contraindications

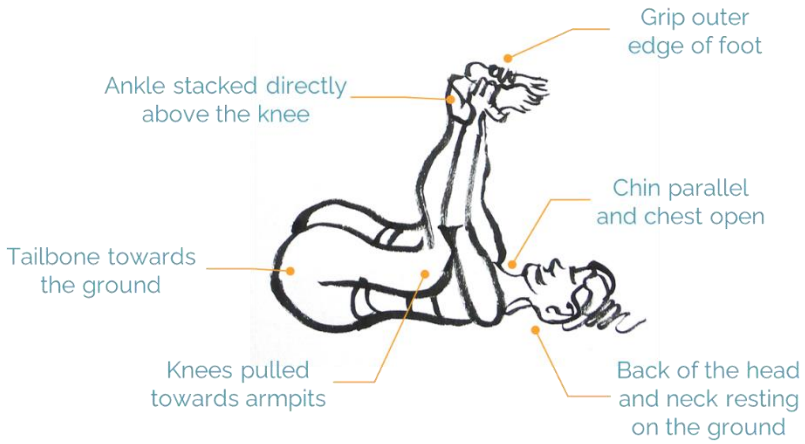
This posture involves majority of the muscle groups and requires a lot of focus to get all the pose elements right. Those suffering from following symptoms, must refrain from this pose:

- Diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Cardiac condition, heart palpitations
- Neck problems

7.6 Happy Baby Pose

Happy baby pose is an excellent grounding pose and an instant mood booster. This pose helps awakens your inner-child, as it melts away nervousness, relieves stress, and transforms your busy mind. It is gentle and soothing pose that is great for enhancing relaxation and stretching the body. This is an easy stress-relieving pose that gently stretches the lower back and calves, while opening the groin and inner thighs.

Posture 11: Happy Baby Pose



7.6.1 Happy baby pose practice instructions

- Place a yoga mat or thick towel down flat on the floor.
- Lay on the mat on your back and draw the knees into your chest.
- Hold onto your knees, inhale deeply and exhale.
- Grab the outside edges of your feet or wrap your index and middle around your big toes and pull your bent knees out to the side.
- Try to pull the knees as closely to the floor as you can, without causing any discomfort.
- Pull your feet back with your hands.
- Tighten your tummy as though you are pressing your belly button towards your spine and pull up the pelvic floor.
- You can rock from side to side to give your back a slight massage.
- Hold for as long as you feel comfortable.
- Then release your legs straight to the floor gently, with your arms at your side to relax.

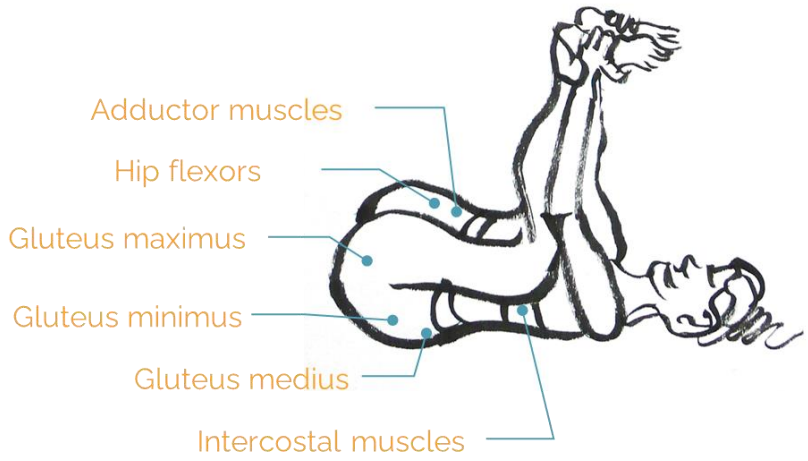
7.6.2 Happy baby pose benefits

Stretches and realigns – Happy baby pose mainly opens the chest while applying pressure on the inner thighs. This pose brings a deep stretch to the hips, hamstrings, calves, chest, triceps, biceps, abdominal and groin area, as it lengthens and re-aligns the spine.

Rejuvenates the body – If one regularly practices this pose, the stiffness of the lower back and the hips is reduced, and lower back pain is relieved. As this pose is done in supine body position, happy baby pose is helpful in bringing the heart rate down, which further brings calmness to the mind and body.

7.6.3 Happy Baby Pose Muscles Engaged

Posture 12: Happy Baby Pose - Muscles Engaged



Happy baby pose is primarily a hip opener, which has great benefits for the hip flexors and muscles of the legs. Leg muscles engaged in this pose are gluteus maximus, adductor magnus, gracilize, biceps femoris, semitendinosus, popliteus, tibialis posterior, sastrocnemius, and semimembranosus.

7.6.4 Happy baby pose contraindications

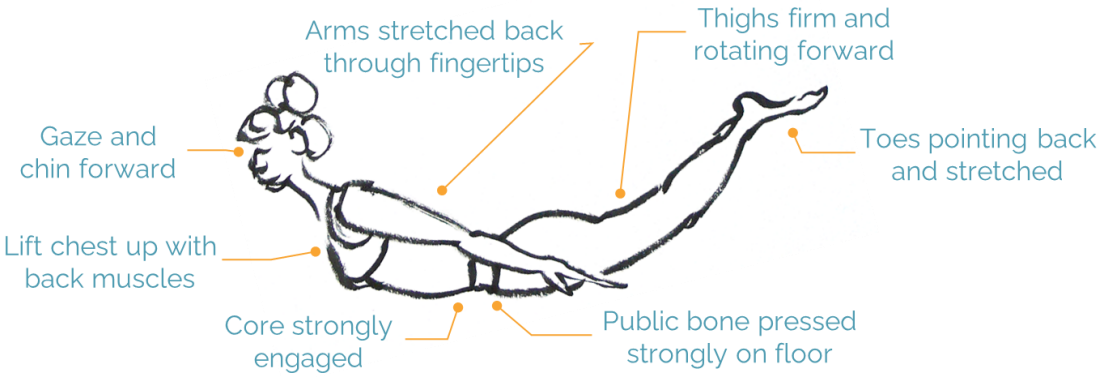
Even though this pose is simple, relaxing, and easy, you should still be careful. This pose is not recommended for:

- Not recommended for pregnant women.
- Those suffering from neck and shoulder injuries.
- Those who have any injury in the knee and the ankle.

7.7 Locust Pose

Locust pose is a spine stretching, and a back bending posture that builds strength in the back of the body, rightly using the complete strength of the upper portion of the body and the middle back. This posture strengthens lower and upper back, deltoids, triceps, abdominal muscles, buttocks, quadriceps, hamstrings, sartorius muscles, and calf muscles. It stimulates the digestive system, liver, and spleen; while increasing stamina and strength, plus improving coordination and flexibility.

Posture 13: Locust pose



7.7.1 Locust pose practice instructions

- Begin on your belly with your feet together, and your hands reaching back, or forward, palms facing down.
- Extend your big toes straight back and press down with all ten toenails to activate your quadriceps.
- Spin your inner thighs to the ceiling, to broaden your lower back.
- Keeping your hands lightly on the mat, raise your head, chest, and legs, leading with the inner thighs.
- Roll your shoulders back and up away from the floor.
- Keep the back of your neck long and emphasize lifting your sternum instead of lifting your chin.
- Do not grip your glutes.
- To come out of the pose, slowly release.

7.7.2 Locust pose benefits

Healthier back – The most important benefit is this pose stimulates the parasympathetic nerves in the lower spinal region and blood circulation. It removes the pressure on the sciatic nerve and provides relief from backache and slipped disc, and helps strengthen the back muscles. It also removes the stiffness around the lower back, legs, and neck, as it strengthens the neck muscles, rectifies neck pain, and repairs defects in the neck joints.

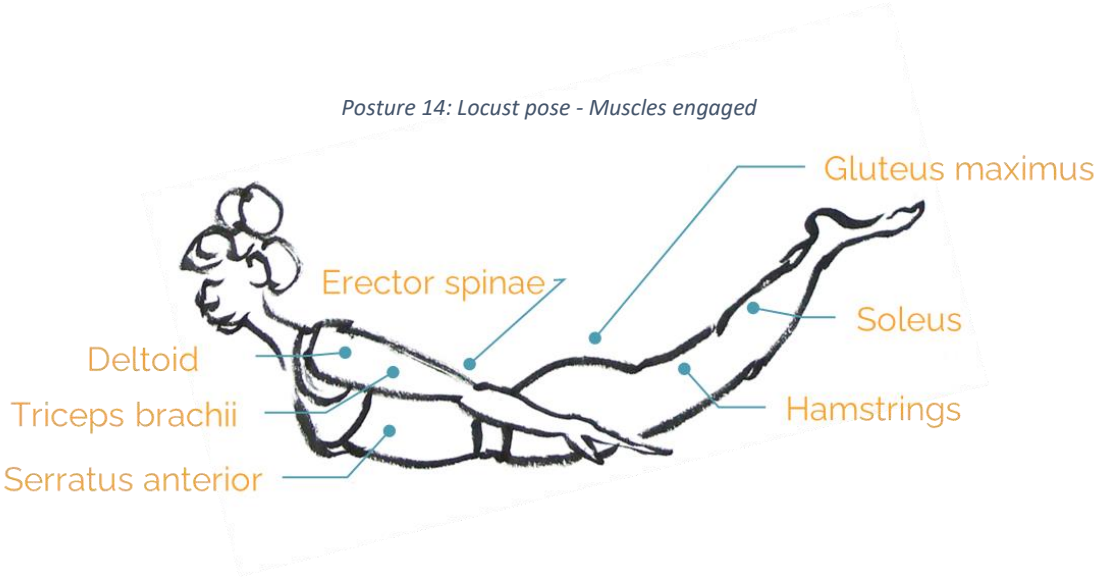
Strengthens abdominal organs – Pressure at the lower abdomen helps in rectifying urinary disorders, strengthens the reproductive system, strengthening the uterus, and helps in correcting menstrual problems. It also helps improve digestion, decrease constipation, improve functioning of the organs, and activity of the intestines.

Lesser pain and anxiety – Locust pose improves and stabilizes the blood circulation throughout the whole body, having a calming effect on the nervous system. This pose effectively alleviates anxiety and lets the practitioner properly unwind. The stretch provides additional benefits in the form of reduced pain, and lessened tension in the body.

Rejuvenates the body – This pose draws blood to the sacral region of the spine, and revitalizes the entire endocrine system, especially the adrenal glands. Locust pose flushes the kidneys with fresh blood supply of blood, which helps eliminate toxins. This pose also recharges the nervous system and releases venous blood from the legs, which helps to prevent varicose veins.

7.7.3 Locust pose muscles engaged

Posture 14: Locust pose - Muscles engaged



7.7.4 Locust pose contraindications

The very fact that this pose brings an impact on the lower back, care should be taken while practicing this pose. Some of the contraindications are listed below:

- Those with acute back pain or slip disc should avoid this pose.
- Those with severe sciatica should avoid, as this pose tightens the entire body from the hip to the feet.
- Those who have major problems with menstruation or with a prolapsed uterus should avoid this pose.
- Women in their pregnancy should avoid this pose.
- Those who have blood pressure problems should avoid this pose.

8. Practice Preparation Guidelines

In order to optimally prepare for the yoga practice, you must have the proper tools and knowledge to enhance your yoga experience on the mat. Knowing what is expected, and what works ahead of time, will help you feel more comfortable during your class. Here are some tips to suitably prepare for your session:

- Prepare your body

  Do not eat 1-3 hours before the practice. Drink water throughout the day, so the body is well hydrated and prepared for movement and stretching.

- Materials

  Before the yoga class, you will want a non-slip yoga mat. Wear appropriate clothes that are easy to move around in, stretchy and comfortable.

- Embrace beginner mindset

  Keep an open mind to set yourself up for success. Try to embrace the suggestions from your instructor to enhance your yoga experience.

- Trust your teacher

  Listen carefully to your instructor and follow the sequence to the best of your ability. Maintain proper yoga etiquette and rest when needed.

- Breathe

  Focus on your breath, and link your breath with the movement, for the entire sequence. It helps to create a sense of calm and enhances the mind-body connection.

- Take yoga off the mat

  Reflect on the physical, mental, and emotional benefits from the class. True transformation and growth come with daily devotion and attention. Strive for consistency and celebrate the small victories along the way.

It is recommended that you do these postures after a hot shower or bath. Do your practice where you can focus and pay attention to your body and your breathing while stretching. You'll want to recognize if you are tightening your pelvic floor, so you can learn to let go the tension, with awareness of your mind-body-breath movement.

Proper technique of strengthening, stabilizing, stretching, and softening the pelvic floor helps to create the correct foundation by each movement in the body. By focusing on your breath, being mindful of your movement, and connecting with your body through these practices, you are able to relax, heal and strengthen from within.