



ASHTANGA YOGA

THE PRIMARY SERIES

Yoga Chikitsā



Practices to unlock our inner intelligence for bringing about physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health!

LINDA MUNRO & GÉRALD DISSE



Ashtanga Yoga

The Primary Series

Yoga Chikitsā

*“Wisdom tells me I am nothing.
Love tells me I am everything.
And between the two my life flows.”
— Nisargadatta Maharaj*

*Let the differences between all be nothing
and let the love that is within all be everything.
And may all unite in yoga... oneness.*

We dedicate this book to this intention.

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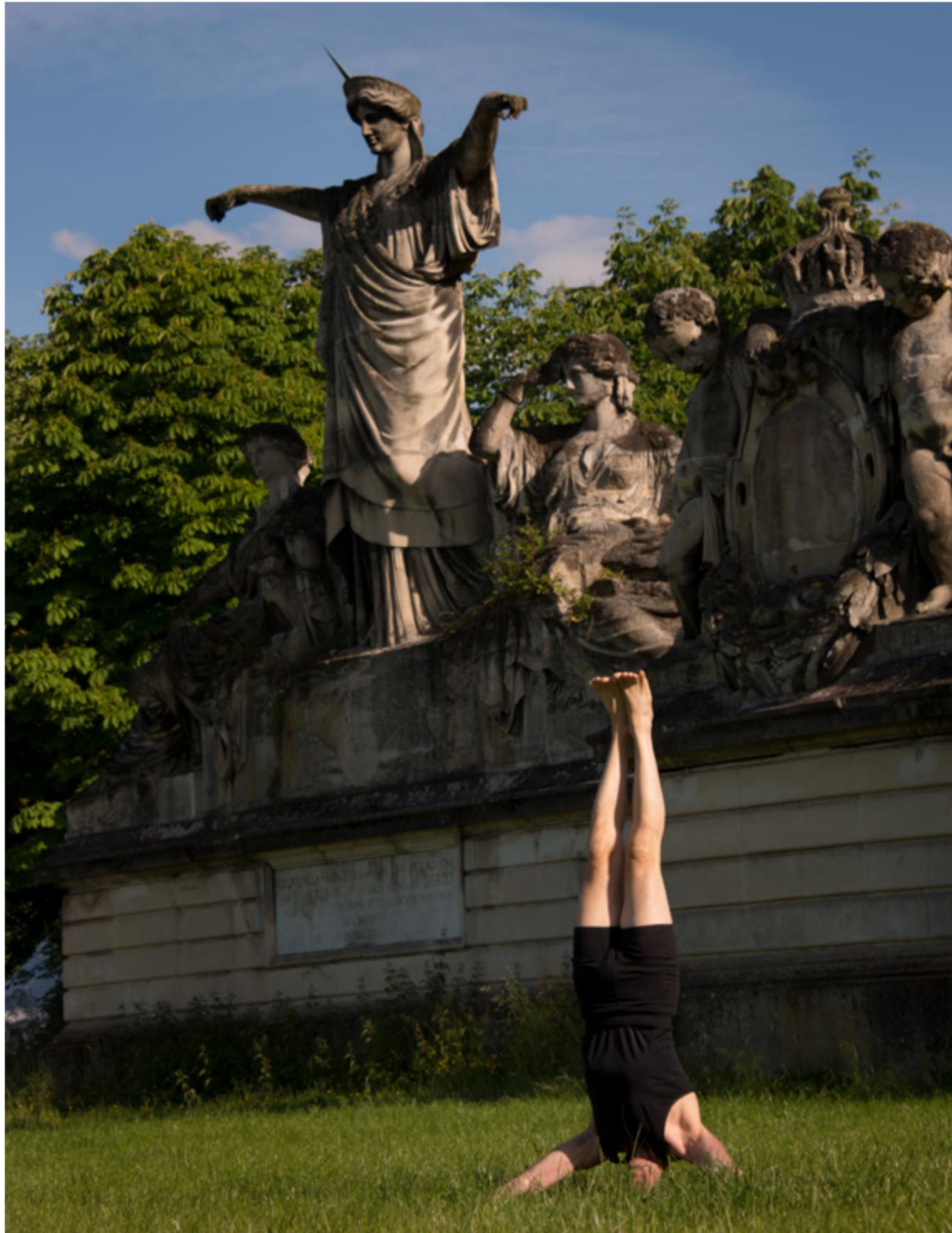
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Gratitude

When one embarks on a project such as writing a book and especially a book about something as old and deep as yoga we must recognize the fact that we could not do it without the support of many! From our teachers to those who help us run Aṣṭāṅga Yoga Paris to our children, Amaya and Jonathan, who manage to melt our hearts over and over; all have participated in the coming together of this project.

We have been formed and informed over the years of yoga study, therefore this book represents the voices of all those avenues of inspiration; from intense study with our teachers, to simple life lessons and wonderfully written yoga articles, all have come together to embody our teaching styles.

In ancient Indian times, we would have authored this book “Vyāsa” – compiler – as we cannot take credit for the knowledge that has been so generously granted by our teachers, mentors, friends, yoga students and countless other sources.

In ‘compiling’ this information we give special thanks to:

Śrī K. Pattabhi Jois – the gurū of Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa Yoga – for introducing this practice to Gérard, for offering a sincere smile every time we saw him and for keeping the practice alive.

Ron Reid – Linda’s first yoga teacher – for continually inspiring both of us with his amazing intelligence of the yoga and how to make it healthy and approachable for all!

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Gleb Kororukov – friend and talented photographer – who spent hours with us taking photos, indoors and outdoors!

And especially the **Aṣṭāṅga Yoga Paris yoga community** – teachers and students – who have studied with us over the years giving us the sacred gift of being able to live from imparting yoga and supporting us to continue to do what we love by being so receptive and inspiring! Every single person is a bead on the beautiful mālā that makes up a thriving yoga community!

Thanks to **Daniela Escobar** who did the tedious work of entering all our text into the ‘special book software’ and **Sofia Larsén** who spent hours putting all the text and photos into place and more! Thank you to **Anni Tamminen** who did some additional detail photos and is always ready for a new project. And much thanks to **Marla Meenakshi Joy** for reading and correcting the Sanskrit errors!

Lastly and certainly not least! These very special people who have inspired us to live yogic lives and their teachings are weaved into our understanding of yoga as a whole, therefore into this book: **Ramana Maharshi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Serge Vallade, Chuck Miller, Eddie Stern** and **Georg Feuerstein**.

Our sincere gratitude,
Gérald Disse and Linda Munro



The Fundamentals of the Ashtanga Vinyāsa Practice

To fully comprehend the essence of the Aṣṭāṅga system there are a few concepts that we need to study thoroughly.

How to Breathe

Ujjayī Prānāyāma

*The first and most important is the breath!
We do a special breathing technique, which is called Ujjayī Prānāyāma.*

The Sanskrit word Ujjayī means ‘victorious’ and Prānāyāma can be divided in two ways to mean either ‘extension of the Prāna (the life force)’ or ‘control of the breath’.

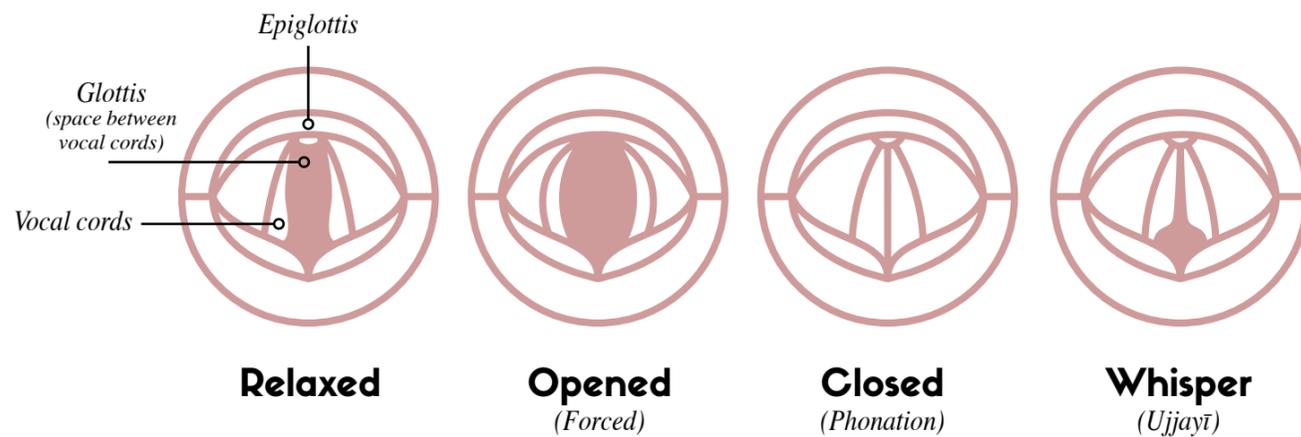
Therefore it can be called “victorious extension of the life force”.

With Ujjayī Prānāyāma we are making a soft sound as we breathe by slightly contracting the glottis at the back of the throat while the air is passing in and out of the body.

*This contraction brings the vocal cords closer together like when we whisper.
The sound that is produced helps us to keep our awareness on the breath during the entire practice and it is a sound that calms the nervous system. When we are not able to keep the breath smooth and even it means we are doing too much and thus aggravating the nervous system.*

Another important effect of Ujjayī is, as the passage for the air to pass through is narrowed, this both lengthens the breathing and heats the air as it passes, which has the benefit of heating the body.

Pattabhi Jois used to say that Ujjayī ‘boils the blood’ in order to purify it.



Ujjayī Humour

If you are familiar with the Star Wars films you will remark that the sound of Ujjayī Prānāyāma is quite similar to Darth Vader’s breathing. In fact, as I often say to neophyte yoga students: Darth Vader used to practice Aṣṭāṅga before he stopped and became a villain. The moral of the story is one must never quit their yoga practice.

Prānāyāma

This Sanskrit word is composed of prāna, āyāma and yama.

Prāna is the life force and on the gross level it is expressed through the breath.

Āyāma means extension and yama means control or restraint.

This is how we can translate prānāyāma as either ‘extension of the life-force’ or ‘control of the breath’. However, the two meanings are intimately linked because it is said that controlling the breath extends the length of our life!

Therefore, Ujjayī Prānāyāma is the Victorious Control of the Breath and Extension of the Life-Force!

Learning the Technique:

1. We always breathe in and out through the nose. The nose is built to obstruct particles in the air from entering the lungs and when we breathe through the nose it is easier to lengthen the inhalations and exhalations.



2. To learn how to contract the throat we can start with the mouth open, placing a hand in front of the mouth, breathing in and out through the mouth ‘as if’ trying to steam up a piece of glass. Feeling the air warm on the hand with the exhalation and cool with the inhalation.



3. Once we are able to do this comfortably we shut the mouth midway through the exhalation and push the air out the nose and then inhaling with the same slight contraction in the throat.

4. Notice that the air is not felt coming through the end of the nose near the nostrils, it’s almost as if the air is first coming through at the mid-bridge part of the nose. If the sound is coming from the end of the nose, then it is not correct. As well, if the sound is too loud, forceful or uneven, it is not correct.

Some Trivia about the Breath

When we pay attention to the subtleties of our breathing we remark that the air entering the lungs is cooler than the air exiting. The average person takes between 15 and 16 breaths per minute, whereas a Yogi who practices prānāyāma can lower this to about 4 or 5 breaths. The consequence of lengthening our breath is a longer life. The slowing of the breath reduces stress on the heart. If we take a look at the animal kingdom, those which have long lives, like elephants or the large tortoises, have slow breathing rhythms as opposed to hummingbirds or squirrels which have very short lives.

The texts of yoga state that we are born with a certain number of breaths, which is about 21,600 per day. Now if we are able to divide this number by 4 or 5 (between 4,300 and 5,500 per day) this translates into a pretty remarkable lengthening of longevity. (Just a side note: this isn’t suggesting short shallow breathing will increase you life span – just the opposite.)

It’s also interesting to notice that the flow of breath dominates in one nostril at a time, alternating between the right

and left nostrils every 90 minutes, more or less, in an average healthy person. The right nostril is called Sūrya or Pingala Nadi, the nostril of the sun that heats the body whereas, the left nostril, Chandra or Idā Nadi, the nostril of the moon, cools the body.

It’s important when we want to fall asleep that the left nostril is the more active one. If it is not, then we can help it flow by lying on the right side of our body while falling asleep.

The Idā and Pingala channels directly influence the brain: Idā (left) relates with the right hemisphere and the Pingala (right) relates with the left hemisphere of the brain.

“The hemisphere that speaks does not know and the hemisphere that knows does not speak.”

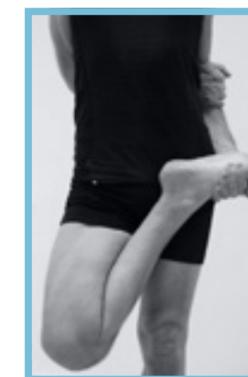
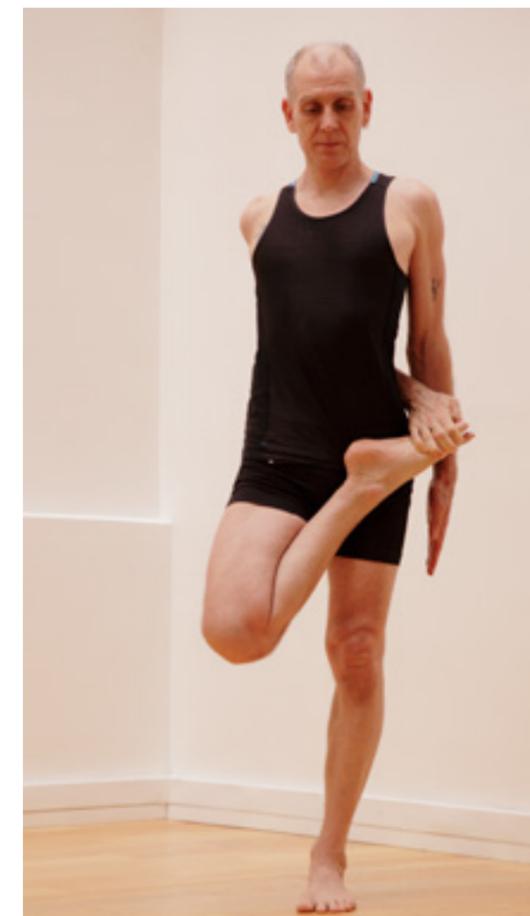
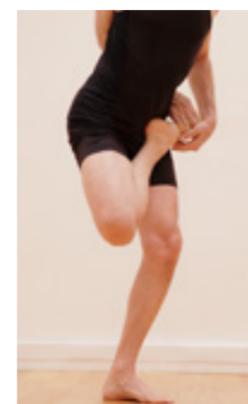
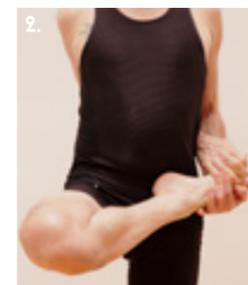
Let’s spend a moment on the physiology of the brain, this incredible computer that is located inside our skull, the command control of everything that happens in our body. The two hemispheres are different from one another but complement one another marvelously. The left hemisphere (Pingala) is associated with logic, intellect, thought, linear thinking, language, time, analyses; it is active and represents our masculine side, Yang. The right hemisphere (Idā) is associated with intuition, silence, space, the experience of being here now, emotions and sentiments; it is passive and represents our feminine side, Yin.

The brain controls our central nervous system, which contains the motor and sensory nerves and the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system is divided into the sympathetic nervous system – guided by Pingala – and the parasympathetic nervous system – guided by Idā.

Ardha Baddha Padmottānāsana

Standing Half Bound Lotus Posture
(Drṣṭi ~ Nose)

Another one-legged balance pose that requires us to focus intensely; especially with one leg in this iconic yoga position – lotus or padmāsana. We'll go into more ways to work on lotus and knee safety when we come to the sitting poses since here the priority is standing firm in the balance.



Variation when the "Arm is too Short"

That's a joke, rarely is it actually because someone's arm is too short but that is what we may feel. In any case no problem, either we hold on to the other arm or even use a yoga belt or towel looped around the foot in lotus to 'make the arm longer'. Whether to still fold forward or not is a choice that needs to be evaluated individually. It depends how well placed the foot in lotus is so it is best to ask a qualified and experienced teacher to have a look.



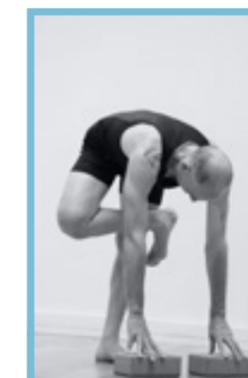
Variation when the Knee is Fragile ~ Vrṁśāsana / Tree Pose :

The first pose we could choose as a variation is the classic tree pose. Although if you choose to do this, try to get the benefits of opening the inner line of the leg by being steadfast in keeping the pelvis aligned and reaching the bent knee away in the same line as the femur bone.

Step-by-Step Vinyāsas:

1. Starting from Samasthitiḥ we slowly start to shift the weight to the left leg and bend the right knee, lifting the knee up towards the chest, keeping the knee closed we place our hands under the ankle to keep it straight and supported as we rotate the hip joint externally to let the knee come out to the side.
2. While continuing to support the ankle we can reach around the back to see if we can get the big toe (if that is not possible, take the arm as in the modified options), once the toe is held then we can slowly let the right knee lower. It is better to move slowly here so that if something doesn't feel right in the knee we can stop before getting into trouble.
3. Then have a look at the floor to find a point to place the left hand when folding over with the next exhalation.
4. Inhaling we get more length in the torso before exhaling into the full pose to hold it for 5 long breaths.
5. On the sixth inhale we lift and lengthen the spine, bend the standing leg exhale in place, press firm into the floor with the standing foot and come back up to stand with an inhalation.
6. Remove the leg from padmāsana with as much care as getting into it and repeat with the opposite leg.

With one leg in this iconic yoga position – lotus or padmāsana



Variation to Stretch the Buttock and Thigh Areas

Bending the standing leg, we place the opposite foot over the lower portion of the standing thigh. Then we can fold over the standing leg and work towards straightening the standing leg and folding the torso into it. Be aware to always keep the foot of the upper leg flexed.



A Little Shaky in the Pose:

If this is a new pose, it is best to go into it slowly with attention not to fall over. A tip to fold forward is to keep the standing leg bent until the hand or fingertips are firm on the ground and to find a point on the floor to focus on and place the hand on that point.



Sitting Sequence of Āsanās

Ardha Baddha Padma Paśchimottānāsana

*Bound Half-Lotus Intense West Stretch
(Dṛṣṭi ~ Nose or Toes)*

Remember we already did this pose as a standing pose.

We could ask ourselves, why don't we do this version before the standing version, which makes the pose even more challenging because not only do we have to have flexibility but we have to have it while balancing on one foot! The answer is because in the Aṣṭāṅga Vinyāsa system we are first and foremost concerned with finding balance, stability and centeredness.

Then once we have a certain amount of those qualities we are able to find a deeper expression of the pose while continuing to train ourselves to keep centered and stable by engaging mūla and uḍḍīyāna bandhas. As this is quite an advanced āsana that requires a great deal of external rotation of the hip joint we will explore different ways to prepare the joint for this movement and how to go safely into the pose and the general anatomy of the knee.



Step-by-Step Vinyāsas:

1. After coming through to sit from the linking Vinyāsa, we bend the right knee in, open the leg at the hip joint and place the leg in the half lotus position on the top of the left thigh. Reaching behind the back with the right arm we clasp the toes with the first two fingers and the thumb and then reach forward with the left arm to hold the outside of the left foot.

2. Inhale lifting away from the leg, straightening the arm and lengthening the spine.

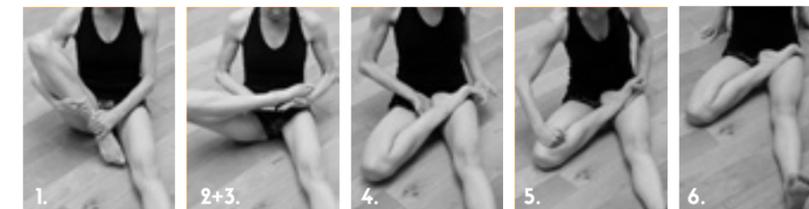
3. Then exhale to fold into the position and hold it for five long breaths. Reminding ourselves of everything we already learnt about performing forward bending and asymmetrical poses with intelligence.

4. Inhale we lift the chest, straightening the arm and exhale to release the pose.

5. Here we can either lift up to do a Vinyāsa to link to the other side of the pose or just move directly into the other side, repeating steps 1 through 4 with the right leg straight and the left leg in half lotus.

6. After 5 breaths on the second side we always do the Vinyāsa to link to the next āsana.

As this is quite an advanced āsana we will explore different ways to go safely into the pose and the general anatomy of the knee



Breaking Down the Steps to bring a Leg into Half Lotus

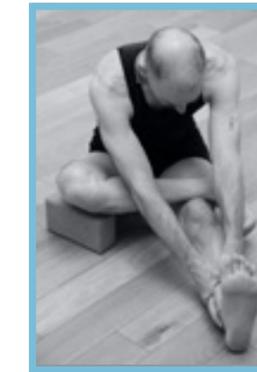
It's wise to learn to go into lotus step by step with mindfulness so as not to rush it and oops, one day the knee is moved incorrectly causing an injury. In general the knee is safest when it is either fully extended (straight) or fully flexed (bent), the movements in between are when the knee is most vulnerable.

1. Bend one knee back to close it fully.
2. Then open the leg to the side from the hip joint.

3. Leaning back slightly we place the ankle in our hands to ensure the ankle isn't collapsing. As soon as the ankle is bent, it risks the movement going into the knee rather than staying in the hip joint.

4. Then without losing the stability of the ankle we start to bring the foot towards the navel to lay it down on the top of the thigh with the outer line of the foot lined up with the groin.

5. If there is any sensation of compression or pulling in



Modification for Half Lotus:

Actually this modification serves as both a modification of the pose and a preparation for half lotus.

Instead of bringing the foot into a lotus position we bring the ankle just over the opposite knee. Being aware as we move into it that the movement is coming from the external rotation at the hip joint and not twisting of the knee! The ankle must stay completely flexed and if necessary a block or blanket can be placed under the 'lotus' knee to support it. When the leg is in the correct position then we can attempt to fold forward.



How to Wrap the Arm to Get the Toe behind the Back?

When reaching to get the big toe behind the back we can take the following steps to ensure the shoulder socket is moving in a safe and healthy way. And, if the arm seems a bit 'short' we can lengthen it by using a yoga belt or towel to bind the foot.

1. We reach the arm out to the side to keep the chest area broad, rotate the arm internally so that the thumb points to the ground.
2. Then we bend the elbow and are either holding the big toe or a yoga belt that is wrapped around the foot.

Anatomy of the Knee Joint

The joint consists of two of the longest bones of the body coming together: the femur and the tibia. In addition there is the fibula and patella. The cruciate and the collateral ligaments stabilize the knee. The Menisci are crescent shaped cartilaginous pads that lay between the articular cartilage that is on the ends of the femur and tibia bones. They act as shock absorbers as well as creating cups to protect the articular cartilage of the knobby femoral condyles on the flat tibial plateau.



Preparations for Half Lotus:

An excellent way to isolate the lengthening action to the thighs, these two preparation exercises, along with intelligent forward bending āsanās, may one day bring us the ability to do half lotus in a safe and rational way.

1. Lying on our back, we bend one leg up, placing the sole of the foot on the floor and then bending the other leg to close the back of the knee fully before bringing the foot to rest on the floor behind the opposite buttock. Take hold of the foot resting on the floor with the opposite hand to keep the feet firm in place while we keep the pelvis anchored on the floor (avoiding lifting one side up which actually just avoids the stretch) and try to reach the 'lotus' knee away at the same angle as the femur bone. It can be useful to have a friend carefully help us to find the lengthening action. See the photo to have a friend help us.
2. If the first exercise is easy then we are ready to try the second one. Lying on our back we bend one leg in to close the knee fully before bringing the foot over the top of the opposite thigh. The warning here is to never let the ankle bend! The ankle and shin should be at a straight line as if there is no bend available at the ankle joint. If this is not possible it means there is more work to be done in the first exercise. Then once again, a friend can help with the lengthening as shown in the photo.

Drop Backs

Traditionally, once our *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* is quite deep and we are ready for another challenge, we start learning to stand up from the position and drop back into it from standing.

It isn't for everyone, for sure, but if one has a very open back and wishes to work on more strengthening then it can be fun!



Gaining Faith, Foundation & Flexibility

This project needs to be done with your teacher. With 'no arms' you will need to have faith in your teacher that he/she will not let you drop and you will need to use your legs more than ever! The added benefit is that with the weight of the torso hanging back it aids in arching the back into a deep back bend. Traditionally this project is done after the three drop backs described below.



From Standing to Back Bending – Getting Started:

The first step is to get used to being on our feet, relying on the groundedness of our legs and arching back as far as we can before coming back up to stand. Slowly, slowly getting lower and lower to the floor until one day our hands are close enough that we can have faith and let them drop to the floor. Below are several steps to work on; we only need to go to the place that feels secure and as we work on it patiently and consistently, one day we may get all the way to the final step!

1. Standing at the front of the mat in *Samasthitih* we place our hands on our back with the thumbs on the sacrum and the fingers pointing away from the center of the back. Then we 'walk' our hands up our back, lengthening the space between each and every vertebrae as we work up.

2. When the hands are at the level of the thoracic spine we try to place our thumbs at the bottom angle of the shoulder blades and then press them forward as we broaden the space between them. Anatomically what we are doing is laterally rotating the shoulder blades and feel as they are going to come through the front of the upper chest; this action will open the heart center and get some life into the upper back.

3. Preserving the opening, we now place the hands on the upper inner thighs from behind. We use our hands to remind us to keep the buttocks from squeezing and the legs from turning out. Walk the hands down the legs, as the hips move forward (however, not so much that the heels come off the floor or that the knees bend).

4. Once the hands can reach somewhere around the level of the knees we are ready to reposition them to the front of the chest. This can be scary if there is not enough stability in the legs, so take your time to build up the strength until the fear slowly subsides.

5. At this point we can work towards reaching the hands to the forehead and over the head, slowly arching the back more and more, beginning to bend the knees and reach until we feel we will lose it if we go any further. At this point we push the feet, squeeze the front of the body and come all the way back to *Samasthitih* with the head being the very last part to lift up.

6. Basically if we work this way, once we actually get the hands to the floor we will know how to get back up because we have trained all the same areas to go down as we need to come back up however, it is best to work this with a teacher as it is beyond the scope of this book to go into greater detail.

If we are working on going all the way down and standing back up by ourselves then after the third *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana*, instead of lying on the floor, we come to stand and then drop back two more times (so that we have come to standing three times). When working with a teacher we can by cross our arms across our body, taking the arms out of the picture to increase the strength in the legs, and go back 3 or 4 times, then do one final *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* before going into either hand stand, *Adho Mukha Vrksāsana*, or the counter position; *Paśchimottānāsana*.

Matsyāsana

Fish Pose
(*Drṣṭi ~ Nose*)

This is the counter pose to the previous sequence where the neck has been in a flexed position; now we are extending the spine, opening the chest and throat. One thing to keep in mind however, is to move slowly from one movement to the next so that the cervical joints are not 'shocked' by going quickly from one end of range of movement to the other end.



Getting into Matsyāsana:

1. From Piṅḍāsana, we place our hands behind the back on the floor and slowly roll ourselves so that the back is on the floor.

2. Then we press into the elbows to use the arms to lift the chest from the floor and place the back part of the top of the head onto the floor. We want to be attentive not to crunch the back of the neck by resisting going into our maximum extension. This is accomplished by pulling the chin towards the chest just 2 or 3 millimetres before touching the head to the floor.

3. The back muscles are engaged while holding Matsyāsana to support the spine therefore, we can release our elbows from the floor and take a hold of our feet. If there is any pinching sensation in the spine try tucking the tailbone slightly, if this does not release the pinching then do the modified Fish pose that protects the lower back.



Modifications to Lotus Legs in the Fish

If full Padmāsana isn't the pose for you, you can keep the legs in one of the many other options!

1. Half lotus. Just one leg in the lotus position, instead of them both. Switch the lotus leg from day to day.
2. Crossed legs.
3. Straight legs.
4. Lastly, this is the best one when we have an achy lower back. Straight legs with the hands placed under the buttocks to support the back.

Uttāna Pādāsana

Extended Legs Pose
(*Drṣṭi ~ Nose*)

I like to call this Fish with straight legs. It's harder than it looks and is great for strengthening the hip flexors, thighs and abdomen! It's the final part of the shoulder stand sequence.



Getting into Uttāna Padāsāna:

1. If we are entering the pose from any version of Matsyāsana with the legs in a crossed position, we just unravel the legs, extend them out at an angle from the floor and bring the arms to the same angle.

2. However, if we are entering the pose from a version of Matsyāsana where the legs are straight, we need to first bend the knees towards the body and then straighten them out, in order to avoid too much strain on the lower back.

3. To come out of the pose we press the elbows to the floor, tucking the chin and lowering the back of the head onto the floor before lifting the legs over the head for Chakrāsana.



Chakrāsana - Vinyāsa

Confronting the Myths about Ashtanga Yoga

Injurious

Depending on the way you choose to practice it!

There is a lot of talk about yoga causing injury but upon deeper inspection into specific cases, we usually see that it is not the yoga that is the problem, rather it is the mental attitude during the yoga practice. Are we listening to our body's subtle messages? Or are they being overridden by what we think we 'ought to be doing' to satisfy the form of the practice, our teacher, our desires or our need to be praised? Aṣṭāṅga has the ability to be healing or harming depending on the approach. We have the choice to use the practice the way we want to. If we wish to use it to heal then we need to remind ourselves of that intention when getting on our mat; to be ever vigilant that it is not our desiring mind and ego driving our practice.

As David Swenson says, "Aṣṭāṅga is a tool. If I start smashing my thumb with a hammer or hit someone over the head with it, I'm not going to blame the tool."

Real flexibility is about being able to accept that others have the right to be different from us

It is OUR personal practice and we need to remind ourselves of this every day, to stay on the right track. If you are into Aṣṭāṅga because of the extreme challenges it places on you, no problem, you can practice in the way that gives you the 'high'. People have been looking for adventure through-out the ages. Aṣṭāṅga, in some way, can give us this adventure however, we need to be clear that it can be risky. When we manage to stay honest, then the practice will be what we want it to be. Be free to use it as the tool and be free to change the job of the tool as needed. If we do get an injury we can use the experience as a way to grow and understand ourselves better. Sometimes when we 'fall' it helps us learn how to stay standing.

Only For Young, Flexible, Strong People

Or those wanting to feel young and become strong & flexible!

Aṣṭāṅga is a personal practice, it is self-empowering so that means we need to use this wonderful 'tool' of yoga in the way that suits our personal needs! We don't need to be flexible, young, strong or anything like that to do Aṣṭāṅga yoga. All we need is our breath and some motivation.

By the way, real flexibility is about being able to accept that others have the right to be different from us, have different opinions and live their life in different ways, so long as they are not causing harm. And true strength is to be able to go through this life, through the ups and downs, while remaining equanimous.

The Aṣṭāṅga practice reveals our weaknesses: physically, mentally and emotionally. This is true and some see those weaknesses and want to run away and hide from them. If we choose to continue with our practice we will absolutely have to face them! In our opinion, this is one of the most powerful qualities of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga.

**"The strongest trees
in the forest grow
the slowest"**

- David Swenson



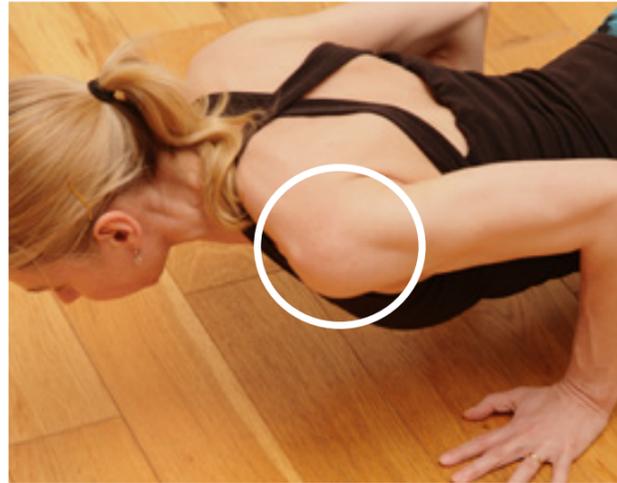
Neck *A pain in the neck!*

Many people suffer from neck sensitivity, especially now-a-days with all our technological gadgets that pull our heads forward, placing a lot of strain on the neck and upper back to hold the head up. It's become a chronic problem of our age. On the bright side, yoga relieves the tension and teaches us to place our heads in a healthier position! I've had neck problems since I was quite young and thank goodness for the practice, it helps me manage the sensitivity. The main thing I suggest to everyone is to keep the movement in the neck! Don't freeze it and be scared to move, in my experience, this just makes it worse. After long flights or drives, being a bit too daring in certain yoga poses, or simply being tired or stressed for some reason, my neck will feel stiff. When this happens, I always make a big effort to move it, even if it is very intense and after an hour of specific practice to loosen up my neck and upper back, I feel much better!

Some general rules: 1) lengthen the back of the neck from the occiput upwards but don't pull the shoulders down strongly – this will over-stretch the neck muscles causing discomfort, 2) the head should only go back if the chest lifts, otherwise all the movement is coming from the cervical vertebra, 3) soften the jaw and facial muscles, 4) avoid letting the head 'hang' back by keeping a mini-bandha effect in the front of the throat – just a few millimeters – so that the vertebra are not collapsing into one another, 5) don't flatten the cervical on the floor in the finishing sequence!

If you have previous injury in the neck you need to be especially attentive to the following poses and perhaps do the prep work or variations instead:

Pūrvottānāsana
Supta Kūrmāsana
Supta Koṇāsana
Chakrāsana
Ubhaya Pādānguṣṭhāsana
Ūrdhva Mukha Paśchimottānāsana
Setu Bandhāsana
Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana
Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana & whole sequence
Matsyāsana
Uttāna Pādāsana
Śīrṣāsana



Shoulders *A Weight on the Shoulders!*

The shoulder joint is perfect for mobility and slightly less built for stability which is kind of contrary to our Aṣṭāṅga practice where we use the arms and shoulder girdle a lot for stability! This is totally fine and great for building our self-confidence and inner strength so long as they are done well. We have found anchoring and healthy alignment in the shoulder area avoids unnecessary strain however, unfortunately sometimes we have to learn this lesson the hard way!

Some general rules: 1) in all the positions where the arms are over the head, maintain external rotation of the upper arm bone, 2) and allow the shoulder blade to move with the rest of the arm as if the arm starts from the inferior tip of the shoulder blade, 3) with all binding or bringing the arm behind you be sure keep a tiny bit of internal rotation and the head of the humerus bone 'connected' to the chest, 4) build strength with a steady, consistent practice and gradually you will have the strength to do the poses that demand a lot from the shoulder girdle in a safe and invigorating way!

If you have a shoulder injury or there is something feeling not quite right around the joint then be especially aware of the following poses that you are doing them properly or have the strength/flexibility necessary:

Lifting the arms during Sun salutations
ChaturaṅgaDandāsana
Adho Mukha Śvānāsana
Parivṛta Pārśvakoṇāsana
Prasārita Padottānāsana C
Pārśvottānāsana
Pūrvottānāsana
Kūrmāsana
Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana
Adho Mukha Vṛkṣāsana
Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana & whole sequence
Śīrṣāsana

Glaucoma

If you have this eye disease you need to avoid all inversions (where the head is below the waist) and a very strenuous approach to yoga practice.

Headache

It depends on why you have headaches, if it has to do with circulation problems or neck problems it can be extremely helpful. The best is to try practicing and if it feels like your headache is getting worse when you start, then you can do some restorative yoga poses instead. Often once we start practicing the headache starts to ease, really depends on the situation.

Wrists

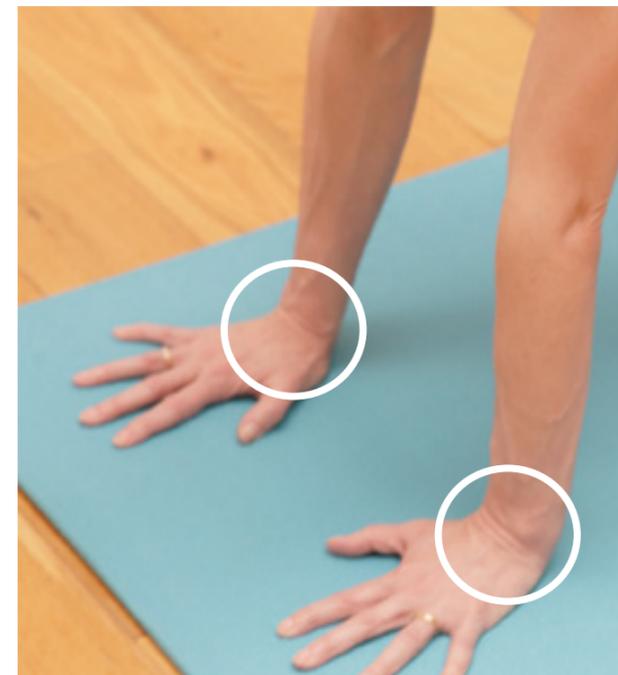
Share the work with the fingers!

When the majority of people come to yoga they have never used their hands to support their body weight or even a portion of their weight. So, it can be a lot to ask for from this delicate part of the body. However, if we can learn to use the fingers and the muscles of the hands then we get stronger and feel more powerful and fearless!

Some general rules: 1) use the fingers to avoid dumping all the weight into the wrist joints, 2) press into the hands evenly to feel a 'lifting' out of the wrist, 3) spread the fingers but not to their maximum, we don't want to collapse the carpal tunnel or the natural cupping of the palm, 4) build up – with consistent yoga practice – to the strength needed to put weight into the hands!

If you are experiencing a flare up of wrist pain you can use a 'yoga wedge', it's a long piece of cork that you put across your yoga mat to place the heel of the hand on to lessen the bend of the wrist and put more emphasis on the fingers for poses in which the hands are on the floor. These are some of the poses you can use it for or other modifications as necessary:

ChaturaṅgaDandāsana
Ūrdhva Mukha Śvānāsana
Adho Mukha Śvānāsana
Pārśvottānāsana
Bhujapīḍāsana
Kukkuṭāsana
Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana
Adho Mukha Vṛkṣāsana
Utplutih & all lifting



When the majority of people come to yoga they have never used their hands to support their body weight or even a portion of their weight

However, if we can learn to use the fingers and the muscles of the hands then we get stronger and feel more powerful and fearless!

Standing Sequence

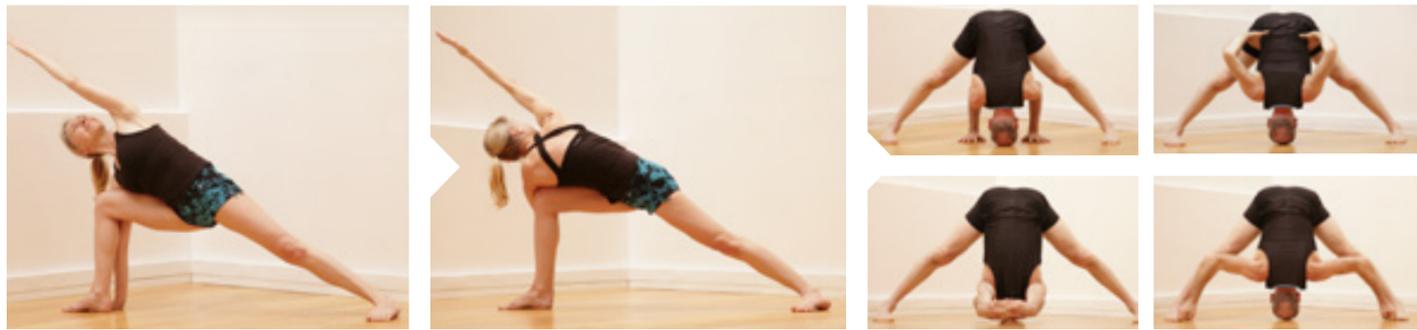


Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana

Pādahastāsana

Utthita Trikoṅāsana

Parivṛta Trikoṅāsana



Utthita Pārśvakoṅāsana

Parivṛta Pārśvakoṅāsana

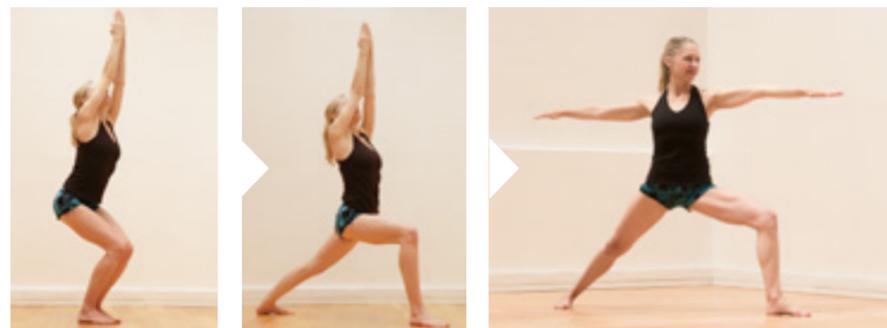
Prasārita Padottānāsana A, B, C, D



Pārśvottānāsana

Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana

Ardha Baddha Padmottānāsana



Utkaṭāsana

Vīrabhadrāsana A

Vīrabhadrāsana B

“Yoga is a process of replacing old patterns, with new and more appropriate patterns.”

— Sri T. Krishnamacharya

“Linda and Gerald’s presentation of the Primary Series of Ashtanga Yoga is colorful, rich with information and accessible. Their instructions are precise and clear with focus on mindfulness and safety. The photos are beautiful and their compassionate insights are sprinkled throughout the text. This book is a wonderful asset to anyone interested in learning more about this beautiful and dynamic system of yoga.”

~ DAVID SWENSON AUTHOR OF ASHTANGA YOGA: THE PRACTICE MANUAL

Thank you, Gerald and Linda, for sharing your life stories and experiences of practicing and studying yoga. You have done a very nice work. It is easy to read, entertaining and informative and will be a useful companion to any who have a keen interest to learn Ashtanga Yoga! It is a welcome addition to what is available. It will surely become a useful guide, helping students navigate the development of this practice in a way that is effective, safe and enjoyable. Well done!

CHUCK MILLER, CERTIFIED ASHTANGA YOGA TEACHER

This friendly and smart book on the healing yoga system of Ashtanga Yoga is a gem that expertly teaches you how to take up this discipline of yoga. You are guided through a step-by-step learning process that teaches you a system of ‘moving meditation’. You’ll learn to build your own yoga practice that gives you more control over your choices and better enables you to create physical, mental, and spiritual wealth. Be inspired to get on your mat each day, learn to practice safely and intelligently, and best of all this book lovingly directs you to keep remembering your spiritual quest, nudging you to make the daily journey inward to the soul of yoga-- to be ever engaged in the process of small and great self-discovery.

DAVID GARRIGUES, CERTIFIED ASHTANGA YOGA TEACHER
AND CREATOR OF THE ASANA KITCHEN VIDEO TUTORIALS.”

“It has been an honour to support and observe the deep unfoldment’s of Linda and Gerald’s practice and teaching methodology, and to see the garden of information blossom into this book of a workable, sustainable, Aṣṭāṅga Vinyasa practice. It’s all here! Not only to get you started but to help you progress in a highly-detailed way on your yoga journey. A true harvest of the most luxurious and fragrant flowers of guidance and wisdom...bravo!”

~MARLA MEENAKSHI JOY, CO-OWNER OF DOWNWARD DOG YOGA CENTER, TORONTO



ASHTANGA YOGA