



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY

INVERSIONS

In yoga, inversions are positions in which the heart is higher than the head. There are gentle inversions such as Downward Dog and legs up the wall or the more advanced inversions such as Shoulderstand, Headstand and Handstand. Inversions can increase pressure in the head, so anyone with eye problems such as glaucoma or ear problems should avoid the more advanced inversions. If you have a neck injury you may need to avoid shoulder stands and headstands. If you have any of these conditions, make sure you practise under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Before practising full inversions, you need to develop a combination of strength and flexibility in the upper body, so that you can enjoy being upside down without creating strain or injury. The more gentle inversions serve an important function, as they prepare and train the body so that the more advanced inversions can be as beneficial and pleasurable as possible.

One of the main benefits of inversions is that they bring a rejuvenating supply of blood to the brain cells. They help increase concentration and sharpen memory. The inversions shown overleaf should be practised under the guidance of an experienced teacher to avoid injury. I have listed the benefits of the inversions and also the contraindications for each posture so you know which postures you may need to avoid.

Is it safe to go upside down when I'm having my period?

Most yoga students are accustomed to hearing their teachers ask whether anyone is having their period before leading the class into inversions. In Iyengar yoga, doing inversions during your period is strictly forbidden. Yet not all teachers consider menstruation an absolute contraindication to going upside down.

From a yogic perspective, the reason for not inverting during menstruation has to do with **apana**, the downward pranic force that is said to help things such as bowel function, urination, and menstrual flow. The concern is that reversing this normal energetic movement could interfere with the period, leading to a cessation of flow and possibly heavier bleeding later on.

From a medical standpoint, women are often warned that if they invert during their period, blood could flow in the opposite direction and lead to endometriosis, a painful condition in which small clusters of uterine cells grow in the abdominal cavity. So it may be wise to avoid inversions during your period.

My advice is that during class I wouldn't recommend that you do inversions during your period, unless it is the last day and flow has almost finished. What you do on your own time during your personal practice, however, is your business. As a general rule, you might want to refrain from inverting when your menstrual flow is heavy (when you may not feel that well anyway). With a lighter flow, the risk of going upside down is probably less. Briefly held inversions—say, a minute or less—are also less likely to cause problems than longer-held ones.

During your period you may feel weaker with less energy. Listen to your body, not just when you have your period but always. Sometimes the "real yoga" is to know when to take it easy.

Contact Lynne on 00302892042356 or email lynne.gully@iremia.net

<p>Adho Mukha Svanasana (downward dog). Gentle inversion.</p> <p>Benefits: - Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression. Energizes the body. Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands. Strengthens the arms and legs. Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause. Helps prevent osteoporosis. Improves digestion. Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue. Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica, sinusitis.</p> <p>Contraindications: -Carpal tunnel syndrome, diarrhoea, high blood pressure or headache: - support your head on a bolster or block.</p>	 <p>MARTY SCODUTO</p>
<p>Viparita Karani (legs up the wall). Gentle inversion.</p> <p>Benefits: - Relieves tired or cramped legs and feet. Gently stretches the back legs, front torso, and the back of the neck. Relieves mild backache and calms the mind.</p> <p>Contraindications: -Avoid if you have eye problems such as glaucoma. With serious neck or back problems only perform posture with the supervision of an experienced teacher. If your feet begin to tingle, bend your knees, put the soles of your feet together and slide your feet down the wall, bringing your heels close to your pelvis.</p>	 <p>MICHAEL VENERA</p>
<p>Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand)</p> <p>Benefits: - Calms the brain and helps to relieve stress and mild depression. Stimulates the thyroid, prostate glands and abdominal organs. Stretches the shoulders and neck. Tones the legs and buttocks. Improves digestion. Helps relieve symptoms of menopause. Reduces fatigue and alleviates insomnia. Therapeutic for asthma, infertility and sinusitis.</p> <p>Contraindications: - Diarrhoea, headache, high blood pressure, menstruation and neck injury.</p>	
<p>Halasana (plough)</p> <p>Benefits: - Calms the brain. Stimulates the abdominal organs and the thyroid gland. Stretches the shoulders and spine. Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause. Reduces stress and fatigue. Therapeutic for backache, headache, infertility, insomnia, sinusitis.</p> <p>Contraindications: - Diarrhoea, menstruation, neck injury, asthma and high blood pressure.</p>	
<p>Salamba Sirsasana (headstand)</p> <p>Benefits: - Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression. Stimulates the pituitary and pineal glands. Strengthens the arms, legs, and spine. Strengthens the lungs. Tones the abdominal organs. Improves digestion. Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause. Therapeutic for asthma, infertility, insomnia, and sinusitis.</p> <p>Contraindications: - Back injury, headache, heart condition, high blood pressure, menstruation, and neck injury.</p>	
<p>Adho Mukha Vrksasana (handstand)</p> <p>Benefits: - Strengthens the shoulders, arms, and wrists. Stretches the belly. Improves sense of balance. Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression.</p> <p>Contraindications: - Back, shoulder or neck injury, headache, heart condition, high blood pressure and menstruation.</p>	
<p>Pincha Mayurasana (feathered peacock) Also known as elbow balance.</p> <p>Benefits: - Strengthens the shoulders, arms, and back. Stretches the shoulders and neck, chest, and belly. Improves sense of balance. Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression.</p> <p>Contraindications: - Back, shoulder, or neck injury. Headache, heart condition, high blood pressure and menstruation.</p>	