



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY CONTINUING WITH THE KNEES

Last month I wrote about students with varying knee problems and how certain yoga postures could help resolve the imbalances in our feet, ankles, shins, knees, thighs and hips. We'll continue learning how to improve the functioning of the knees because when they are functioning well, and without pain, they help us to transfer movement and action from the hips to the feet.

If you have felt any type of knee pain while practising yoga, you will know that while the rest of your body feels great, the pain in your knee prevents full enjoyment of your practice. Your knee problem may be the result of tight muscles in the hips or dropped arches in your feet. When it is resolved and the pain disappears, you can feel the difference in your standing postures. The yoga postures may have helped the muscles in your hips to release or the fascia of your foot to be released, which may have changed the way you walk. You can feel the freedom as you move into the sitting postures that involve bending the knees. It is always possible to make modifications to the yoga postures to help you move into a more comfortable position.

Many yoga students say they have these problems because their knees are just "old". They accept this is the way it is and that in time they will need a knee replacement. I always feel sad when I hear this because it is possible to improve the functioning of the knees.

Anatomy of the Knee

The knee is formed by the juncture of three bones – the femur (the upper leg or thigh bone), the tibia (the shin bone) and the patella (the kneecap). Two of the three bones that create this joint are responsible for creating two separate joints. The femur creates the hip joint and the tibia creates the ankle joint. The point here is that whatever is happening at the hip joint and ankle joint is going to influence the functioning of the knee joint. Failing to sit in Padmasana (lotus posture) is not about your knees. It's about the hip joint not fully moving into an external rotation. If you rotate the leg at the knee in order to move into this posture, strain will be placed on the knee joint and over time damage will be created. So it is really important, for the health of your knees that you consistently consider the functioning of both your hips and ankles when doing your yoga practice.









Because it is a shallow joint, the knee relies on strong ligaments and muscles to hold it together. The knee joint needs to be moved through its range of motion regularly to keep it healthy. Disuse often causes the cartilage, then the bone underneath it, to deteriorate.

Yoga Postures

Some of the yoga postures we will focus on this month will help to reduce inflammation and pain for tendon, ligament and meniscus tears, cartilage damage, osteoarthritis and misalignment. The balancing postures will help to strengthen the ankle and knee joints. Always remember to keep your breath flowing throughout your yoga practice.

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POSTURES TO STRENGTHEN THE KNEES

<p>TADASANA (mountain)</p> <p>Tadasana is the base posture for all standing postures. Go through the check list as you lift the inner arches of your feet, lifting the inner ankles. Check if your knees are locking back and, if so, soften the knees. If your knees are dropping inwards, rotate your thighs out bringing alignment through the hips, knees and ankles.</p>	 <p>DAVID MARTINEZ</p>
<p>UTTHITA TRIKONASANA (triangle)</p> <p>In this posture the inner and outer legs are strengthened, which helps the knees to bear weight. Inner and outer legs should be parallel. Remember to lift the inner arch of both feet. If you are locking back into your knees, soften your knees and this will allow you to externally rotate your thighs. If you experience pain in your knee, place the front foot on blocks next to a wall. This will lessen the weight on the knee.</p>	 <p>RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p>PARIVRTTA TRIKONASANA (revolved triangle)</p> <p>In this posture the legs and knees are strengthened. Remember to keep your pelvis level and twist from the centre of the body. If you are not ready to make a full twist, do not try to stretch up the arm as this may create tension in your shoulder. Keep your upper hand on your hip as you rotate.</p>	 <p>RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p>ARDHA CHANDRASANA (half-moon)</p> <p>Your raised leg should be parallel to your hip. Your legs get a great extension and the ankles and knee joints strengthen when balancing on one leg. Use a support under your hand to ensure that your body stays open. It's good to practise this posture with your back to a wall so you really open your body.</p>	 <p>MARTIN RODRIGUEZ</p>
<p>PARIVRTTA ARDHA CHANDRASANA (revolved half-moon)</p> <p>Standing on one leg strengthens the ankle and knee joints. The twist of the spinal column adjusts spinal defects, including the sacrum, which helps the knees to maintain their alignment.</p>	
<p>VIRABHADRASANA III (warrior III)</p> <p>Start with your hands on a wall at shoulder height and step back straightening the arms and place the feet together. Legs are perpendicular to the floor. Raise each leg in turn keeping the pelvis level. You can use the back of a chair to support your raised foot to enable you to hold the posture for longer.</p>	 <p>CHRIS ANDRE</p>
<p>PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA (wide-legged forward bend)</p> <p>In this posture the legs and knees are strengthened. As you move into the posture, start by spreading the sitting bones and then externally rotate your thighs to bend further.</p>	 <p>RORY EARNSHAW</p>
<p>UTKATASANA (chair)</p> <p>Excellent for strengthening the front thighs and especially beneficial for those with hyperextending knees. Your feet are together and you can place a belt around the shins just below the knees to keep your inner and outer knees parallel to each other. Draw the navel back and lower the sacrum. Bend your knees and lower your thighs until they are nearly parallel to the floor.</p>	 <p>CHRIS ANDRE</p>