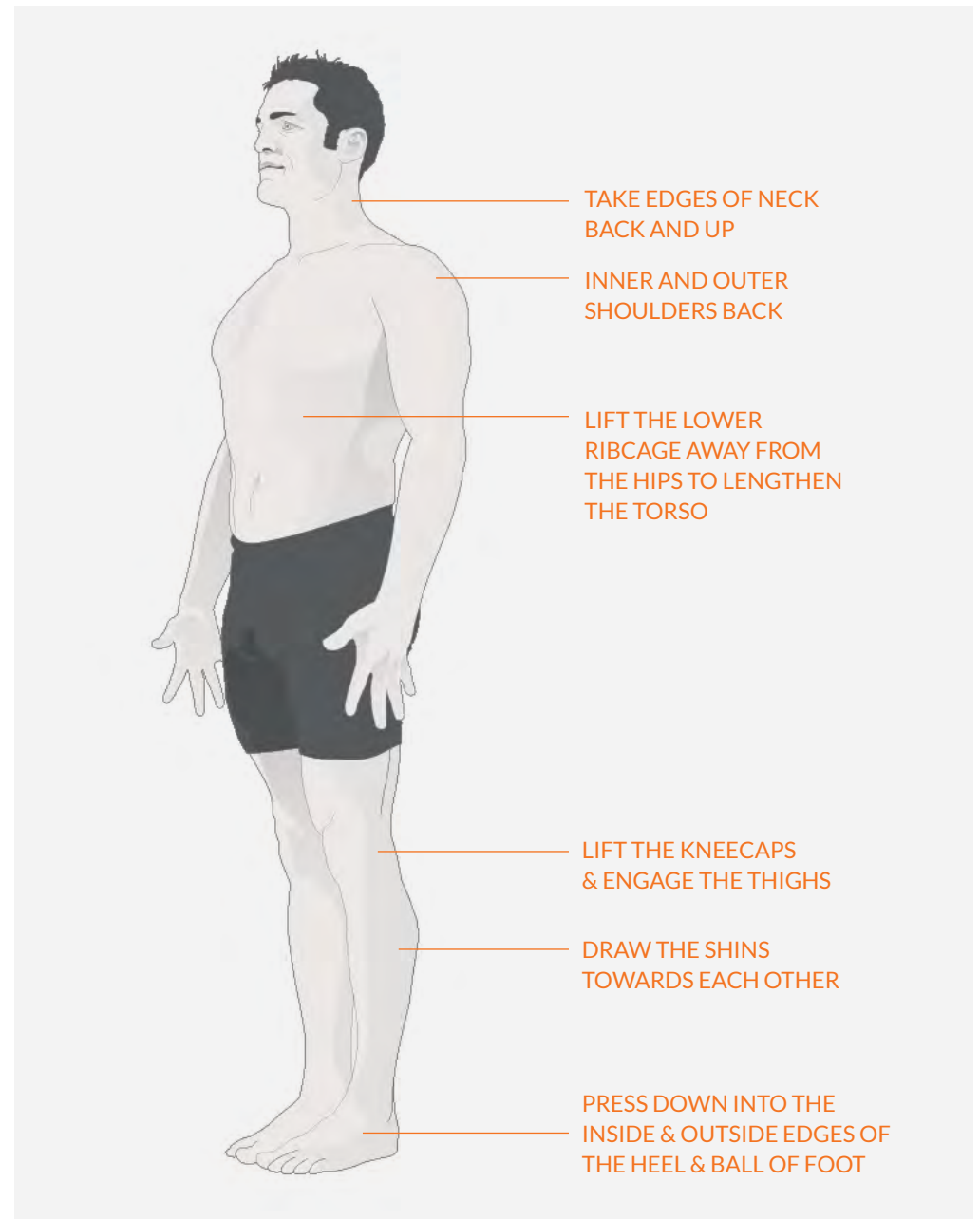


Tadasana
MOUNTAIN
POSE



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Tadasana IN EVERY POSE



The fundamental posture that governs all postures through its alignment and energetic qualities, is the mountain pose.

Yogis call this tada, meaning 'mountain' and asana meaning 'seat' or 'pose'. However, it is not just a description of the shape of the pose – it also references the energetic qualities and attributes of 'the mountain' and gives us a true understanding of what is trying to be created in this asana. If you have ever stood beneath a large mountain and taken in its immensity, noted its immovable, strong nature, yet sitting in such peaceful repose, you will then understand the subtle philosophical and energetic qualities that we look for in this pose. This is also true for all other poses, there is deeper meaning to be gained from the names of poses beyond the alignment contained within them.

This philosophical and energetic quality is hard to describe in words and must be experienced to be understood completely. It is a beautiful balance of steadiness and suppleness within

your body, your mental approach and inner stillness. The ancients call this balance stira (steadfast) sukha (comfort) asanam (posture performed).

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This is of great importance; once a student grasps the basic elements and safety of each pose, they can then focus their awareness on detaching from their mind and identity. The latter focus is a far superior practice for us as humans because we need to deal with the issues associated with self-reflective consciousness. Developing detachment carries with it immense benefits that naturally flow into the rest of our world. The health and fitness delivered from the physical asana practice is rather a by-product of the internal work being done, which is 'time spent in stillness, no thoughts' or developing a healthy detachment from thinking; as such, training your mind whilst under stress.



Provides SPACIOUSNESS

When you align the physical body, you activate the energetic and subtle body referred to above. This grounding of the physical body allows for a uniting experience of our little self with a greater energy, as explained by the ancients as the jivatman connecting with paramatman (the individual soul connecting with the collective consciousness).

This is what makes some Vinyasa yoga styles and Modern Yoga's methodologies a somewhat different experience to that of normal exercise or mindless stretching. We apply mindful techniques to immerse ourselves in movement and breath, to draw us into a deeper, concentrated inner experience.

This is a foundation that you can come back to, it is the same principle in every pose. Originally the postures were meant for preparation to actual meditation, helping the practitioner find a position that would be comfortable for long periods of time. Remembering this original intention of asana practice allows you to focus on the experience of the pose, rather than focusing on the role of

various body parts which reduces the practice to mere physical activity. You create a global sense of alignment that keeps asana safe and promotes 'flow energy' (prana) and intricate alignment that can be refined over the years of practice. This will deliver to you the experience of turning inward, focusing on the breath and building a foundation for concentrating the mind.

Initially we need to learn the poses by rote, as a series of physical actions, until we create a certain level of anatomical comprehension. Once this basic level is understood in the body, then the practice will shift gears to a deeper dimension that encourages enquiry into our nature and the question "Who am I?" This question has long been pondered by the ancients and has been answered by the yogic sages. The Traditional Teachings chapter in this book looks at this more closely and what it means for us today. It is important to remember that our asana practice needs to progress beyond physical gymnastics and become a meditation in motion.

Anatomical INTELLIGENCE

Anatomically, the Tadasana pose creates healthy joint alignment by activating muscles that cross over each joint in a balanced and harmonious way. This provides stability and protection when force comes to bear on the joints when either in a range of motion or in static holds.

For example, in the feet, our weight is not shifted into the ball of the foot excessively, nor the heel of the foot, or the outside or inside. Rather, it is spread evenly across all corners of the foot, which we press firmly down into. This activates all the muscles, nerves and joint structures that cross over the knee, ankle and smaller joints in the foot and protects them through muscular support, spaciousness and a correct neural environment. In a dynamic approach to physically moving your body into large ranges this is essential.

There is constant stimulation and feedback from the nervous system into our brains that is predominantly unconscious, not part of our conscious awareness but influencing the state of our conscious mind. We have all had

the experience of feeling out of balance in the physical body, which then effects our mind and energy each day. When we bring the physical body into Tadasana alignment in each pose the stimulation that is coming into our central nervous system and conscious mind becomes more harmonious and balanced. This means we can integrate the right and left hemispheres of our brain for a greater feeling of connection and being at centre, which is the same effect that meditation delivers.

The ancient yogis looked upon this phenomenon and described the alignment in the physical body which creates maximum energy as 'pranic flow' and they called the channels it runs in 'nadi', meaning 'little rivers' or 'energetic channels.'

In western science, we also look to align the spine in its optimum relationship to the vertebral joints above and below. This allows the intervertebral foramen (hole created between two vertebrae) optimal alignment so we can

have the best possible nerve flow from the central nervous system to the peripheral nerves through the tightly wrapped fascia nerve root. This is an incredibly important process. Our nervous system runs everything in our bodies, so the effect of having a high degree of neural transmission is one of the healthiest things we can do for our body. This relates to every other joint system in our body in the same way. A daily asana practice that is safe, suited to your body and not practised for egoic goals will deliver this and will also unlock the energetic nadi channels to give us pranic flow within.

These days we don't so much think of our bodies as energetic beings but it is the essence of what we are trying to align in our asana practice. The result will be great neural function, energetic freedom and flow within our being. This provides a great sense of health and wellbeing beyond normal exercise regimes and explains the transformative power of this ancient tradition.

Tadasana Mentally:

- 1 Look inwards and acknowledge an internal environment/energy beyond the normal thinking mind
- 2 Accept that this energy is of a higher knowing
- 3 Be open to its purpose in you
- 4 Drop the stories from your past
- 5 Forget about the future
- 6 Live precisely in the present moment – breathe
- 7 Observe your thoughts with tolerance – no judgement
- 8 Develop yourself as a witness – shakshin, free from identity
- 9 Use your wisdom to remain internally still – equanimous
- 10 Through stillness you can hear the roar of existence and like a mirror see yourself clearly but have no concern for what you observe

Tadasana Spiritually:

- 1 Mantra ‘service before self’ – ‘sohum’
- 2 Surrender to Ishvara – Higher Power
- 3 Drop your identity
- 4 Honour the character – be a detached artist
- 5 Choose love in each moment



Skeletal DIFFERENCES

A hugely important factor in performing asana is the skeletal differences we all have.

No two skeletons are alike and some poses that are easy for some people will be impossible for others and vice versa.

For years yoga styles have postulated that if you keep practising you will be able to get into this pose or that pose. Unfortunately, this has been at the peril of some students who have injured themselves in the process.

Skeletal variations mean poses might be difficult or easy depending on the range of motion allowed by the skeletal system, or bones hitting bones. Not always is it that people are 'tight', meaning it's their muscles that stop them

going further. It is often the compression of a joint where two bones are hitting against each other. This is quite common in a simple forward bend where the thigh-bone or femur hits the front crest of the pelvis and prevents us from bowing forward more. We immediately blame the hamstrings but often it is not the case, it is simply how we are put together. Pushing into this type of compression will only lead to injury if done repetitively over a long period of time.

This is not to take away from good alignment and focussing on opening the muscles and fascia, but it's important to recognise that there is a point where no matter how hard you stretch, your skeletal system won't let you go any further.

This is also the case when we compare bone lengths relative to each other. A person with a long tibia bone (calf/shin) relative to the length of their arm bones (humerus/ulna) may find it extremely difficult to get their hand to the floor in twisting crescent lunge, it simply is a matter of bones being too long for other bones.

Unfortunately, we have seen yoga grow so popular that it can be taught by people who are able to do a lot of the poses but who may not have a solid understanding of the physiology of the practice. They teach from their experience, their understanding of their own body, but don't understand anatomy well enough to know that other people are not like them skeletally and it isn't just muscles that restrict movement. The key is understanding when you are compressing into a joint or when you are being restricted muscularly. This is not easy to feel but over time you will develop the skill to do this.

Try to follow the steps below to determine if compression is the problem and if it is, don't push any more in that pose, you are only going to do damage.

- 1 Identify where the pain is, if any exists.
- 2 Is it where the target muscle you are stretching is? Probably muscular.
- 3 Is it opposed to the other side of the target muscle? Probably skeletal and often with no pain just a tight or compressed feeling.



A key example is your elbow joint. If you hold your arm out to the side and extend your elbow, it eventually comes to an end range and stops. This is because the bones on the underside of the elbow have compressed together rather than the biceps being too tight. Eventually this can happen in all your joints.

Another key example is in backward bending, once you have opened your torso muscles and are able to backbend without too much muscular resistance then your spinous

processes, the bumps on the back of the vertebrae you can see going down someone's back, are going to press together and prevent further range of motion. Someone with big gaps and smaller spinous processes will bend deeper than someone with big spinous processes and smaller gaps between them. Once you are an adult then nothing can be done about this, no matter how hard you try to stretch, your range of motion is limited by the compression of bones.