

Help Your Health – The Weekly Review Fall Session 2018 – #4

Yoga for Balance – Part I

This past week and again later in this session, we will be working on balance, challenging and stressing our limits of stability through ‘controlled instability’.

In this yoga practice we will be moving from simple to complex, progressing from: known to unknown, static to dynamic, stable to unstable, eyes open to eyes closed and emphasizing quality over quantity.

What is Balance?

Balance is the ability to maintain a stable position. Regardless of age, maintaining your ability to balance is essential for safely and going about your daily life.

Our ability to balance is actually surprisingly complex. Your brain takes in information from various systems in your body to determine how to move you back into balance. You also have postural reflexes, automatically kicking in to keep you upright.

But even when all balance systems and postural reflexes are functioning perfectly, your body won't be able to respond well to the information it's receiving from your brain if you're very weak and stiff.

Maintaining strength, flexibility and agility are key for maintaining your ability to balance.

Maintaining your ability to focus mentally in the face of distraction ‘cognitive distracting drills’, is also essential because in the real world there's a lot going on, all around us.

Understanding what influences your ability to balance will help you see what you can and cannot do to improve your balance with yoga.

Vestibular System

-the three canals in your inner ears provide your brain with information about changes in the position of your head, triggering reflexes that allow your body to maintain a steady posture.

ex: turning the head, are you twisting, lurching forward etc.

ex: standing with your feet at different levels such as climbing

Somatosensory System

-your senses give your brain the information about the environment outside of your body so you know where and how to move.

ex: walking on slide ground or sinking into mud

Visual System

-to position your body relative to other objects in your environment including their depth, velocity and motion, using this information to orient yourself.

ex: using the horizon to tell what ‘upright’ is

ex: using the angles of the room

ex: if you have poor vision or are not wearing your glasses or contacts or have closed your eyes.

Touch

-the sensors of your skin allow you to feel the outside environment

ex: feel the type of surface you're walking or balancing on

ex: maybe another part of the body is providing feedback about the ground

ex: practice Balancing Cat on a wooden floor versus a stack of blankets/foam padding

ex: strong wind pushing you slightly off balance or a wall you're touching for support

Proprioception

-the sensors in your muscles and joints allow your brain to feel from the inside how your body is positioned, how it is moving through space, and where the body parts are relative to each other. This sense allows you to walk around in the dark, as these sensors tell your brain where your body is in the space you then can know and work on how to make adjustments to move back into balance.

ex: close your eyes and touch your nose with your hand

Postural Reflexes

-these reflexes automatically correct the orientation of your body when it shifts from being upright, when unexpected events throw you off balance to try to prevent you from falling.

ex: bumping into something or someone

ex: everyday activities, getting dressed, reaching up high

ex: walking on the raised edge of a curb just for the fun of it

How Aging can make a change on your Balance (to be detailed in Weekly Review #5)

Using Yoga for Balance

-practicing with a non-judgement attitude, no negative self-talk

-noticing your thoughts taking a neutral approach and lets just see..

-remember if you begin to lose your balance just working to regain it is tremendously beneficial, so practicing, rather than just staying upright is your real aim.

How Often to Practice

– **every day, twice a day at different times of the day, every week, month, year...for the rest of your life, it's accumulative.**

How Long to Hold the Poses

-hold until you notice your leg or whichever body part is supporting you is just on the verge to begin to quiver and then try to hold for two or three seconds longer -rest a few seconds before repeating on the other side.

-you can then repeat the pose again gradually and eventually working up the hold for one to two minutes on each side

Balance Your Practice

-practice a wide variety of strength, flexibility and agility poses – standing, sitting, supine, prone, be creative

Mindfulness

-maintain your awareness while you balance, just don't throw yourself into the pose

-focus on the sensations of being on and off balance and making whatever adjustments are necessary to steady yourself

– feel your alignment with every single pose that you do from arms to torso to head to feet

– take it to another level by working with more subtle alignment cues -shoulder blades, collarbones, expansion of ribs, or maybe the poses muscles trying to sense areas that you may not have noticed before and then eventually moving the area to see the effect.

Challenging Yourself

-always continue to challenge your balance and keep moving to the edge of stability

-begin to lose your balance by varying the poses you do with your vision, surface and amount of distraction – you alone in an empty room versus in a class atmosphere

Varying Poses

-progress from simple to complex poses and then inventing versions of existing poses

-progressing from dynamic poses to dynamic sequencing in a flow combining 2 or more familiar balance poses as we often do in class

Removing or Changing Vision

- taking the vision equation out of the practice going from focusing the stare/dristi, to eyes closed or possibly just in a darkened room.
- if you wear glasses notice the difference without the glasses – please hold on....
- changing the position of your head by looking up or down or turning your head R/L

Varying the Surface You Balance On

- practicing on a hard surface then gradually to a foam mat (as in the studio) or block or even a mattress
- outside on the grass, at the beach, an uneven surface with one foot on one surface and the other a different surface

Changing Your Environment

- practicing in a distracting environment such as the park or the beach, with a talkative friend or inviting some children and/or pets to join you
- adding cognitive distraction such as chanting

General Class:

Restorative with the Breath:

- Legs on the chair/or up the wall:** with/wo blanket: 1st -across the torso at base of shoulder blades
- 2nd -lengthwise along spine of upper torso including under the head but not under the buttocks
- both with arms in Cactus if possible or a variation of which is possible.

Attunement:

Supine: Morning Wake-Up Stretch (see printable link below)

Hip Openers (Small Circles Together, Circles Apart and Large, In/Out Together)

Ankles/Wrists Flex-Extend -keep the legs and arms still and not moving in the same circles

Prone: Child's Pose

Cat n' Cow

Balancing Cat-Hunting Dog Chair – Classic Static for 30 sec + Dynamic with challenge

Getting up from the mat to standing: from Child's Pose to Prone to Down-Dog

-walk the hands to the feet and gracefully come up bringing the hands at the heart.

Make sure that the feet are wide so you can be stable, from beginning to end. Lead with your heart and not your head, no self induced dizziness.

Class Sequence for Balance:

Standing

- 1. Mountain Pose/Tadasana** with arms overhead, block between hands- eyes open and closed
- 2. Standing Forward Bend + 1/2 way Up** Dynamic x10-20.
- 3. Warrior I** Static + Dynamic x6
- 4. Warrior II** or Extended Side Angle Flow Static + Dynamic x6
- 5. Tree** Free standing using finger tips on the wall or not plus concentrating on your dristi/point of focus.
- 6. Warrior III** R/L
- 7. Side Plank** on Wall or Floor R/L

Sitting in a Chair:

- 1. Elevator** with incremental lifts off the chair to the first, second and third floors with the 4th lift to the roof top standing. x6. Feet (back verses forward), torso (leaving forward verses shoulders over hips) and arms (from being on legs/knees to freely hanging next to the body) placement gradually making these movements more challenging.
- 2. Swinging** -Moving the upper torso (from ribcage to head) beginning with the hands on the rib cage, progressing to elbows extended to the sides with the finger tips touching to the extended arms swinging from side to side. Increasing movement with the upper torso while keeping the hips stable and still.

Standing behind the Chair:

- 3. Penguin** -Shifting like a stiff piece of wood or waddle like a Penguin.

Shifting your weight to the right side, pointing the left foot, to flexing the ankle, to point again to shifting to the other side.. Continue from side to side. Do not bend the knees or swivel the hips.

Feet should be wide apart as much as is necessary to keep the legs straight, strong and engaged. Going from security by holding on to the chair to not touching anything, from eyes open to eyes closed.

- 4. Tandem Walking** -heel to toe on a straight line or following the edge of your mat, go slowly its harder
- 5. Marching** -in place, let the arms swing and pick up the speed
- 6. Dynamic Sequencing Flow R/L**

-standing behind a chair with your R arm overhead -bring your opposite/left leg forward knee up -take it out to the left side – return to forward- place it to the rear with toes on the floor -hinge forward as you pick up leg into a Warrior III - hold/you can place one hand on the seat of the chair -then stack hip and shoulder lifting the left side.

-repeat using same side arm overhead and same side leg lifting

-this covers two different versions on one side and now repeat on the other side, holding the lifts to make this sequence more difficult

Sitting on the Mat:

- 8. Boat Pose** Classic Alternative: On Forearms, Single Legs, Different Holds

Savasana: Reclined **Supta Bhaddha Konasana** – Cobbler’s Pose with Bolster/Blocks

5-10 minutes of complete relaxation in Supine -nothing to do with balance but rewarding and oh so relaxing.....

Quote:

Printable/Readable link to: ‘**My Soul Is In a Hurry**’ – based on a Poem by Mário de Andrade (1893 – 1945) original language of this poem was Portuguese this version is translated into English from German by Rolf Goellnitz

<https://yogatherapyalacarte.com/news-2/>

Music: Deuter – Bamboo Forest

Essential Oil: Wild Orange, Lemon, Lime, Grapefruit (see e-mail under separate cover)

If you haven’t placed your order yet for any of the above, just send me a mail at: student@help-your-health.com

Misc. Information:

Printable Link to **Morning Wake-Up Stretch** on my website:

https://yogatherapyalacarte.com/2018/01/20/morning_wake_up_stretch/

There was a request for information about the shoes I recommend for various feet issues. They were recommended by my teachers from LMU who were mostly Doctors spending many hours on their feet: **Sanita Shoes**. There are various outlets and sites which offer them, just be sure to look for the originals.

