

Help Your Health - The Weekly Review - #07 - Spring/2016

This week in class:

Asana:

Supta Padangustasana (Reclining Hand-to-Big Toe Pose) rotation variation using the strap and finishing with Happy Baby and Cobblers Pose.

A strong stretch of the hamstrings where you are in control every moment. Also stretching and strengthening the hip abductors against resistance.

Classic:

Lying on your back, bringing one leg across the body. use your opposite hand or a strap to hold the outer arch of your foot. When you feel a stretch in your side hip, press up into your hand or strap, as if you were coming out of the pose. This strengthens the abductor muscles of the hip and at the same time, engage the quadriceps while turning the top leg slightly outward as you straighten the knee, which draws the kneecap into alignment. Hold for 30 seconds, switch sides and repeat if you would like.

Adaptation/Variation:

Lying on your back, knees bent and feet together directly behind buttocks on the floor. Lift the buttocks and take it to the left a few inches, bring the knees into the chest and release them to the floor to the right. Arms in airplane and both shoulders, as much as possible, on the floor. Relax for a moment. Then slowly straighten the top leg taking the toes in the direction of your right hand, see if they will meet, if so, wrap your thumb and index finger around the big toe. Be mindful of your hamstrings, go gently and slowly. Once the top leg is straight you can begin to straighten your bottom leg.

It may take weeks/months until the final posture is achieved but it took years/decades to become so tight, be patient. This can be practiced in bed as the mattress can be very forgiving as long as you are not laying in a valley.

This is also a twist and often twists are not a friend of lower back issues so use your awareness and proceed with caution.

Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 at the wall using a block)

Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend)

Either standing in front of your chair or wide on the mat feet parallel, heels should line up with the little toes and the outside of the foot should be a straight line.

This is an excellent opportunity to strengthen and lengthen the tibias posterior (a deep muscle that runs along the back of the shinbone and down to the inner arch of the foot. which lifts the inner arch, inverts and rotates the foot, the secret to this muscle is balance, not too tight and not too weak). This pose also shows our stiffness from tight adductors, the inner thigh muscles pulling the thighbones toward each other, tightening and even locking the hip joints.

With a micro bend in the knees, to avoid locking them, fold forward at the hip joints and either touch the fingertips to the floor or to the chair while also keeping the back flat (slight cow position/not cat).

You will now be able to see if your arches are sinking/collapsing, are your knees turning inward or the feet trying to turn all in order to help you bend forward. Possibly bending the knees a little more can help.

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Try to keep the inner heels and balls of your big toes firmly grounded and begin to lift the instep of both feet. Weight will begin to shift towards your outer heel but don't let the inner heel twist, rotate, invert or curve the foot.

Instead draw the energy all the way from your inner arches through inner knees and thighs so your inner thigh muscles firm, lift and press outward as if you were sitting on a ball which was inflating. At the same time drawing the upper inner thighs back so the lower back does not round.

Straightening the legs slowly and smoothly if possible.

This is a short look into the complexity of this posture and how it addresses many various issues in the body regarding flexibility and agility but at the same time creating strength through eccentric work (contracting the muscles and lengthening at the same time). Much of what we do in Hatha yoga is this type of work.

Yoga Snacks (reviewed see previous newsletters for details)

Big Toe strengthener (Flexor Hallucis Longus and Brevis Muscles assisted by the abductor and adductor Hallucis Muscles)). Using the big toes to push down, as if they were pushing a button in the elevator, keeping the other toes still and relaxed. Do this standing.

Reviewing other good methods of strengthening/stretching the toes/feet. Scrunching a small towel with the toes or using marbles or paper. Toes on the edge of a step and slowly going up and down with the feet.

Both stretching and strengthening exercises are needed to maintain dynamic stability in the toes.

For the big-toe muscles to do their job well, protecting your body from impact and instability, they need to be dynamically stable, meaning they should respond to shifts in movement, weight and balance. The good news is that you can train your big toes.

Readings:

Gratitude

#7. Gratitude increases mental strength. For years, research has shown gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma. A 2006 study published in *Behavior Research and Therapy* found that Vietnam War Veterans with high levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11.

Recognizing all you have to be thankful for - even during the worst times of your life, fosters resilience. We all have the ability and opportunity to cultivate gratitude. ***Simply take a few moments to focus on all that you have, rather than complain about all the things you think you deserve.***

Developing an “**attitude of gratitude**” is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.

Brain Health

#7. Find the mindfulness that works for you!

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Mindfulness is the art and science of being present.

Myriad studies have proven it reduces your alarm. Less alarm heightens your ability to manage negative emotion that could lead to disease like depression. Maybe most valuable is mindfulness helps us engage in complex thinking, your brain needs mindfulness.

The secret to brain health and mindfulness, however, is find the ways that work for you.

For some of us, mindful eating thickens our gray matter where sitting and breathing drives us crazy. Some of us love moving slower where other can't imagine changing the pace of their lives. But even fast movers can listen more mindfully to be more present.

The best way to find what works for you: experiment. The forms of mindfulness you stick to are the ones that will make your brain healthier.

Visit your local book store, spend some time looking through the shelves of reading material on mindfulness and see what touches you. Which book or books do you want to continue reading, this is the type of reading material which helps in the moment we are wondering or feeling low about ourselves. Be fair to the book store and buy from them, who knows how much longer we will have that pleasure of meandering through the aisles of a book store. I truly enjoy my Kindle but I still support the local book store.

Have you every heard of Alan Watts? An English Philosopher who has left this earth some years ago but spent a lifetime talking and writing about the meeting of East/West Philosophy. When he talking in the 50's about being present the word 'mindfulness' wasn't even in usage at that time and now look how often you hear it mentioned.

Keeping companionship with: compassion, gratitude and mindfulness, you will find your glass is always full.

Quote:

3 Rules of Work: by Albert Einstein

Out of clutter find simplicity, from discord find harmony, in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

Music: Deuter "Mystic Voyage"

Miscellaneous: No class this coming Friday and Monday of Memorial Day Weekend. We will be in Joshua Tree at the Retreat Center enjoying the company of 20 students who have registered for this 2nd annual retreat. I will be holding classes, lectures and discussions on Strength and Flexibility of the Mind and Body. Each evening, a lulling Yoga Nidra Practice before drifting off to sleep in a calming and peaceful desert center.

The Art of Living:

The Art of Living: Burgundy, France in October 2016.

Join us for a week or more, your option, of roaming the cities and countrysides of this beautiful region in France.