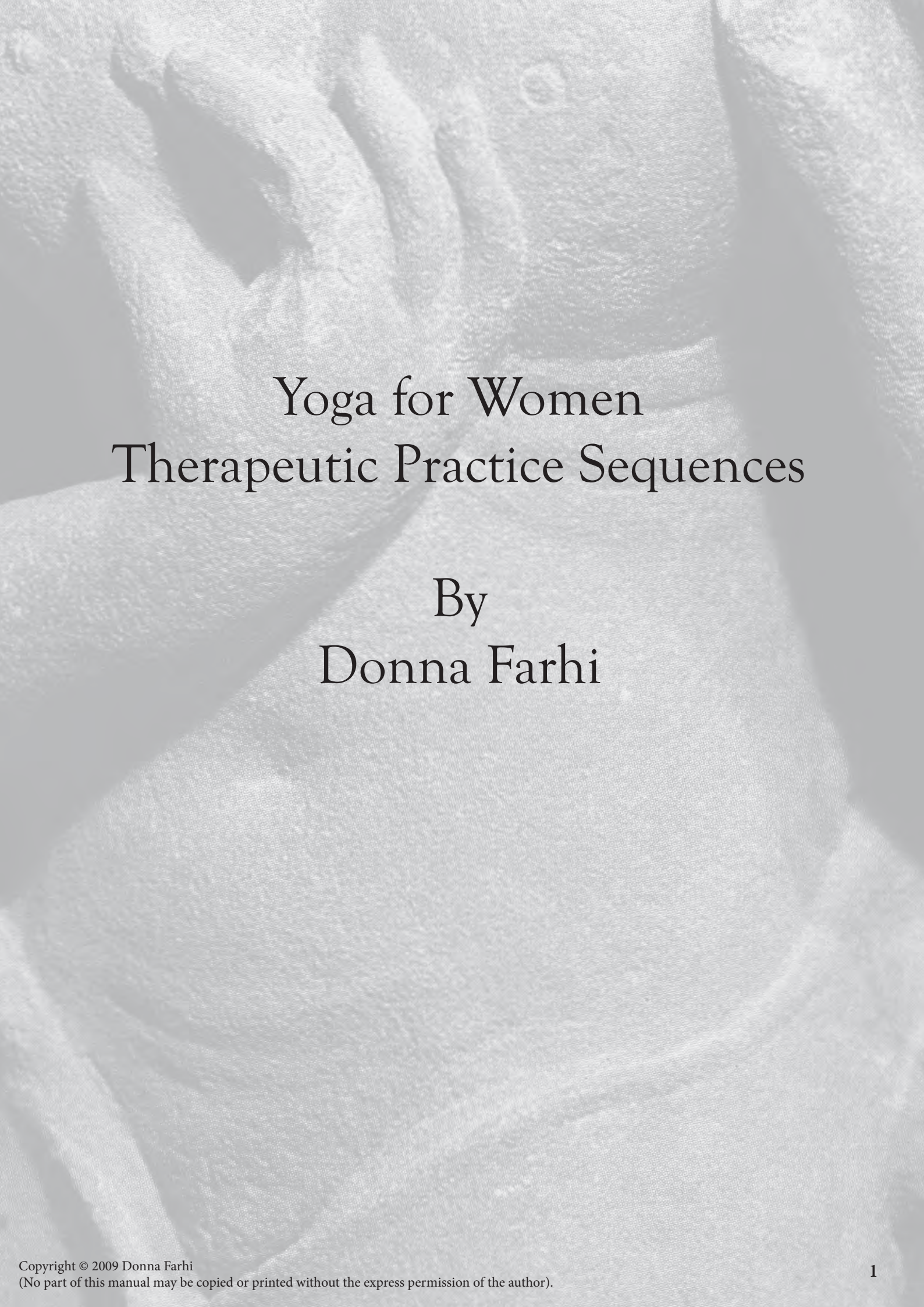


Yoga For Women

Therapeutic Practice Sequences

By
Donna
Farhi





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A Caution

This booklet is not a prescription for health problems or a replacement for necessary medical treatment. If any of the Yoga restorative postures or exercises causes you discomfort do not persist. A qualified Yoga instructor may be able to assist you in correcting the alignment of a posture to make it comfortable or modifying the posture to suit your physical condition. If you are at all in doubt, seek the advice of your health practitioner.

About Props

The practice of restorative Yoga postures is greatly aided when you work with good quality yoga props. Having yoga props at your disposal allows you to quickly and easily set up each yoga posture and allows you to transition smoothly from pose to pose with the least disruption. A few recommendations:

Yoga Mat

I prefer the thicker quality sticky mats as these can cushion the body and insulate if working on a cold floor. Even if you are working on carpet, a Yoga mat will prevent your props from slipping which in some poses can be a safety issue, such as when you use a chair for support.

Blankets

Yoga blankets should be made of cotton or wool and be of a fine weave so they offer firm support. Avoid synthetic fibres such as polypropylene as these blankets compress with the least pressure and therefore offer inadequate support for postures such as Shoulder Stand. Synthetic blankets can however make light covers to keep you warm in relaxation postures and for some people are less allergenic than wool or cotton.

Towels

Old bath towels, hand towels and wash clothes can lend themselves as Yoga props that can be fine tuned when adjustments involving small increments are required. For instance, it is easier to alter the dimensions of a rolled-up towel than a blanket when adjusting support under the neck, and sometimes all that is needed to reestablish the cervical curve in restoratives is a few-folded layers of a wash cloth. Once you find just the right diameter that suits your structure, place rubber bands around your towel and designate this as a full time Yoga accessory!

Straps

I prefer to work with a wide cotton webbed strap with a sturdy metal D-ring. Thin synthetic straps tend to cut into flesh and plastic cinch clasps can (and have) come undone under pressure, which can be dangerous if you are using the strap to give traction, especially if it is used as an inversion device. A good quality strap will last you a lifetime. I recommend straps made by the American company, Hugger Mugger.

Bolsters

Bolsters come in many sizes and dimensions. For some purposes a rectangular bolster is preferable, but in most instances I use cylindrical bolsters as the curved structure tends to better suit the human form. Most important, your body should have to “give” to the bolster, the bolster should not “give” to the body. I have an upholsterer make my removable cotton/polyester blend covers (these wash without shrinkage) with an inexpensive canvas inner in which we very firmly stuff a blend of cotton and wool fibres. The dimensions of my standard bolster are 9” x 9” x 27”.

Chair

The most important thing to look for in a chair is that it is sturdy and does not wobble. Always place chairs on top of your sticky mat and if you are using it for support, place the back of the chair against a wall. For restorative postures where you are supporting the lower legs while the back is on a bolster or floor, it is sometimes better to use your living room sofa as the height and softness is ideal.



Constructive Rest Position (The One Stop Shop)

Use: As an alternative to a nap, cup of coffee or piece of chocolate!
Effects: Creates an enlivened sense of restfulness and a restoration of mental calm. Excellent for relieving a sore lower back.

Women seem to be particularly adept at resisting the call to rest. No one resists drinking a glass of water when they are thirsty but for many of us we have strong judgments about and layers of conditioning around taking the rest we need when we need it. When you feel the call to rest do you drink a cup of coffee, reach for a sugary snack or look for yet another job to do? These are common evasions to rest. It is remarkable how even a 10 minute rest with legs up and eyes closed can renew our energies and allow us to be even more effective throughout the day.

Constructive Rest Position (CRP) is a term coined by the somatic innovator Mabel Todd¹. On a purely structural level CRP is a very precise way of lying supine that supports the lengthening and release of the deep muscles of the spine (iliopsoas muscles). On an energetic level, the subtle positive tension required to stay in the pose helps to create a conduit of support for the free movement of prana throughout the body. Herein lies the magic of CRP: by maintaining a trellis of support for prana to freely flow through the body the practice evokes a deeply relaxed yet awake state of consciousness.

I learned about the value of CRP during the rigorous demands of leading a 21-day teacher training. I noticed that if I collapsed in bed after lunch for a 45-minute nap I awakened feeling heavy and groggy, making it difficult to “reboot” to teach my afternoon classes. In experimenting with instead practicing CRP, I observed awakening feeling light and refreshed, mentally calm and yet alert.



Figure 1

¹ Mabel Todd is known as a major somatic innovator. Her work was originally published in her book *The Thinking Body* (1937).

Here's How:

Lie with your trunk resting on a folded blanket with a soft towel supporting your neck and head. Bend your knees and place the soles of your feet on your Yoga mat so they do not slide. Move the feet far enough away from the buttocks so that the upper and lower leg bones rest against each other like cards. You are searching for a position that requires the least amount of tension possible (Figure 1). If the feet are too far away from the buttocks the abdomen will become tense, and if the feet are too close the thighs will contract. Now adjust the width of the feet so that the feet are both parallel to each other and hips-width apart. The knees should neither roll in or out. Turn the arms outward and place them about a foot away from the hips with the palms rolling upward. Cover the eyes with an eye bag and rest for 5-15 minutes. To come out of the pose first extend the legs one at a time. Notice if your back has lengthened as a result of practicing CRP. Rest here for several minutes and then bend the knees again and roll over onto your side to come up to sitting.



Moon Cycle Practice

- Use:** Suitable for premenstrual time and during normal, healthy menstruation.
- Effect:** Relaxes the abdomen, uterus and vagina. Supports the health of sexual organs and facilitates the easeful flow of menses. Soothes lower backache.

Salamba Balasana

(Supported Child's Pose) (5-10 minutes)

Place a bolster cross-wise in front of you and prop a second bolster length-wise to form a 30-45 degree angle of support. Kneel in front of the bolster and bend forward so that your abdomen, chest and head are completely supported. Rest your arms around the bolster or to the side, whichever is most comfortable. Fold a washcloth and place this under your left cheek and turn your head to the right (Figure 1). The washcloth will help to reduce the rotation of the neck and thus make it more comfortable. As you feel the need, turn the head to the other side.



Figure 1

- Benefits:** Increases the physiological function of all internal organs, raises parasympathetic function, releases and relaxes the spinal muscles and spinal column. Draws the attention inwards and reduces anxiety.
- Contradictions:** Knee injuries, possibly some spinal conditions although the raised angle should make this comfortable even for those who have difficulty in forward bending.

OR if practicing Child's Pose is uncomfortable because of injuries to your knees try this posture instead:

Adho Mukha Savasana

(Downward Facing Corpse Pose) (5-10 minutes)

Place a bolster in front of you and fold a blanket so that it is roughly 2 inches thick and 8-10 inches wide. Place the blanket support half way down the bolster laying it cross-wise. Now fold a towel to make a 2-4 inch

support. Place this on the floor in front of the bolster. This will support your forehead so that your head and neck form a continuous line through to the rest of your back, that is, so there is no sharp drop off between your upper back and your neck and head (Figure 2). Lower yourself onto the bolster so that your head is on the floor, your breastbone supported by the edge of the bolster and your abdomen supported by the blanket. Your tailbone should be inclined slightly downwards and both the lower back and abdomen completely comfortable (Figure 2.1). Be willing to adjust the blanket by moving it forward or back until you have achieved this comfort. Allow your back muscles to completely relax and your breath to deepen.



Figure 2



Figure 2.1

Benefits: This is an excellent pose for grounding the body, especially if you are suffering from jet lag. The strong pressure against the front of the body induces a relaxation of the whole breathing process while simultaneously activating and nourishing all the internal organs. It is an excellent pose for reducing anxiety.

Contraindications: Heavy bleeding may be exacerbated by the pressure on the abdomen. Women with large breasts sometimes find this pose uncomfortable.

Salamba Supta Baddha Konasana (Supported Supine Bound Angle Pose)

Variation A with sacroiliac support (5-10 minutes)

Place a bolster cross-wise in front of you and prop a second bolster length-wise to form a 30-40 degree angle of support. Fold two blankets of equal thickness so they are roughly 2-3 inches thick, 6-8 inches wide and at least 2 feet long. Place the two blankets to form a **V** in front of the bolster. There will be a triangular depression formed by the edge of the bolster and the two edges of the blankets. Sit with the soles of the feet together so that your buttocks are supported on each of the blankets and the sacrum is centered over the triangular depression (Figure 3). Now fold a third

blanket into an accordion pleat to be 4-6 inches wide and long enough to form a sling to support the legs. Place this roll over the top of your ankles, under your shins and finish the support by wrapping it under the upper thigh/hip area on both sides to form a sling for the legs. The legs will feel as if they are in a secure harness. Lie back onto the bolster and support each arm on a block so that there is a smooth transition between the chest and the arm. Finally fold a wash cloth and place it under your neck and cover the eyes with an eye bag (Figure 3.1).



Variation A - Figure 3.1



Figure 3

Variation B with a yoga belt. (5-10 minutes)

Most women find the first variation very supportive to the sacroiliac joints. However, some women prefer to use a yoga belt. Wrap the belt around the back of your pelvis, slightly lower than your panty line and secure the buckle around the ankles (Figure 3.2). Some women find this variation serves to give a mild traction to the lower back and others who have a more accentuated lumbar curve find the belt can cause compression (Figure 3.3) Those with a deep lumbar curve may find this variation



Variation B - Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3
(incorrect)



Figure 3.4

more comfortable if the buttocks are shifted forward of the edge of the bolster so that the *base of the ribcage* rather than the lower back is supported on the bolster (Figure 3.4) If you have very tight hips consider loosening the belt and moving your feet further away from your groin. Experiment to see which variation serves you best.

Variation C with crossed legs. (5-10 minutes)

Use the same support for the sacrum but simply cross the legs. This variation can also be less stressful to the sacroiliac joints (Figure 3.5).



Variation C - Figure 3.5

Variation D with legs raised. (5-10 minutes)

This variation is suitable for those who experience discomfort in the lower back. Place a bolster cross-wise in front of you. Lie on your back and raise the lower legs onto the support of the bolster with the soles of the feet touching. The whole of your trunk will be resting on the floor. Use a Yoga belt or folded blanket wrapping it over the tops of the feet, under the shins and securing it behind your pelvis (Figure 3.6).



Variation D - Figure 3.6

All Variations of Bound Angle Pose:

Benefits: Directs blood flow to the lower abdomen and can soothe menstrual cramps. Nourishes the sexual organs. (N.B: All Bound Angle variations are excellent for nourishing the male sexual organs and increasing circulation to the prostate glands).

Contraindications: Because the weight of the outstretched knees tends to lever into the sacroiliac joints, Bound Angle Pose in any form can be a potential irritant for those with pre-existing sacroiliac dysfunction. Make sure that the legs are supported at an equal height and that there is no tension on the inner thighs. Consider moving the feet further away from the groin OR try Variation B with the legs crossed instead.

Salamba Parigrasana

(Supported Gateway Pose) (3-7 minutes)

Lie on your right side over a large cylindrical bolster with the apex of the curve of the bolster under the nipple line of your chest (mid-thoracic spine). Place a tightly rolled bath towel on top of a folded blanket to support your neck. Your neck will also be in a side-lying position with the head draped over the towel (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Note that the primary function of the towel roll is to support the open spacing and span of the cervical vertebrae in lateral extension (side bending) and is not to support the head. If you make the diameter of the towel too big you will end up with your head raised higher than your neck (ear towards your upper shoulder). If you make the diameter of the towel too small this will cause your neck and head to collapse to the side.

Extend the arm over the head and experiment with how far forward of the shoulder or how far back over the head it is comfortable for you to stretch the arm. The extension of the arm creates an opening throughout the whole rib cage, releasing the intercostals muscles and the diaphragm while opening the lungs.

The deep intervertebral muscles of the upper back will also be released, making this an ideal posture for those with a stiff thoracic spine (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1

For those who are more flexible you can bend the upper arm and reach back behind the head to grasp the end of the towel roll. Use this as an anchor to then press the elbow along the side of the head to increase the lateral extension of the neck (Figure 4.2).

Alternatively, you can place your hand *with very gentle pressure* against the side of your head to gradually increase the lateral extension of the neck (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.2

After 3-7 minutes very slowly begin to spiral onto your back *as if you were going to roll onto your back* but only go a few degrees to increase the rotation and release throughout the trunk (Figure 4.4). Then roll back onto your side and towards your forehead. Practice this spiral action moving forward and backwards several times. Then roll onto the other side.



Figure 4.4

Benefits: Releases tension in the diaphragm and lungs and increases breath capacity. This therapeutic pose is extraordinarily useful for increasing the spacing between the thoracic vertebrae and is therefore a powerful antidote for those with kyphosis (exaggerated thoracic curvature). The supported side bending of the neck can effectively alleviate compression in the cervical spine.

Contraindications: On rare occasions the side-bending action can exacerbate preexisting disc problems in the lumbar spine, but each individual should experiment to see if side bending is safe for them. Those with osteopenia, osteoporosis or any degenerative condition of the spine, (in particular the cervical region) should work under the supervision of an experienced instructor.

The Rolling Brook (5-10 minutes)

Place a large cylindrical bolster under the knees and a rolled blanket under the chest (nipple line or level with the center of the shoulder blades) and a tightly rolled bath towel under the neck. The size of each roll will be dependent on your particular body proportions and your flexibility or stiffness in the different segments of your spine. Lie with your legs supported by the bolster, your upper back lifted into extension by the chest roll and your neck supported in gentle extension by the neck roll (Figure 5). If your shoulders do not rest downwards toward the floor and if the neck is in an uncomfortably arched position, reduce the diameter of the chest roll and slightly increase the diameter of the neck roll. If the lower back is at all uncomfortable, reduce the diameter of the chest roll, or slightly raise the buttocks onto a folded blanket (increasing the thickness of the blanket until the lumbar spine is completely comfortable). Focus on releasing on the exhalation, allowing your upper back, neck and shoulders to relax. Stay only as long as is comfortable for you and when you do wish to come out of the pose roll onto your side.



Figure 5.1



Figure 5

Benefits: Releases tension in the thoracic spine and shoulders. Helps to reestablish the normal inward curve of the cervical spine and can be therapeutic for those with flattened cervical curves and loss of spacing in between the cervical vertebrae. Improves breathing capacity.

Contraindications: For those with chronic asthma the expansive opening of the chest can occasionally trigger a sympathetic reaction and asthma-like precursor symptoms. The previous side-lying restorative pose should minimize this possibility. For those with very restricted spinal movement simply reduce the size of the rolls, or change the shape of the thoracic roll so that it is folded into a gentle roof-like shape (Figure 5.1) offering a more graduated curvature for the spine.

Salamba Upavistha Konasana I
(Supported Wide-Angle Pose I) (3-5 minutes in the variation most appropriate for you.)

Create a **T**-shape support with two bolsters and place these in front of you. Open your legs to the side to form a wide but comfortable angle. Slowly bend forward so that your abdomen, chest and head are supported on the bolster. For extra comfort raise your head with a folded washcloth (Figure 6).

If you prefer to turn your head to the side, place a folded washcloth under one cheek to make this more comfortable, as it will reduce the rotation of the neck. Spend a minute or so with the head turned to one side, then move the washcloth to the other cheek and turn the head in the other direction.



Figure 6

If you do not have the flexibility to bend forward onto the bolster and remain comfortable in your lower back, place a chair in front of you instead with a large bolster propped against the edge of the seat. Tip forward to rest your torso against the bolster and rest your arms on the seat of the chair (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1

Alternatively, you can also prop a bolster at an angle rest your head on the edge of the bolster using your arms to give light support for the back (Figure 6.2). Stay for 3 -5 minutes and use your arms to support you as you come out of the pose.

Finally, if none of these variations is comfortable because of a lack of flexibility, try simply sitting in a crossed-legs position and tipping forward onto the support of a bolster (Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.2



Figure 6.3

Benefits: Increases blood flow to the abdomen and supports easeful flow of the menses.

Contraindications: May be contraindicated for some lower back injuries. Could be an irritant for those with sciatica or injuries to the hamstring muscles.

Baddha Konasana
(Bound Angle) (3-5 minutes)

In this classic variation of the pose, sit with the soles of your feet lightly pressed together. Wrap the hands around the feet and elongate the back to sit upright (Figure 7). If your flexibility is such that your knees are well

away from the floor, move the feet further away from your groin and place your hands either side of your hips to give you support to straighten the back.



Figure 7

- Benefits:** Increases blood flow to the abdomen and supports easeful flow of the menses.
- Contraindications:** Because the weight of the outstretched knees tends to lever into the sacroiliac joints, Bound Angle Pose in any form can be a potential irritant for those with pre-existing sacroiliac dysfunction. To help, support the legs at an equal height and ensure there is no tension on the inner thighs.

Savasana **(Corpse Pose) (5-20 minutes)**

Support the lower legs on two bolsters. Place a *slightly inflated* Gertie ball² under your sacrum, centering the ball so that your lower back is in a neutral position. When you place your hand on the ball you should not be able to feel the floor underneath (Figure 8). For those with a deep lumbar curve it may feel more comfortable to place the ball more towards the tailbone. For those with a flat lower back it may feel more comfortable to have the Gertie ball on the lumbosacral junction (the transition between the sacrum and the lower back) where it can support the lower vertebrae. Now place the Stillpoint balls³ so that they rest *slightly wider* than the center of the occipital ridges on the skull. The head will drop slightly below the support of the two balls but will not be resting on the floor. Cover the eyes with an eye bag and rest for 5-15 minutes (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1

Benefits: This variation is particularly therapeutic for those with compression and/or inflammation in the lower back or sacroiliac joints. The Stillpoint balls serve to induce a very deep state of relaxation.

Contraindications: The Stillpoint balls should not be used if you are pregnant or recovering from a head injury, stroke or surgery (see the contraindications listed by the manufacturer). If the Stillpoint balls are not suitable for you, place a folded towel underneath the neck and head instead.



Figure 8

² Gertie Balls are roughly 9 inches in diameter. They have a remarkably soft pliant texture that makes them ideal for use in supporting the body in Yoga postures. The use of these balls is only limited by your imagination. They can be inflated or deflated to “fit” the area that needs supporting. When they are inflated slightly (almost flat) they make an extremely effective flotation device for the sacrum and lower back, allowing the spine to elongate. Inflated they lift and support structures such as the knees in forward bends. They are available in most toy stores.

³ Stillpoint balls were designed by Cranial Sacral Therapists to help the body regain its restorative balance. Cerebrospinal fluid is produced at your core and flows around the brain and spinal cord in a constant rhythm. By therapeutically bringing that rhythm to a standstill, a phenomenon known as *stillpoint* is created. When a stillpoint is achieved, the body’s stress response is shut off and it’s restorative system comes into dominance, bringing an immediate relaxation. While lying down, the Stillpoint is simply placed behind the head (an instruction sheet is included) and the effects of the balls particular density and shape enable virtually anyone to induce a stillpoint in minutes. Stillpoint balls are available through The Cranial Therapy Centre in Canada (www.stillpointer.com).

Suggestion for the Day

Take some time to lie on the earth, preferably with your body in direct contact with the ground. If this isn't possible, spend a few minutes lying in Constructive Rest Position. Feel and follow the direction of your energy and notice that during menstruation it is natural to want to be quiet and to have the body close to the ground. Perhaps this is the time of month that you catch up on reading, sewing, knitting, weeding the garden, or some other repetitive, creative activity that helps to build resources of energy.

SEQUENCE SUGGESTIONS:

30-65 minutes

Supported Child's Pose or Downward Facing Corpse Pose (5-10 minutes)

Supported Supine Bound Angle Pose (5-10 minutes)

Supported Gateway Pose (3-7 minutes)

The Rolling Brook (5-10 minutes)

Supported Wide-Angle Pose I (3-5 minutes)

Bound Angle (3-5 minutes)

Corpse Pose (5-20 minutes)

15 minutes

Supported Supine Bound Angle Pose (5 minutes)

Corpse Pose (10 minutes)

5-10 minutes

Corpse Pose (5-10 minutes)



Perimenopause & Menopause Sequence

Use: Fatigue, weariness and depletion accompanied by general stiffness. Episodic hot flashes and sweating. Perimenopause and menopause.

Effect: Calming, nourishing, increases physiological function of all internal organs, reduces sympathetic nervous system activation while increasing the base support of the parasympathetic nervous system. Reduces internal heat (cooling). Releases and relaxes the entire spine.

Sitting Meditation: Body Weather Reading (10-30 minutes)

During times of fatigue and during the often disorienting period of perimenopause and menopause, we may be experiencing many changes. These changes can be happening on a physical, energetic, emotional, mental and spiritual level. Sometimes there is so much change occurring it is difficult to get a grasp of what exactly is going on! The simple act of sitting still can give us a better sense of where we are and how we are. Through getting a better gauge of our current state of being we can better assess how to use our Yoga practice to bring balance. The practice that follows is called Body Weather Reading. It is a simple practice of observing the state of each layer of your embodiment.

Even if you are tired, take at least 10 minutes to sit quietly and let your mind settle (Figure 1). If you are unaccustomed to sitting without support, place your back against a wall and raise your buttocks on a folded blanket. Alternatively, you may lie down with the knees bent and the head and neck slightly raised on a folded towel in Constructive Rest Position (see page 3). As you begin, focus your awareness on the rise and fall of your breath, bringing your attention back to the breath each time the mind wanders off. Be clear that there is no ideal to the process of perception: whatever comes up is equally worthy of your observation. It is not good or bad, but simply “information” that can help you to know where you are and how you are. Without this information it is very difficult indeed to know how to bring balance within your practice and how you might adjust your day to support a movement towards equanimity.

First notice what is present in the physical structure of your body. In particular, observe if there are any areas of tension or compression. Take a few minutes to scan through your whole body being careful not to miss anything. Then bring your awareness to the subtler energetic body and notice the quality of your breath. Is it shallow, rough, smooth or irregular? Also take note of your overall energy level. Do you feel rested or weary? Is your pranic battery fully charged and ready for action or is it flat and empty? Then bring your awareness to your emotional body and note whether there are any thoughts, feelings or emotions currently visiting today. As you make note of these feelings or emotions be careful not to drift off or to get caught up in the story you may attach to these feelings. Notice the sensations in your body that may accompany these feelings. Finally, observe whether in this moment you feel a sense of connection to the world. Do you feel connected to the world and to others, or do you feel a bit lonely and cut off.

Finally, draw your awareness deeper into the background of all these experiences. You have observed physical sensations, energetic qualities, thoughts, feelings and emotions. Each of these has the potential to create “turbulence” like an airplane being buffeted and shaken by strong winds. Once the awareness itself has moved into a point of reference that is panoramic, it is like the airplane having attained a cruising altitude. Even though your experiences continue it is now possible to view them with a quiet detachment and dispassion. From this larger perspective, you can view your experience as transitory and impermanent as the movement of clouds. All the contents of experience remain yet the simple act of viewing these experiences from the unshakable still part of yourself can give you a valuable perspective.

As you complete your Body Weather Reading, note how you are today and use this information as a baseline perception so that you can compare and appreciate any changes that occur as you move through the therapeutic sequence. After each posture, take a moment to observe whether there are any changes that have occurred on any level of your embodiment as a result of the practice.



Figure 1

Salamba Balasana

(Supported Child's Pose) (5-10 minutes)

Place a bolster cross-wise in front of you and prop a second bolster length-wise to form a 30-45 degree angle of support. Kneel in front of the bolster and bend forward so that your abdomen, chest and head are completely supported. Rest your arms in front of the bolster or to the sides, whichever is most comfortable. Fold a washcloth and place this under your left cheek and turn your head to the right. The washcloth will help to reduce the rotation of the neck and thus make it more comfortable (Figure 2). As you feel the need, turn your head to the other side.



Figure 2

Benefits: Increases the physiological function of all internal organs, raises parasympathetic support, releases and relaxes the spinal muscles and spinal column. Draws the attention inwards and reduces anxiety.

Contraindications: Knee injuries, possibly some spinal conditions although the raised angle should make this comfortable even for those who have difficulty in forward bending.

Salamba Adho Mukha Jathara Parivartannasana

(Supported Downward Facing Revolved Belly) (3-5 mins)

Place 2 bolsters to form a **T**-shape support. Turn the knees to the right side and resting the right hip on the floor, support the abdomen and trunk on the bolster. Your head will be turned to the right and the arms outstretched to the side. Focus on broadening through the back of the body, especially across the back of your shoulders as you give your weight to the support of the bolsters (Figure 3). Stay for 3-5 minutes on each side.



Figure 3

- Benefits:** Stimulates the internal organs and reminds the large intestine and bowel of their job. Raises parasympathetic support while releasing tension through the spinal column and shoulders.
- Contraindications:** Compromised vertebral disc integrity, disc herniation and sacroiliac instability may be exacerbated by this twist. May not be appropriate for those with irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhea or heavy menstrual bleeding.

Salamba Parigrasana

(Supported Gateway Pose) (3-7 minutes)

Lie on your right side over a large cylindrical bolster with the apex of the curve of the bolster under the nipple line of your chest (mid-thoracic spine). Place a tightly rolled bath towel on top of a folded blanket to support your neck. Your neck will also be in a side-lying position with the head draped over the towel. Note that the primary function of the towel roll is to support the open spacing and span of the cervical vertebrae in lateral extension (side bending) and is not to support the head. If you make the diameter of the towel too big you will end up with your head raised higher than your neck (ear towards your upper shoulder). If you make the diameter of the towel too small this will cause the neck and head to collapse to the side. Extend the arm over the head and experiment with how far forward of the shoulder or how far back over the head it is comfortable for you to stretch the arm. The extension of the arm creates an opening throughout the whole rib cage, releasing the intercostals muscles and the diaphragm while opening the lungs. The deep intervertebral muscles of the upper back will also be released, making this an ideal posture for those with a stiff thoracic spine (Figure 4). See pages 10-11 for remaining variations.



Figure 4

- Benefits:** Releases tension in the diaphragm and lungs and increases breath capacity. This posture is extraordinarily therapeutic for increasing the spacing between the thoracic and cervical vertebrae and a powerful opening for those with kyphosis (increased thoracic curvature) or those with arthritic changes and nerve impingement in the neck.

Contradictions: On rare occasions the side-bending action can exacerbate preexisting disc problems in the lumbar spine, but each individual should experiment to see if the side bending is safe for them.

The Rolling Brook (5-10 minutes)

Place a large cylindrical bolster under the knees, and a rolled blanket under the chest (nipple line or level with the center of the shoulder blades) and a tightly rolled bath towel under the neck. The size of each roll will be dependent on your particular body proportions and your flexibility or stiffness in the different segments of your spine. Lie with your legs supported by the bolster, your upper back lifted into extension by the chest roll and your neck supported in gentle extension by the neck roll (Figure 5). If your shoulders do not rest downwards toward the floor and if the neck is in an uncomfortably arched position, reduce the diameter of the chest roll and slightly increase the diameter of the neck roll. If the lower back is at all uncomfortable, reduce the diameter of the chest roll, or slightly raise the buttocks onto a folded blanket (increasing the thickness of the blanket until the lumbar spine is completely comfortable). Focus on releasing on the exhalation, allowing your upper back, neck and shoulders to relax. Stay only as long as is comfortable for you and when you do wish to come out of the pose roll onto your side.



Figure 5

Benefits: Releases tension in the thoracic spine and shoulders. Helps to reestablish the normal inward curve of the cervical spine and can be therapeutic for those with flattened cervical curves and loss of spacing in between the cervical vertebrae. Improves breathing capacity.

Contraindications: For those with chronic asthma the expansive opening of the chest can occasionally trigger a sympathetic reaction and asthma-like precursor symptoms. The previous side-lying restorative pose should minimize this possibility. For those with very restricted spinal movement simply reduce the size of the rolls, or change the shape of the thoracic roll so that it is folded into a gentle roof-like shape (see page 12) offering a more graduated curvature for the spine.

Adho Mukha Jathara Parivartannasana

(Downward Facing Revolved Belly Pose Variation B) (3-5 mins)

Fold two blankets so that they are 3-4 inches thick, 8-10 inches wide and at least 2 feet wide. Place them about a foot apart on the floor so that the first blanket supports your abdomen and the second blanket supports your chest. Turn your knees to the right and lie face downwards over the blanket support. Your chest will be slightly elevated as your head rests on the floor, making the twist much more comfortable in the neck (Figure 6). In this variation there is a deeper rotation of the spine and an even deeper squeezing action on the internal organs. Stay for 3-5 minutes, breathing deeply and then practice the pose to the other side.



Figure 6

Benefits: Releases and relaxes the entire spinal column and simultaneously opens the shoulders. Tones and massages the bowel.

Contraindications: See page 21.

Repeat Salamba Balasana Pose

(Supported Child's Pose) (3-5 minutes)



Figure 7

Salamba Uttanasana

(Supported Forward Bend) (3-5 minutes)

Place a chair against the wall with the seat facing you. Rest a firm bolster against the seat of the chair. Holding the legs of the chair, slowly walk back until your feet are slightly behind the line of your hips, your trunk is inclined forwards and your head is resting on the bolster support. Take some time to experiment as to the exact point of contact on your head (anywhere from the crown of the head to the forehead) that allows you to feel a connection between the top of the head through the neck to the rest of the spine all the way down your legs to your heels. You should feel that the head is *actively yielding* into the bolster support while simultaneously pressing back to lengthen the neck and spine (Figure 8). Do not collapse the neck and head into the bolster as this will cause discomfort in your neck. If you are very confident or your position and feel absolutely light and sensation-less throughout the spine, you can practice the posture with your hands resting just below your knees on your shins, forming a steady triangle of support (Figure 8.1). If you find this posture uncomfortable in your neck, seek the guidance of an experienced Yoga teacher. To come out of the posture, slowly bend the knees, place the hands on the thighs for support and pivot the trunk up to standing.



Figure 8.1



Figure 8

Benefits:

This posture provides a welcome alternative to the potentially difficult practice of Head Stand and places far less weight through the delicate cervical vertebrae. Like head stand, however, the blood flow from the trunk is reversed, stimulating the internal organs and endocrine glands. For this reason, the posture can be immensely uplifting, raising energy levels and creating an overall feeling of freshness. It is also very calming and soothing.

Contraindications:

Preexisting conditions of the neck, detached retina, glaucoma, high blood pressure, menstruation. Those with low blood pressure can benefit from practicing this pose but should come out slowly, pausing with the hands on the thighs for at least a few breaths before coming to the upright position.

Salamba Setu Bandhasana Variation A

(Supported Constructed Bridge) (5-10 minutes)

Place a bolster at right angles to a wall and fold a blanket so that it is 2-3 inches thick and about the same width as the bolster support. Place the blanket about 4-6 inches from the edge of the bolster to create a stair step that will act to raise your sacrum slightly above the level of your lower back (Figure 9).



Figure 9

Now sit on the blanket and bolster facing the wall and tie the upper third of your thighs together. This will serve to prevent your legs from falling apart and placing strain on your lower back. Slowly recline backwards over the edge of the bolster until your shoulders are resting on the floor. Keeping one leg bent, place the sole of the other foot onto the wall, about the height of your hips. As you straighten the leg carefully move the bolster support with you. Once you have adjusted the bolster to be at a correct distance from the wall, place both your feet firmly on the wall and maintain a light but consistent pressure of the feet against the wall throughout the practice. This will help to lengthen and release the lower back and also to create a container of support for the circulation of energy into your abdomen and internal organs (Figure 9.1).

If your lower back is at all uncomfortable there are many options.

Consider:

- ~ raising the height of the feet on the wall.
- ~ bending the knees and placing the soles of your feet on the blanket support.
- ~ adding another blanket under the pelvis to raise the sacrum higher.
- ~ adding another blanket under the neck and shoulders to reduce the angle of the chest and lower back.

Stay for 5-10 minutes. To come out slowly push yourself away from the wall and rest with your lower legs on the bolster support and your back on the floor for an additional 3 minutes, before rolling onto your right side.



Figure 9.1

- Benefits:** This pose is strongly stimulating for the kidneys and sexual organs. The horizontal position of the abdominal organs takes the weight of these organs off of the diaphragm allowing the diaphragm muscles to broaden and release, creating optimal conditions for a lengthening of the exhalation phase of the breath. Like Shoulderstand, this posture has a deeply calming and sedating effect on the nervous system.
- Contraindications:** Those with sacroiliac and/or lumbar spine problems may need to experiment to find a comfortable supportive position for the back. Neck injuries or condition of the cervical spine, especially compromised disc health should not practice this posture. High blood pressure, detached retina, glaucoma. Although this posture can be done while menstruating, it is best to avoid in the first few days of bleeding or if the lower back feels sensitive at this time.

Viparita Karani Variation

(Modified Shoulderstand Variation A) (5-10 minutes)

Place a sturdy chair with the side on to a wall. In front of the seat of the chair place a cylindrical bolster cross-wise. Place a second bolster length-wise to form a + shape. Tie the upper third of your thighs together with a Yoga strap. Sit on the bolster support which will feel a little like a see-saw. Lie on your back with your buttocks supported over the curvature of the cross-wise bolster and your lower legs elevated and supported on the seat of the chair. Recline back until your shoulders are *almost* resting on the support of the folded blanket. Your chest will be in an expansive opened position while your head and neck will be in slight flexion towards the breastbone (Figure 10).



Figure 10

If you feel any sense of pounding in the forehead and temples raise the blanket support under the neck and head. If this does not alleviate the rush of blood to the head come out of the posture immediately. Consider practicing a variation with your lower legs resting on the seat of the chair, your pelvis slightly elevated by a folded blanket and your head, neck and shoulders resting on the floor (Figure 10.1). Stay for 5-10 minutes enjoying the rejuvenating and reviving effects.



Figure 10.1

Benefits:

This pose acts like a little shot of espresso, radically altering the flow of fluids from the lower body to the heart and lungs. After the calming and nourishing effects of the previous postures, this posture serves to raise the energy levels so that the sum total of the practice is to leave you feeling revived rather than sedated.

Contraindications: High blood pressure, glaucoma, detached retina, menstruation. Even if you do not suffer from clinical high blood pressure some people feel an uncomfortable sensation of pounding in the forehead and temples. If this is the case, first try raising the height of the blankets under the shoulders and head. If this does not work, then try decreasing the angle of elevation of the legs by propping the lengthwise bolster on a folded blanket instead of another bolster. Last, if all else fails, lie with the knees bent and the pelvis and chest *slightly* elevated on a folded blanket and the shoulders gently inclined off the edge of the blanket onto the floor.

Savasana

(Corpse Pose) (5-15 minutes)

Place a cylindrical bolster under the lower thighs and knees. Roll a soft blanket and tuck it around the top and sides of the head, anchoring the roll under the shoulders near the edges of your neck (Figure 11). The pressure of the blanket should serve to keep the head absolutely still, generating a very comforting and calming effect.



Figure 11

Suggestions for the Day

Is there anything you can take off your “to do” list today? Consider practicing Constructive Rest Position for 10-20 minutes after lunch or in the late afternoon as a way of recouping your energies, especially if you have been troubled by insomnia or restless sleep the previous night. Ask yourself: What advice would my best friend offer me today? Would she suggest taking a nice, long bath or taking the time for a walk or just kicking back and enjoying a good movie?

SEQUENCE SUGGESTIONS

45-105 minutes

Sitting Meditation: Body Weather Reading (10-30 minutes)
Supported Child's Pose (5-10 minutes)
Supported Downward Facing Revolved Belly (3-5 minutes)
Supported Gateway Pose (3-7 minutes)
The Rolling Brook (5-10 minutes)
Downward Facing Revolved Belly Pose: Variation B (3-5 minutes)
Supported Child's Pose (3-5 minutes)
Supported Forward Bend (3-5 minutes)
Supported Constructed Bridge (5-10 minutes)
OR Supported Shouldertand (5-10 minutes)
Corpse Pose (5-15 minutes)

20-30 minutes

Supported Child's Pose (5 minutes)
Supported Forward Bend (3 minutes)
Supported Bridge Pose (5-10 minutes)
Corpse Pose (5-10 minutes)

5-10 minutes

Supported Child's Pose



The “Centreing Down” Sequence

- Uses:** Prenatal, postnatal, premenstrual, perimenopausal and menopausal. Also an excellent sequence for those with headache.
NB: All postures are suitable up to the end of the third trimester except Supported Pigeon, Reclining Bound Angle - modify by raising the trunk to a height of 45 degrees, and Supine Corpse Pose - relax side lying instead.
- Effect:** Draws the energy down into the navel centre. Reduces mental agitation. Cools and calms.

Salamba Siddhasana

(Supported Crossed-Legs Forward Bend) (5-10 minutes)

Sit on the edge of a folded blanket with your legs crossed. Place a chair in front of you and resting the base of the bolster in your lap, tip forward so that the bolster is resting on the edge of the seat. Cross your arms on the seat of the chair (Figure 1). Relax the abdomen into the support of the bolster and completely release the shoulders. Stay for 3-5 minutes then change the cross of the legs and the cross of the arms and repeat on the other side.



Figure 1

- Benefits:** Gently releases tension from the hips and spine. Cools and calms, drawing the energy down from the head to the navel centre. An excellent antidote for headache and mental agitation.
- Contraindications:** Diarrhea, excessive menstrual bleeding and some lower back conditions.

Janu Sirasana Vinyasana (Head to Knee Flowing Sequence)

Janu Sirasana

(Head to Knee Pose Variation A) (1-3 minutes)

Sit with your buttocks supported on the edge of a folded blanket. Bend the right knee and draw it back so that the foot is tucked in against the inside of the left thigh. If your hips are tight and the knee is more than a few inches away from the floor, move the foot to the inside of the left knee and place a folded blanket underneath the knee for support. Now turn to face the bent leg and place a bolster in front of the knee. Bend forward and rest your arms on the bolster allowing the opposite hip to come slightly away from the floor (Figure 2). With all the following variations you can also work with a bolster tipped at an angle so that your forehead is resting on the edge of the bolster and your arms are used to give support to the back (Figure 2.1)



Figure 2.1

Variation A - Figure 2

Janu Sirasana

(Head to Knee Pose Variation B) (1-3 minutes)

Now turn so that you are facing the space in between the left and right leg. Place two bolsters in a **T**-shape and bend forward to relax over the support of the bolsters (Figure 2.2).



Variation B - Figure 2.2

Janu Sirasana

(Head to Knee Pose Variation C) (1-3 minutes)

Now turn to face the extended leg and bend forward to rest your forehead on a bolster placed at right angles to your shin (Figure 2.3). If this is not comfortable consider raising the height of the support by using two bolsters (Figure 2.4). . . . slowly come out of the pose and turn to face the right leg and extend the left leg behind you so that you transition seamlessly into Supported Pigeon Pose.



Figure 2.4



Variation C - Figure 2.3

All variations of Head to Knee Pose:

Benefits: Opens the hips and spine. Tones and stimulates the abdominal organs and the sex glands. Cools the body and calms the mind.

Contraindications: Those with disc problems should be cautious.

Salamba Rajakapotasana

(Supported Pigeon Pose) (3-7 minutes)

The heel of the right foot will be directly in front of your groin with the left leg extended behind you. Place a bolster in front of you and support the pelvis and entire trunk along the length of the bolster being careful to ensure that the pelvis is level with the ground. Rest your arms either side of the bolster (Figure 3) . . . slowly come out of the Supported Pigeon Pose and turn back to your original starting position in Head to Knee Pose.



Figure 3

Benefits: A gentle and effective release for the hips, groin and iliopsoas muscles which can be a great antidote for long hours of sitting or driving. Relaxes the abdomen and activates all internal organs.

Contraindications: Knee injury.

Marichyasana I

(Twist of the Sage Pose) (1-3 minutes)

Place the sole of the right foot on the floor directly in front of the right sitting bone. Turn the belly to the left placing the right elbow on the inside of the right knee. Use your left arm, placed behind you to gently support the back. Do not push the right arm against the knee but rather press the knee firmly against the arm as you use the support of your outgoing breath to deepen into the twist and the support of your incoming breath to lengthen and elongate the spine (Figure 4). Stay for 1-3 minutes and then slowly release the right leg to the side to seamlessly transition into Bound Angle Pose.



Figure 4

Benefits: Stimulates the circulation, tone and function of the internal organs, especially the liver, lungs and spleen. Releases deeply held tension in the back, neck and shoulders. Assists the elimination of toxins stored in the muscle and organ tissue.

Contraindications: Those with disc problems should be cautious.

Baddha Konasana

(Bound Angle Pose) (1-3 minutes)

Lower the right knee and press the soles of the feet together. In this classic variation of the pose, sit with the soles of your feet lightly pressed together. Wrap the hands around the feet and elongate the back to sit upright (Figure 5). If your flexibility is such that your knees are well away from the floor, move the feet further away from your groin and place your hands either side of your hips to support the back.



Figure 5

Now begin the whole cycle on the other side, starting with Head to Knee Pose Variation A.

Salamba Baddha Konasana

(Bound Angle Pose Variation D with legs raised) (5-10 minutes)

This variation is suitable for those who experience discomfort in the lower back. Place a bolster cross-wise in front of you. Lie on your back and raise the lower legs onto the support of the bolster with the soles of the feet touching. The whole of your trunk will be resting on the floor. Use a Yoga belt or folded blanket wrapping it over the tops of the feet, under the shins and securing it behind your pelvis (Figure 6).



Figure 6

All variations of Bound Angle Pose:

Benefits: Increases blood flow to the abdomen. Nourishes the sexual organs.

Contraindications: Can be a potential irritant for those with preexisting sacroiliac dysfunction.

Viparita Karani Variation C

(Modified Shoulderstand Variation C) (5-10 minutes)

Place a chair side on to the head of your mat.* Fold a blanket and place this on the edge of the seat. This will cushion the backs of your knees and thigh. Place a bolster on the floor in front of the seat of the chair and a folded blanket in front of the bolster. Sit on the bolster and carefully wrap the forehead and eyes with a soft crepe bandage, securing the end around the side of your head. Check that the bandage is not so tight that it is pulling the skin around your eyes and temples, but secure enough that you feel a light comforting pressure over the orbits of the eyes and forehead, and over the ears and back of the skull. Your eyes will be completely covered but the nasal passages should not be obstructed in any way.

Wrapping a bandage around the head is a way of calming the senses by removing visual, and to some degree, auditory stimuli. Additionally, the gentle pressure of the bandage helps to relax the muscles of the temples and the scalp which for many people can heighten relaxation. As the sensory perception is withdrawn from the outside, one is able to become more sensitive to subtle internal sensation.

Slowly recline back so that your pelvis is elevated on the bolster, your lower legs are resting on the cushioned seat of the chair and your shoulders, neck and head will be resting on the blanket (Figure 7). Stay for 5-10 minutes. To come out of the pose, slowly push yourself off of the bolster until your trunk is resting comfortably on the floor and your legs are supported by the bolster.

(*In place of a chair you can use the seat of a couch to support your legs. If you have a friend to help you, also place a bolster across the tops of your shins just below the knees which can serve to anchor the legs and give an even deeper release to the lower back. Enjoy!)



Figure 7

Benefits: This pose acts like a little shot of espresso, radically altering the flow of fluids from the lower body to the heart and lungs.

Contraindications: High blood pressure, glaucoma, detached retina, menstruation.

Savasana

(Corpse Pose) (5-15 minutes)

Take this time to completely absorb the effects of the entire practice sequence (Figure 8). When you have completed your practice roll onto your right side and wait another minute before slowly sitting up and removing the eye bandage.



Figure 8

SEQUENCE SUGGESTIONS

60-90 minutes

Supported Crossed-legs forward bend (3-5 minutes each side)

Head to Knee Flowing Sequence: 10-20 minutes for sequence on each side

~ Head to Knee Variation A (1-3 minutes)

~ Head to Knee Variation B (1-3 minutes)

~ Head to Knee Variation C (1-3 minutes)

~ Supported Pigeon (3-7 minutes)

~ Twist of the Sage (1-3 minutes)

~ Bound Angle (1-3 minutes)

Reclining Bound Angle Variation D with legs raised (5-10 minutes)

Viparita Karani Variation C (5-10 minutes)

Corpse Pose (5-15 minutes)

15-30 minutes

Supported Crossed-legs forward bend (3-5 minutes each side)

Reclining Bound Angle Variation D with legs raised (5 minutes)

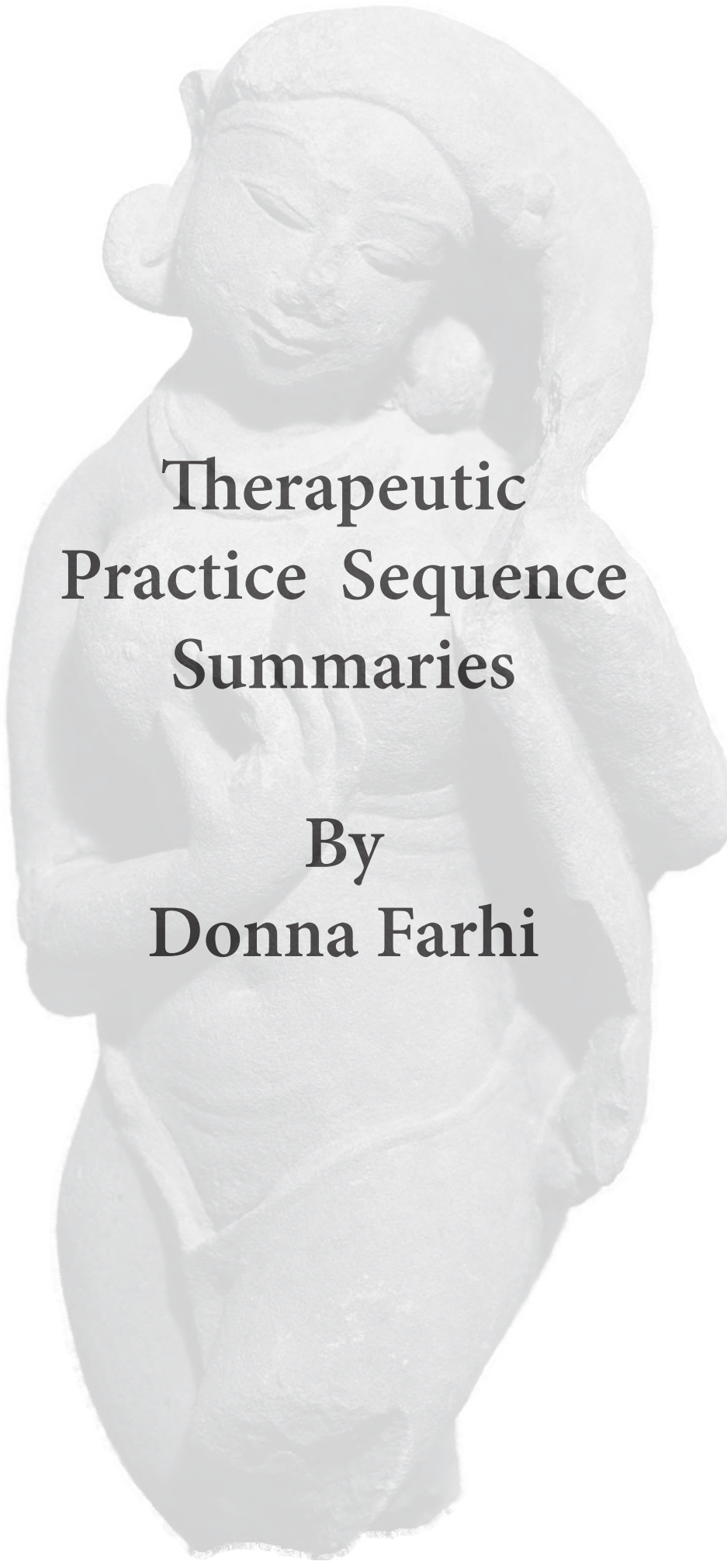
Viparita Karani Variation C (5 minutes)

Corpse Pose (5 minutes)

5-10 minutes

Corpse Pose (5-10 minutes)





Therapeutic Practice Sequence Summaries

By
Donna Farhi



OR



Moon Cycle



1. Supported Child's Pose

- 5-10 mins

OR

2. Downward Facing Corpse Pose

- 5-10 mins

3. Supported Supine Bound Angle Pose

- Variation A with Sacroiliac support
- 5-10 mins
- or Variation B with Yoga belt (page 7)
- or Variation C with crossed legs (page 8)
- or Variation D with legs raised (page 8)

4, 5 & 6. Supported Gateway Pose

- 3-7 mins





Sequence

7. Rolling Brook

- 5-10 mins

8. Supported Wide-Angle Pose

- 3-5 mins
- or Variation with chair (page 13)
- or Variation with bolster raised (page 14)
- or Variation with crossed legs (page 14)

9. Bound Angle Pose

- 3-5 mins

10. Corpse Pose

- 5-20 mins





Perimenopause &

1. **Sitting Meditation**
 - 10-30 mins.
2. **Supported Child's Pose**
 - 5-10 mins
3. **Supported Downward Facing Revolved Belly Pose**
 - 3-5 mins
4. **Supported Gateway Pose**
 - 3-7 mins
5. **Rolling Brook**
 - 5-10 mins
6. **Downward Facing Revolved Belly Pose**
 - 3-5 mins





Menopause Sequence

7. Supported Child's Pose

- 3-5 mins

8. Supported Forward Bend

- 3-5 mins
- or Variation with hands on legs (page 24)

9. Supported Constructive Bridge

- 5-10 mins

10. Modified Shoulderstand Variation A

- 5-10 mins
- or Variation without bolsters (page 27)

11. Corpse Pose

- 5-10 mins





The “Centring

1. **Supported Crossed-legs Forward Bend**
• 5-10 mins.
2. **Head to Knee Pose Variation A**
• 1-3 mins
3. **Head to Knee Pose Variation B**
• 1-3 mins
4. **Head to Knee Pose Variation C**
• 1-3 mins
5. **Supported Pigeon Pose**
• 3-7 mins
6. **Twist of the Sage Pose**
• 1-3 mins





Down” Sequence

7. Bound Angle Pose

- 1-3 mins

Now begin the whole cycle on the other side, starting with Head to Knee Pose Variation A (No. 2)

8. Bound Angle Pose Variation D with legs raised

- 5-10 mins

9. Modified Shoulderstand Variation C

- 5-10 mins

10. Corpse Pose

- 5-15 mins



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

