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Kripalu Yoga: An Overview

Compiled by

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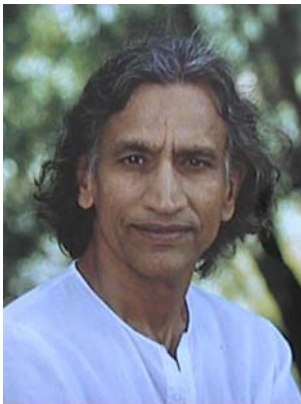
What is Kripalu Yoga?

Kripalu Yoga was developed by Yogi Amrit Desai, who founded the Yoga Society of Pennsylvania which is a nonprofit organization which specialized in providing training for yoga teachers as well as providing yoga classes. Yogi Desai was from Halol, a small village in India. The discipline was named after Yogi Desai's guru, Swami Kripalvananda (A Simple Guide to Contemporary Styles of Yoga).

Kripalu Yoga is described as “an interplay of body, mind and energy” (Parnell, 2005). Within us is a system of energy which flows throughout our bodies. “Even the most insignificant thought can disturb or block this flow of energy, creating imbalance or even disease” (Parnell, 2005).

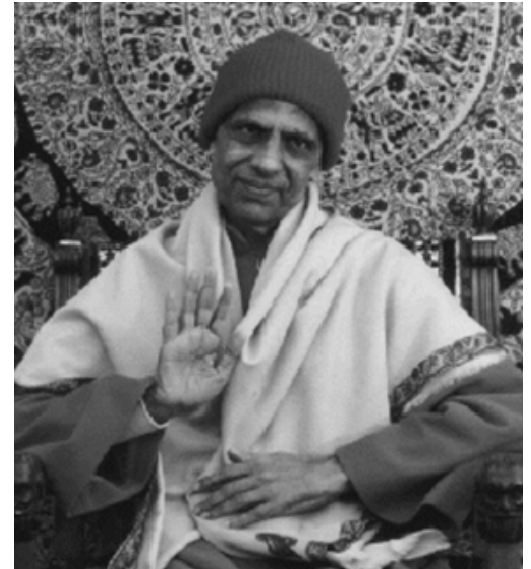
The practice of Kripalu Yoga includes “physical postures, breathing techniques, deep relaxation and meditation” (Parnell, 2005).

Kripalu yoga was developed by Yogi Amrit Desai.



When you establish a habit of practicing Kripalu yoga, “by fully experiencing and objectively observing your physical, mental and emotional experience, blockages [to the flow of energy within the body] begin to dissolve, energy is freed, and healing can happen on all levels” (Parnell, 2005).

“Kripalu yoga is also a tool for self-empowerment and personal growth” (Parnell, 2005). The practice of Kripalu Yoga “puts a great emphasis on the mechanics of Yoga – proper breath and alignment” (A Simple Guide to Contemporary Styles of Yoga) in an effort to realign the energy within us.



Swami Kripalvananda, for whom Kripalu Yoga was named.

There are 3 Stages of Kripalu Yoga:

Stage 1 - Willful practice

Exploring the postures through alignment, breath and awareness.

Stage 2 - Willful surrender

A posture is held for a longer period, in a non-competitive manner. This deepens concentration and it brings into focus thoughts and feelings around the holding. It increases the free flow of life force, plus it can liberate chronic tension from the body and increase strength.

Stage 3 - Meditation in motion

Is a free posture flow, it's a spontaneous, effortless release of energy generally after stage 2, tuning into the natural intelligence of the body as an expression of what feels good and right for the moment. It is guided from within rather than from the mind (Wood)

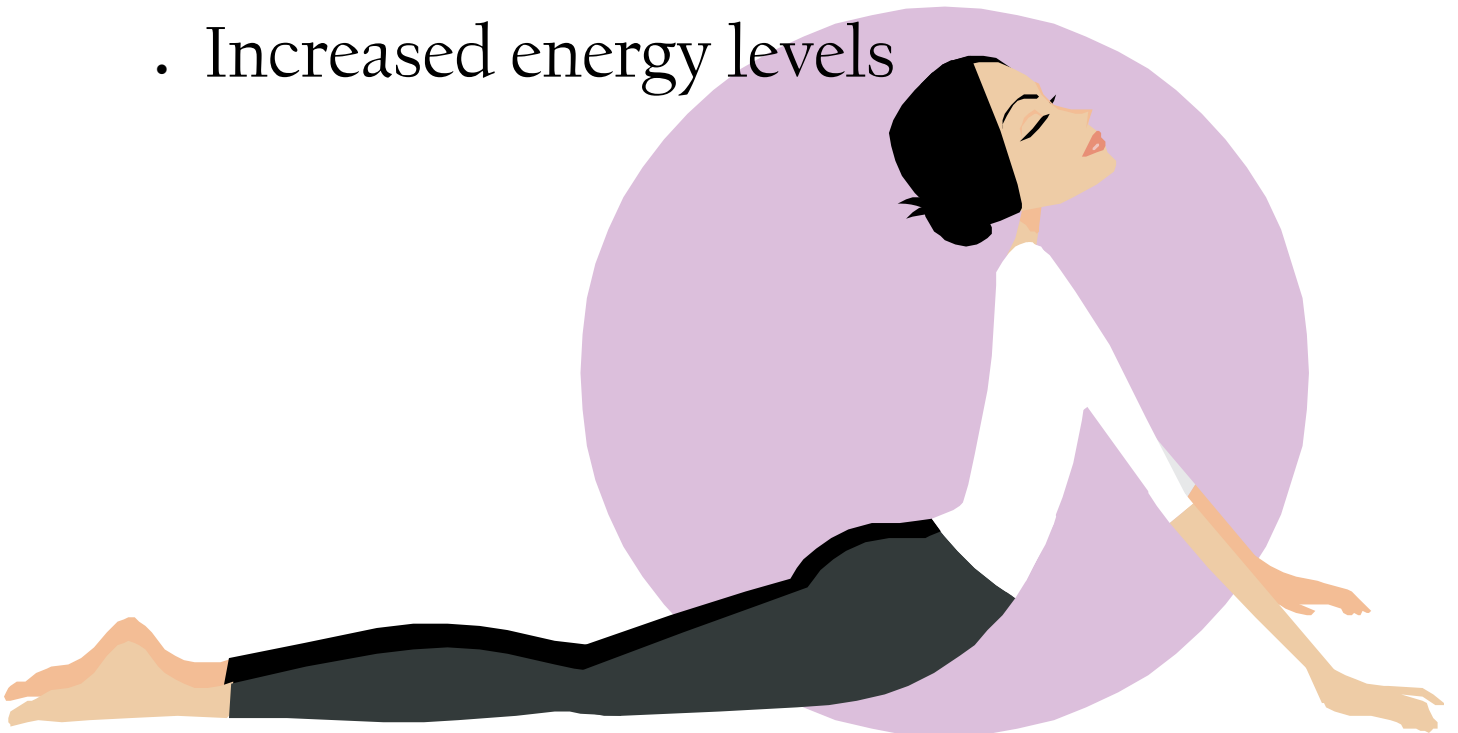


The Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health established by Yogi Amrit Desai in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts.

What does yoga do for me?

“Yoga works on the muscular-skeletal systems as well as the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, immune and nervous systems. The regular practice of yoga has been shown to produce physical benefits including” (Parnell, 2005):

- Reduced anxiety
- Reduced stress
- Reduced blood pressure levels
- Increased relaxation
- Increased flexibility
- Increased strength
- Increased endurance
- Increased energy levels



What do I need to do yoga?



- Yoga mat
- Block (for support, balance and alignment...optional)
- Yoga strap (to assist in reach ...optional)
- Yoga bolster (for backbends, restorative yoga, and other positions...optional)
- Blanket (for warmth, cushion, or in place of bolster. ...optional)
- Comfy clothes (not too loose, not to tight)



Yoga Vocabulary



This is a basic beginner's guide to yoga vocabulary, adapted from the website YOPA: The Original, which used dictionaries and yoga guidebooks to develop their definitions.

Asanas. Yoga poses. Pronounced AH-sah-nahs.

Aum or Om. Mantric word chanted in meditation. This word is interpreted as having three

sounds representing creation, preservation, and destruction. Pronounced AH-oooh-um

Chakras. Centers of radiating life force or energy that relate to major nerve plexuses and glands in the physical body. There are seven chakras that store and release life force, energy. Simplified, they are: the top of the head; the brow, slightly above and between the eyebrows; the throat, the heart, the solar plexus, digestive center; the base of the spine; and the sacral center, located three to four inches above the base of the spine.

Dharma. Self-discipline, the life of responsibility and right action.

Dhyana. Meditation or contemplation. The process of quieting the mind.

Guru. Spiritual teacher, described as the "dispeller of darkness."

Kripalu Yoga. Emphasizes proper breath, alignment; coordinating breath and movement.

Mandala. A circular geometric design that represents the cosmos and the spirit's journey.

Mantra. Sacred chant words.

Meditation. Inward attention to enable a person to get more out of life and to move more completely in the direction one intends to.

Namaste. A Hindu salutation. "The divine in me honors the divine in you." Used in greeting or parting. It is usually accompanied by the gesture of holding the palms together in front of the chest. Pronounced NUM-ah-stay.

Niyamas. Personal, inner discipline and responsibility. Purity, contentment, self-discipline, The study one's self and living with the awareness, surrendering all thoughts and actions to God.

Prana. Life energy, life force, or life current. *Chi* in Chinese.

Pranayama. Method of controlling prana or life force through the regulation of breathing.

Pratyahara. Control of the senses.

Satya. Truthfulness and honesty (one of the yamas).

Samadhi. State of absolute bliss.

Shauca. Purity, inner and outer cleanliness (one of the niyamas).

Svadyaya. Self-study. The process of inquiring in to your own nature and beliefs, and the nature of the world's spiritual journey (one of the niyamas).

Swami. Title of respect for a spiritual master.

Yamas. Ethical principles of nonviolence; truth and honesty; non-stealing; purity, and non-possessiveness, non-covetousness.

Yoga. The science of dealing with the search for one's soul. Achieving union with the supreme spirit through physical (asanas) and mental (meditation) disciplines, as well as controlled breathing.

Yogi. Someone who practices Yoga.

Yogini. A female who practices Yoga.

PRESS POINT DEFINITIONS

(Rahoorkhuit.net)

CHEST POINTS:

The two points in the soft muscle tissue of the chest approximately two inches below the "clavicles" (collar bones). One way of finding these points is to extend your arms out to the side at shoulder height with palms facing downward. Keeping your arms at shoulder height, bend your elbows, bringing your thumbs toward your chest along a parallel plane to the ground. The chest points are where the thumbs touch the chest. This may vary slightly with each individual, in general, they are in line with the ear lobes. Pressing into the chest points helps lift the chest, allowing the lungs to expand and fill more fully with breath. The chest points also help keep the spine erect, the torso straight, and the shoulder blades in their proper place.

CROWN OF THE HEAD:

The top center of the skull. The "fontanelle." When the crown of the head is pressed upward away from the shoulders, the entire spine lengthens. The back of the neck elongates while the chin remains parallel to the ground.

HIP BONES: (As in pressing your hip bones into the ground in the Bow posture.)

These are the front-facing points of the "ilium" or the pelvic bowl.

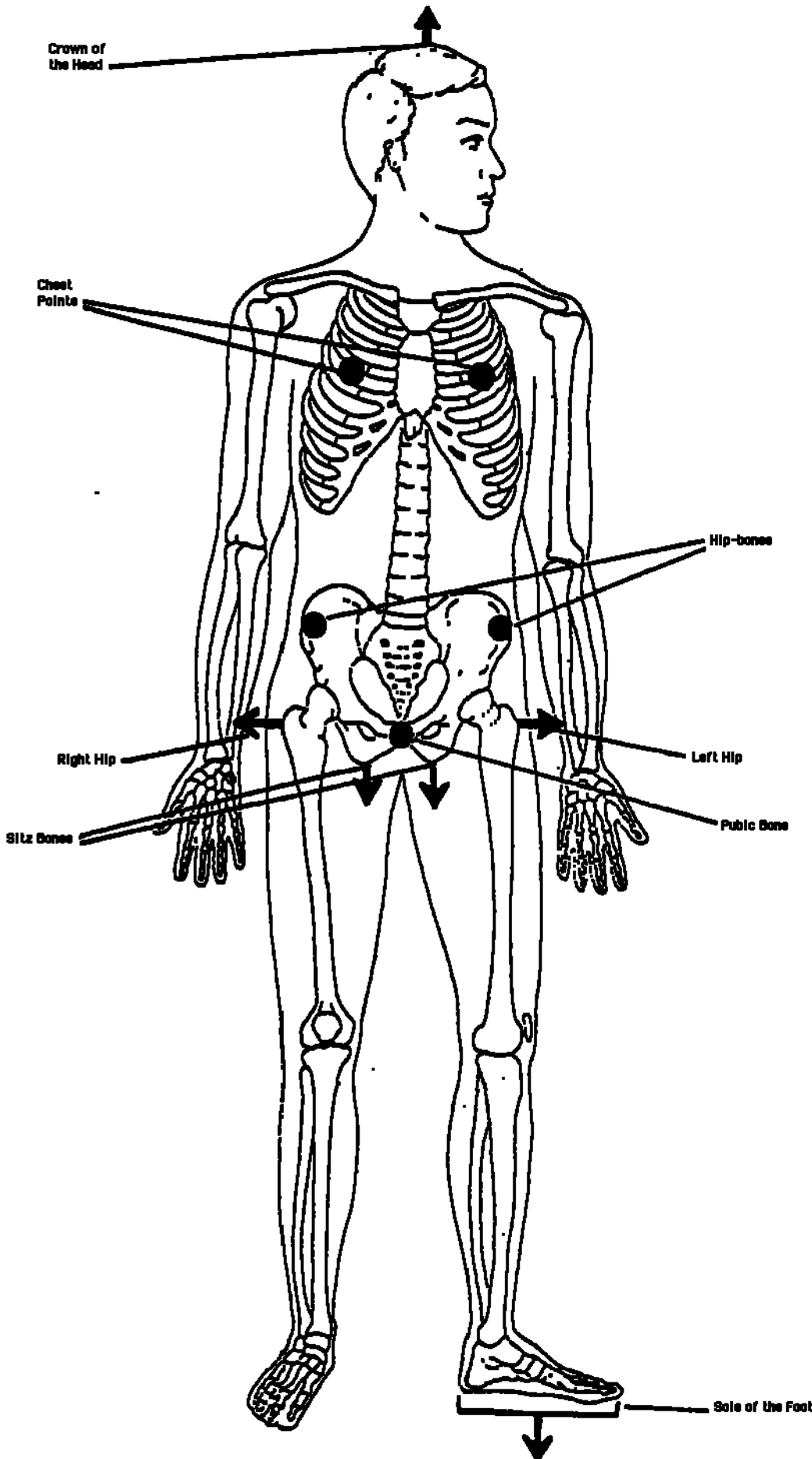
Pressing into these points helps keep the gluteus folds firm which in turn supports the tower spine during backward bending postures.

HIPS: (As in pressing your hip out to the side in the Half Moon posture.)

These are the points on the side of the torso just below the waist, technically located in the soft muscle tissue above the "head of the femur" and just below the hip bone. Pressing into these points produces a side stretch in the opposite direction and helps balance the work being done in the muscle groups on the opposite side. For example, in the Half Moon posture, pressing into the right hip allows the torso to bend to the left side.

PRESS POINTS:

Grounding points. The obvious, structural points which are the foundation of the posture and establish its form. The mind focuses on the direction of the press and the body moves in response to the pressing. Some press points assist in creating alignment. They must be pressed in order for the posture to happen. They elongate as well as trigger the unfolding of the body's natural flexibility. When the mind is absorbed in the press points, the body is freed to express that natural flexibility. Other, more subtle press points counterbalance tightness in specific areas. Because of the muscular structure of his or her particular body, a student may feel at the peak of alignment in a posture, but



actually be out of balance or alignment visually and anatomically. These less obvious points reestablish true alignment by inviting the tight muscles to relax and lengthen. They give the posture the next level of refinement and body awareness.

SITZ BONES:

The two bones in the buttocks that we sit on. Technically called the "ischial tuberosities." Used primarily in seated postures where the sitz bones are pressed down into the ground to assist in elongating the spine.

SOLES OF THE FEET:

The bottom of the feet. Pressing the whole sole down equally, both the ball of the foot and the heel, so that there is a sense of center and balance. Pressing the soles of your feet into the ground is achieved by consciously focusing your awareness there. Imagine that you could press your feet down into the earth without bending your knees, as if sinking into mud or sand. Or imagine that you are wearing heavy, weighted boots. It may take some practice to get the feel of it, but there is a definite sense of increased pressure against the earth and a feeling of groundedness when practiced correctly. Pressing into the feet provides grounding, stability, and balance for all standing and balancing postures. It allows the whole body to extend and gives the energy a direction.

THE SQUEEZE:

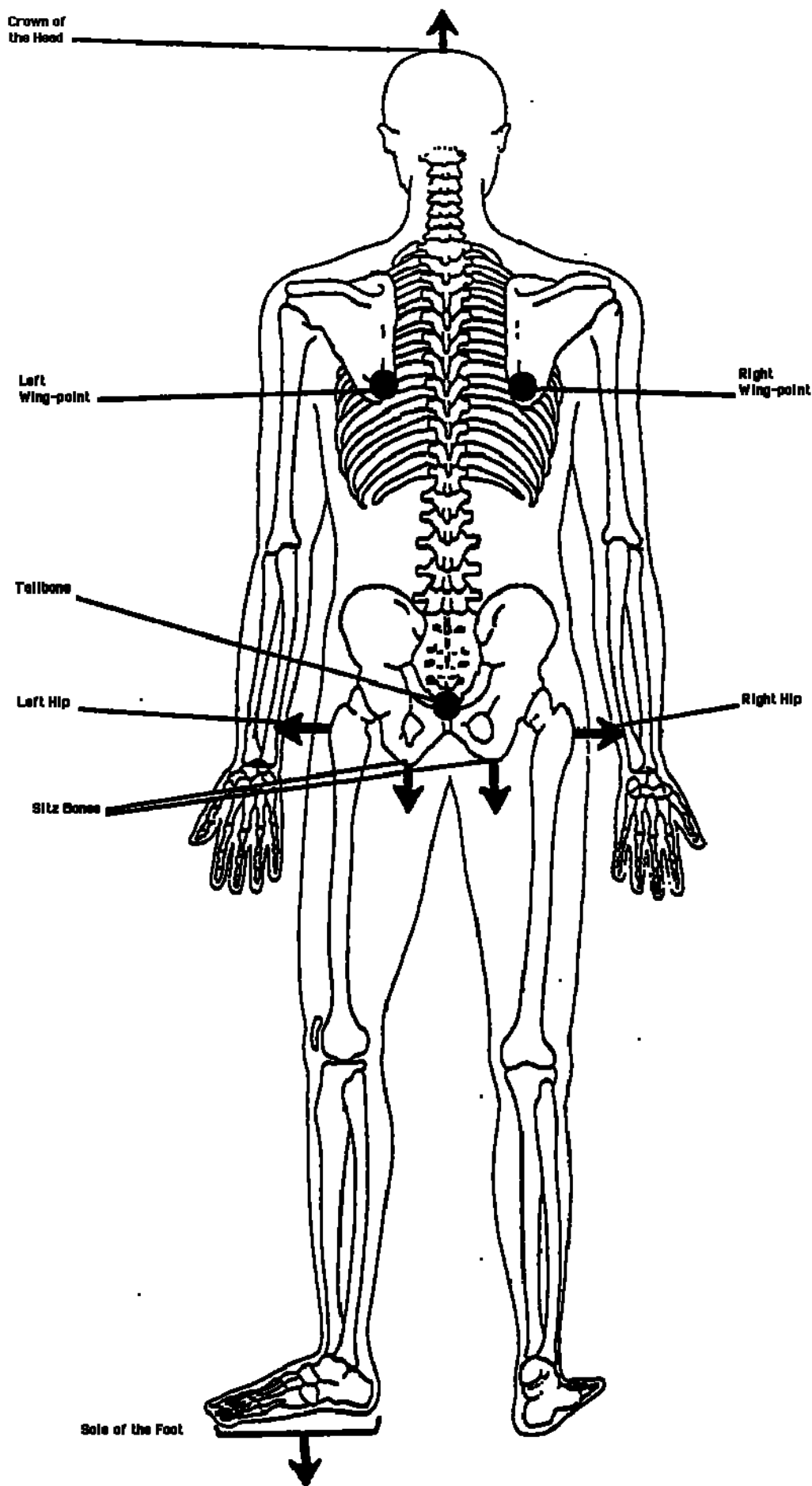
The rotating inward and lifting upward of the muscles of the gluteus folds, where the buttocks muscles meet the upper thighs. The upper buttocks remain slightly softer, getting firmer as the muscles come closer to the fold. The fronts of the thighs rotate slightly outward as the entire pelvis comes naturally into alignment. The arches of the feet as well as the kneecaps are automatically lifted and the backs of the thighs lengthen. Among its functions, the squeeze is the origin of movement in the belly-down postures. It can also be engaged as a regulator to protect the lower back area and relieve discomfort during backward bending postures.

TAILBONE:

Technically called the "coccyx." it's like a bony tail on the end of the "sacrum" at the base of the spine. Lifting the tailbone acts like a lever that tilts the torso forward with the spine elongated so that the bending comes from the hips and pelvis rather than the lower back. When practiced correctly, this shifts the focus of the stretch to the backs of the legs which is desirable.

WING POINTS:

The points on the lower inside edges (closest to the spine) of the "scapulas" or shoulder blades. The wing points are used most often in the rotation of the spine, as in the spinal twist. If you press one of the wing points, the torso will rotate in that direction.

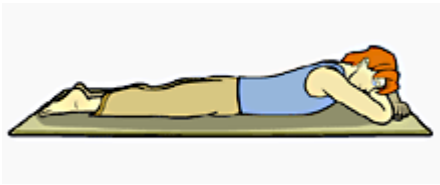


A few yoga poses:

Try them!

Courtesy of ABC-OF-Yoga.com

Cobra Pose



STEP 1: Lie on your belly, while your head rests on your lower arms.



STEP 2: Raise your forehead, look upwards and stretch your hands backwards. Let your weight rest on your chest.



STEP 3: The head falls a little backwards towards your back and the backward movement proceeds from the neck and the chin. Move your belly further backward as if someone is pulling your arms. The weight is more and more shifted towards the belly and the lower back does the real work.

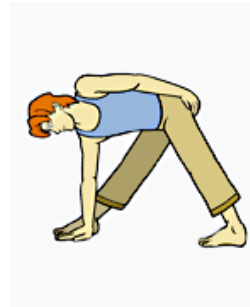


STEP 4: If you cannot raise your chest any further, put your hands and arms next to your chest on the mat without losing the bend. Stretch your arms so that they stand perpendicular on the floor and at the same time turn your arms a little inward. Relax your lower back and bear your weight with your arms.

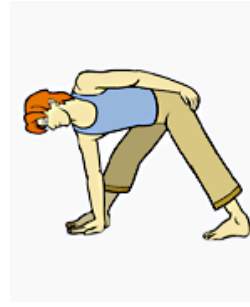


STEP 5: The buttock muscles remain relaxed during the exercise. Move your chest further upwards with every breathing out. Do this in a relaxed way instead of using force. You can tilt your head back. The shoulders are broad in front and the shoulder blades remain low.

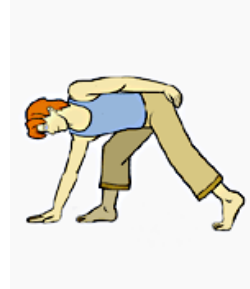
Half-moon Pose



STEP 1: Start with a [Trikonasana](#) with your left hand resting on your hip.



STEP 2: Slightly bend your right knee then move a bit forward.



STEP 3: Move your right hand forward - a few inches from the toes of your right leg, and



STEP 4: Exhale and press your right hand and right heel into the floor for balance. Lift your left leg parallel to the floor.



STEP 5: Raise your left hand. It should be aligned with your right hand. Bear your weight on the right leg.



STEP 6: Look up at your fingers. Stay in this pose for a few seconds.

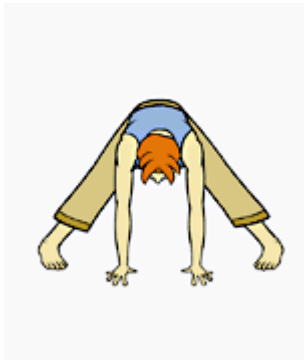
Wide-legged Forward Bend



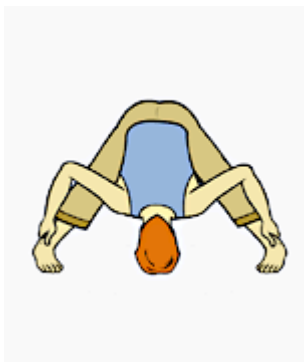
STEP 1: Start with the Mountain Pose.



STEP 2: Jump so that your feet are around four feet apart. Slightly turn your heels outward while you look forward.



STEP 3: Bend forward until the upper body stands halfway parallel to the ground. Place your hands right under your shoulders on the ground and see to it that your lower back is straight and still supports your position.



STEP 4: Push, as it were, your pelvis upward, look to the ground and stretch from the neck towards the ground.

If you can do this easily, you can grab the outsides of your feet and slightly pull at them so that the front part of your body feels long and you can stretch even further.

The stretching should be the result of relaxation, letting loose, gravitation and the stretching motion itself and not the result of pulling your hands with force.

When you come back, stand straight up again and then you jump back to Tadasana.

Try to maintain the feeling of stretching and giving length to the back and the chest at all times in the forward bend. When the back sinks down the chest and your breathing get oppressed and you lose a major part of the stretching.

Remember that you do this forward bend in a relaxed manner and never through pulling your feet with force. When you pull too hard, the body stiffens, your thinking and breathing become unquiet and you run a risk of injuring your-

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