

Yoga Posture Alignment + Assisting Laboratories

When assisting in yoga postures, keep in mind that **verbal assisting** reaches the entire room of students, while physical assisting might only reach one student. Therefore, talk to the room about the physical assist you are doing with a student.

3 basic kinds of physical assists :

- 1) stabilize the base
- 2) light touch that brings awareness
- 3) increase the key action

Stabilize the base

Examples:

- reinforce muscular energy in any pose (press toward the focal point)
- press on the hands in down dog
- provide support in a standing balancing pose
- stabilizing the base will allow the student to increase the key action

Light touch that brings awareness

Examples:

- trace one of the alignment loops or body segments (example: warrior 1, kneel in front of the student, trace up the lead leg calf, and draw the lead knee toward you-the-teacher)
- press on the focal point (example: warrior 1, place hands on either side of the pelvis)
- inner spiral (example: cobra, cross hands and draw the inseam or inner thighs up)
- outer spiral (example: warrior 2, help draw the lead hip crease down)

Increase the Key Action

Examples:

- seated twist - hold onto both sides of the rib cage and turn with the exhale
- seated forward fold - press from the lower back with the exhale, and slide along the spine with each successive exhale
- upward facing bow - straddle the arms and lift the shoulder blades away from the head and each other
- increasing the key action requires that a student can stabilize the base
- these assists are the most dangerous and require the most training and understanding

We teach these 3 kinds of assists in a variety of yoga laboratories, where a small subset of postures are explored with all ages and body types, which represent different movement capabilities and restrictions.



Yoga Laboratories:

- 1) Alignment Basics** the importance of strength and flexibility, muscle energy and expressive energy, focal point of a posture (like the center or root), the 7 segments or loops of the body, the inner spiral, outer spiral; stabilize the base, light touches that bring awareness, increase the key action
- 2) Prop Use** we love teaching yoga without any external aides at Santosha, and learning to use props can make postures safer, more dynamic, more relaxing and more challenging
- 3) Warm Ups** start a class and establish breath initiated movement: cat-cow, extended cat-cow, cobra, grasshopper, alternate limb cat/cow, spiral twist, stretching the wing, lunge, side plank
- 4) Dynamic Warm Ups** include varieties of sun and moon salutations: devotional style, ashtanga vinyasa jumping style (A) and (B), hip and shoulder circling
- 5) Warrior 1 Class Standing** teach rooting the legs through the pelvis in the front plane: warrior 1, tracking the front leg (extending the flank), rotated triangle, rotated side angle, airplane
- 6) Warrior 2 Class Standing** teach rooting the legs through the pelvis in the side plane: warrior 2, tracking in the side plane (moving triangle), extended triangle, extended side angle, side cross (balancing half moon)
- 7) Bilateral Standing** teach rooting equally through both legs up through the pelvis and are excellent for re-establishing symmetry: standing forward bend, standing backbend, chair, rotated chair, balancing chair, wide legged forward bend (with variations)
- 8) Standing Balancing** teach breath importance and nervous system calibration: column, moving column, holding the big toe, tree, half-lotus forward bend, eagle, balancing stick, standing bow, rotated side cross (rotated half moon)
- 9) Forward Bends** emphasize spinal flexion and the exhale: knee to chest (downward current poses), head to knee, bound angle, star, turtle, wide legged forward bend, maricyasana A



- 10) Back Bends** emphasize spinal extension and the inhale: grasshopper (variations), floor bow, stretching the front pose (moving and holding), bridge, upward facing bow
- 11) Side Bends** teach spinal lateral flexion and help explore the differences in the sides of the body (like liver/spleen): standing crescent moon, gate latch, triangle adaptation, rotated head-knee, leg lifts in side lying
- 12) Core Strengthening** teach the importance of the transition between the torso and the legs: boat, abdominal curling, crossovers, turn-ins, roll-ups, leg lifts, figure 8s
- 13) Arm Balancing** establishes the arms as the roots, develops confidence: downward dog, forearm down dog, dolphin, half handstand, handstand, forearm stand, scorpion
- 14) Hips** teach the various directions of work in connecting the leg to the pelvis: rock the baby, one leg pigeon, cow-face, half-lotus, stacking the shins, windshield wiper, pointed foot lunge, reclined hero
- 15) Twists** teach the deep cleansing along the spinal column: reclined variations, moving while reclined, half lord of the fishes (variations), maricyasana B
- 16) Inversions** are deeply relaxing for the nervous system and allow the venous leg blood to easily return: plow, shoulder stand, pike, headstand (variations), legs up the wall/chair
- 17) Sequencing** teaches the meaningful flow of postures in a class according to time allotment (what to do in 45 minutes in the morning for a young adult, for example)
- 18) Dynamic Sequencing** teaches the expanding spiral of opening possible in the human form with regular yoga practice, "for whom" and "when"

