



Week 2 – Mindful Living Yoga

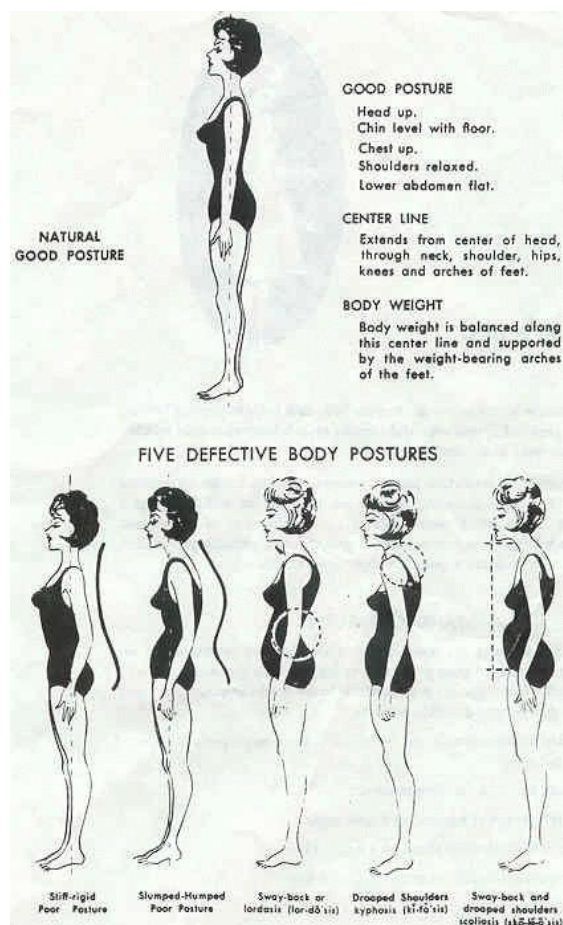
Posture and Breathing

Having good posture is important on so many levels. Sitting, standing and laying in good posture can:

- help keep your joints and bones in alignment,
- your muscles are used effectively,
- you look confident,
- you reduce wear and tear on your body
- can help to reduce back pain
- prevent future health problems
- help you to breath more efficiently

Good posture = efficient breathing = good oxygen intake = excellent health

Next week we will learn more about effective and efficient breathing and some breathing techniques.



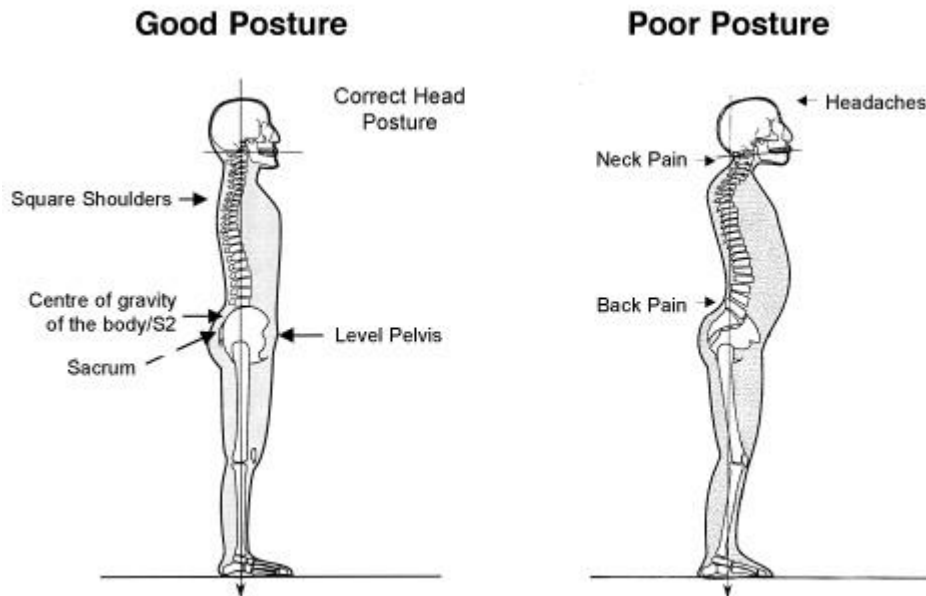
Some Notes on Posture:

Posture can tell us a lot about our emotional state.

When we feel down – we actually look down, our shoulders round off, our head drops and our gaze is to the floor.

When we feel defeated with something – we round our shoulders and try to protect our heart or our confidence centre. We do our best to create an shell around our vulnerable bits.

When we are in a hurry to go somewhere – we stick our neck out and lean forward. We are in a hurry to move into the future.



Images for posture sourced: <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/posture>

Re-training the Body for Good Posture

At first when we are in poor posture we do not notice any pain or even are conscious of the fact we have poor posture. If you sit at a computer all day or stand all day in one spot and have no awareness of your posture then it is possible that you have poor posture. Unless you begin to develop mindful awareness of how you sit or stand then you will not be able to correct your posture. It is entirely possible to correct your physical posture. However you must be aware of your posture in the first place to correct it.

Once you are aware of your posture then you can start to re-train your body.

How do I correct my posture?

In seated

For starters look at your chair. Not all chairs are created equal. Chairs that tilt your pelvis too far forward or too far back should not be used. Get out the lounge chair – lounges encourage poor posture. I literally use mine to “lounging” in and I avoid long periods of time in it. At work I avoid leaning back in my work chair and I have set my chair with a slight tilt forward to accommodate the slight curve at the back of the chair. Where possible I sit on the very edge of a chair. I do not rely on the back rest wherever possible.

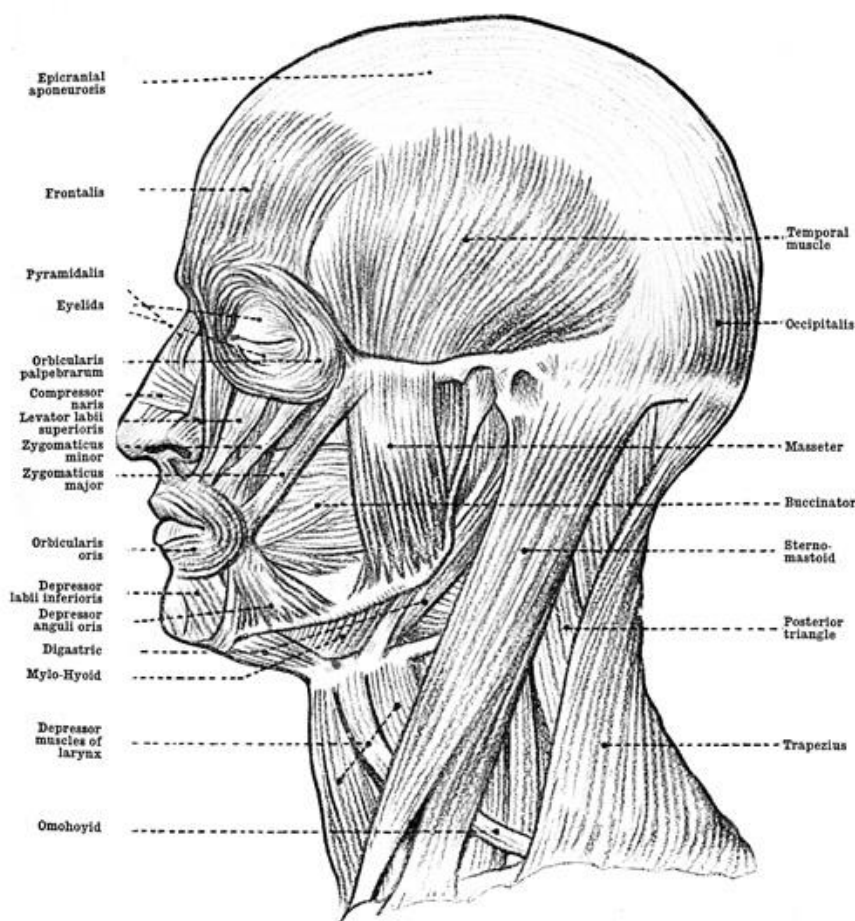
I suggest by starting to correct your posture you should come down to the floor. Sit crossed legged or with your legs out in “Goddess” position. Locate the two sit bones by gently rocking back and then locate the perineum by sitting forward in your seat. Now find half way between the two and



relax into this position. According to Naisha Ahsian this is called your sacred seat – it is the centre most position of your body.

Locating the crown of your head, straighten the spine, elongating through your head and neck. Imagine you have a bunge cord lifting your crown towards the ceiling. Ensure that your chin is parallel to the ground. Now hold that position.

In Standing



If you can stand against a wall. Ensure that the back of your head – at the place where the neck and the skull meet, called the Occipital is on the wall. This will draw your chin parallel with the ground.

Your shoulders may make light contact with the wall, so will your buttock. Your knees and ankles are in align with your hips. In fact your ears, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles should all be in alignment.

Keep your knees soft and your arms relaxed beside you.

When you start to correct your posture you will become acutely aware of the pain associated with correcting it. This is not unusual. The muscles need to re-establish themselves in correct alignment.

Once you have learned how to correct your posture and need to become aware of the triggers for poor posture. Sometimes it is mechanical – over use and fatigue, sometimes it is emotional – feeling down, lacking confidence. This is why developing mindful awareness is imperative for yoga practice. Once you are aware of your triggers you can take steps to prevent poor posture.

Engaging your core muscles

The foundations of any physical practice relies on an understanding of the core elements* relating to the practice. I like to use the work of Chris Knight from Pure Elements Therapy when I discuss the



core elements. You can visit Chris' website and see the work he does - <http://pureelementstherapy.com.au/> .

All credit for the following information goes to Chris. I have written it in my own words but it is based on some of his theory.

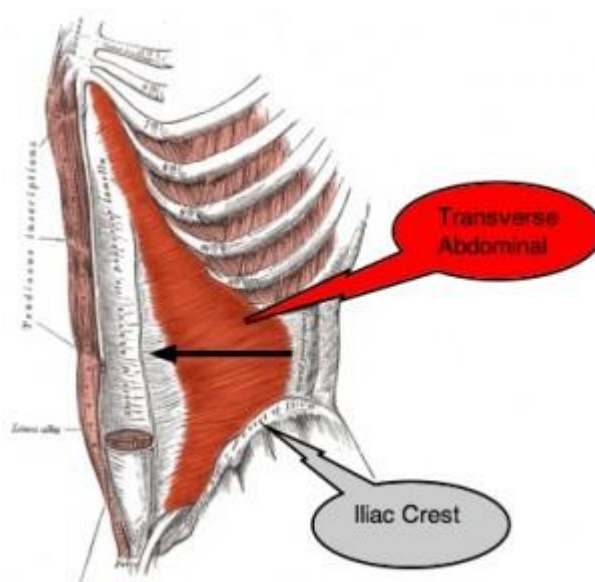
What is the Physical Core Elements for Yoga?

There are five elements to the physical core:

- 1) The transverse abdominal is a corset like muscle that runs around the torso.
- 2) The Gluteal muscles of the buttocks
- 3) The Trapezius at the shoulders
- 4) The neck muscles
- 5) The Quads of the thighs

The Transverse Abdominal Muscles

This is the traditional core that most people think of. This muscle helps to stabilise your trunk. To locate this muscle lie on your back with your pelvis in neutral position, Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the ground, open at hip width. Locate the highest most point of each hip bone (iliac crest). Place your fingers about two finger distances from the point of the hips. You may need to place some pressure in this area. I find the muscle is easiest to locate if I cough or laugh. The action is a drawing in – like you are pulling on a tight pair of jeans and doing the button up and then a drawing up action – like you are doing the zipper up.



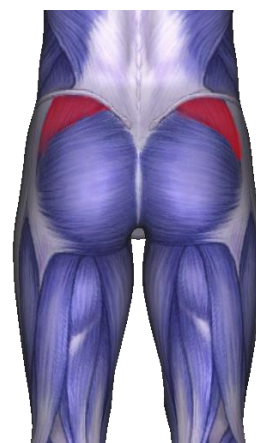
The trick once you locate it is to hold it on and breathe.

Practice this at home.

The Glutes

To locate the gluteus medius lie on your side with the hips, knees and ankles stacked on top of each other. Bend the knees gently. Lay the arm closest to the ground out straight and rest your head on the upper arm and use the other arm as a support.

Locate the highest most point of each hip bone (iliac crest) with the pointer finger. Open the hand wide and using the thumb locate the gluteus medius.



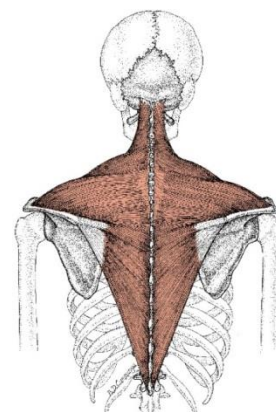


Trapezius

To me the trapezius is like a large set of wings that run from the neck, across the scapula. I think of tucking my wings down and under.

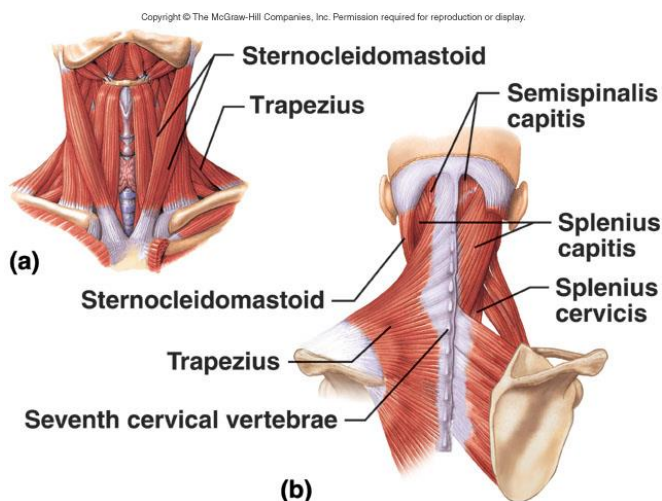
In aikido I think of weight underside.

Practice getting a cup or something down from a high cupboard – are you aware of what happens to your shoulders as you lift your arm. In most cases we lift our arm and allow our shoulder to rise up to our ears. Do the same exercise while thinking about tucking your wings away. Note the change in movement. Of course to do this exercise you need to remain completely relaxed.



Neck Muscles

The trapezius is one of the major neck muscles involved in the core elements. The other muscle is in the front of the neck. My favourite neck muscle is the sternocleidomastoid. It works with other neck muscles to flex the neck and extend the head. Poor posture of the neck and shoulders can be attributed to problems originating in the trapezius and the sternocleidomastoid. Sitting at a computer or playing computer / video games is a major contributor to problems in this area.



If you remember to lift from the crown of the head, ensure your chin is parallel to the ground then you can assist in preventing problems in this area.

Image supplied: <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~uzwiak/AnatPhys/APFallLect14.html>



The Quads

I believe it is the legs that will bring it all together particularly when standing. Engaging the quads lifts the knees and the arch of the foot. The quads (and legs in general) provide the strength to the entire pose.

The quads are a large muscle group that includes the four prevailing muscles on the front of the thighs.

When in standing keep your knees soft and image that you are send all your energy or weight into the ground. Engage through your quads, lifting the muscles up (while still sending energy down).

Feel the strength in your body as you do this. Remember to breath. Now release and engage all the core elements together, remembering to breath.

In this class we have only touched on the core elements very briefly. There is so much more to learn about this area of yoga, my hope is that this gives you some indication of the foundations with which to build a solid yoga asana practice. Over the next few weeks I will be reminding you about these areas and I trust you will be using this to assist you in developing a strong core practice.

If you are interested in learning more about the core elements I can highly recommend taking one of Chris' workshops. Visit his website for more details. <http://pureelementstherapy.com.au/>

