

**POSE OF THE MONTH**  
**APRIL 2007**

**Bhujapidasana** (pressure on the shoulders pose) bhuja means shoulder or arm pida means pressure, or to squeeze, so we are literally squeezing our shoulders with our legs, developing strength and heat for upcoming poses, as well as stretching your esophagus (when you are able to do the full expression of the pose).

**Method:**



ॐ From Down Dog jump your legs around your shoulders and lock your ankles . . .  
**EVERYONE ELSE . . .**

ॐ From Downward facing dog, hop your feet outside your hands, trying to place your palms on the floor with your fingertips as far behind your heels as you can reach. **NO BACKWARD THUMBS**, make sure your thumb and fingers point forward—leaning your weight on to backward thumbs can hurt the thumb joint. Keep your feet just inside your yoga mat for the correct width in your

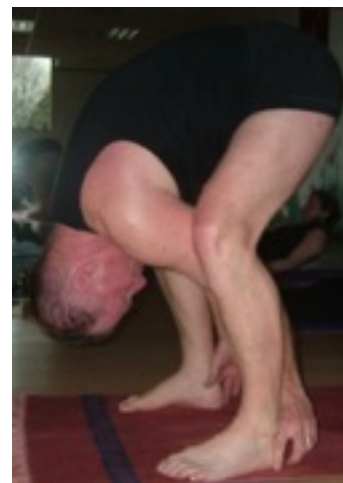
stance.

ॐ If you can not get your hands to the floor behind your feet then you need to work on your outer hip flexibility—do this by first placing your right hand on your heel and work your shoulder behind your thigh, keep your right shoulder there and do the same with your left side, then try to straighten your legs as much as your hamstrings permit. Stay here for 5 breaths and take vinyasa for the next pose.

ॐ If your palms are close to the floor shift your weight onto your hands and have a seat on your triceps, trying to get your hips up as close as you can to your shoulders. You may have to stay here for a few weeks . . . or longer . . .

ॐ From sitting on your triceps walk your feet in toward each other and see if they come off the floor, continuing to walk your feet together in front of you and try to lock your ankles. Initially you will stay here for 5 breaths and then take your vinyasa.

ॐ To progress, open your knees and slide them toward your elbows just a bit, point your toes and turn your feet so your toes aim backward, pull your feet up toward your groin, carefully bend your elbows and lower (do not tip forward) your head to the floor—squeezing with your thighs greatly increase the control of this descent (as your practice progresses your chin goes toward—but not touching the floor whilst you gaze at your nose). Take 5 breaths here.



ॐ To exit from here, raise yourself up, inhaling, exhaling; one at a time tuck your legs back to bakasana sucking your knees into your armpits and your heels to your buttocks, hold this position for an inhale,



ॐ on your next exhale glide back to Chaturanga Dandasana for vinyasa. See flow of pictures below:

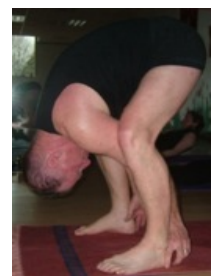
As your practice advances:

ॐ From Downward Dog, Inhale hopping your hips up high using bandha control, land with your inner thighs around your arms, lock your ankles and exhaling lower your chin toward the floor. Remain here for 5 breaths and exit as above.

**Benefits:** Bhujapidasana cleans and purifies the esophagus. The strength of the wrists and arms are increased giving lightness and balance to the posture. See more about your esophagus below.

How to work towards keeping your esophagus healthy with bhujapidasana; most likely it will be quite a few years of learning ashtanga for most people to figure out how to hover their esophagus above the floor while balancing on your hands . . . In the mean time there are other poses where we stretch our esophagus such as upward dog, setu bandhasana, matsyasana. Here are some tips to work toward the full expression of bhujapidasana:

**Hips, lower back, and hammies** – if you are tight in any of these areas you will lack flexibility necessary to sit on your own arms. If this is your case, do bhujapidasana as Frank does and keep practicing! Over time it will come.



**Wrists!** – The next stumbling block are your wrists, you need to be able to support your full body weight on your hands, this takes wrist strength and flexibility, which will develop over years of practice, in the mean time here are some tips to stretch and strenghten your wrists:



ॐ Do your sun salutes and vinyasas . . . going from chaturanga to upward dog will develop your wrist flexibility.

ॐ try doing some vinyasas on your fingertips :) This will develop strength in your wrist and

forearms Or try some vinyasans on your knuckles with your palms facing each other. This will strengthen your wrists too.

**Arm Balancing** – The control and balance necessary comes with years of practice, don't ignore the arm balance just keep trying each time. Keep coming back!



- ॐ Understanding the mechanics of the human body will help you find balance such as keeping your weight over your hands instead of behind them, gripping the floor using your hands, learning how to bend your elbows and sink down vs. tipping forward which causes a klunk on your head.
- ॐ other tips to help: Get your hips as close to your shoulders as you can, then let your knees go wide toward your elbows and grip your arms with your legs!
- ॐ Lightness and Bandhas – See Nov. 2013 and Sept. 2012 monthly topics: <http://www.befityoga.com/philosophy-lifestyle/topic-of-the-month/>

Bhujapidasana is about our esophagus -- the way our food gets from the earth to our stomach . . . The esophagus is a membranous tube for the passage of food, it is also called the 'gullet'. You may not be aware of your esophagus until you swallow something too large, too hot or too cold . . . or until it troubles us . . . but it has an important role just as the liver, pancreas, etc.

The esophagus is known as the *anna nala* in yoga terms. *Anna* means food, and *Nala* is a root word to *nadi* meaning stem or hollow reed (a species of reed, *Amphidonax Karka* that is eight to twelve feet high). *Nala* or *nada* means motion, so *nadi* is representative of energy in motion in a vessel :)

Yogic texts cite 72,000 nadis or flows of energy throughout the human body (some even more!). These nadis can be:

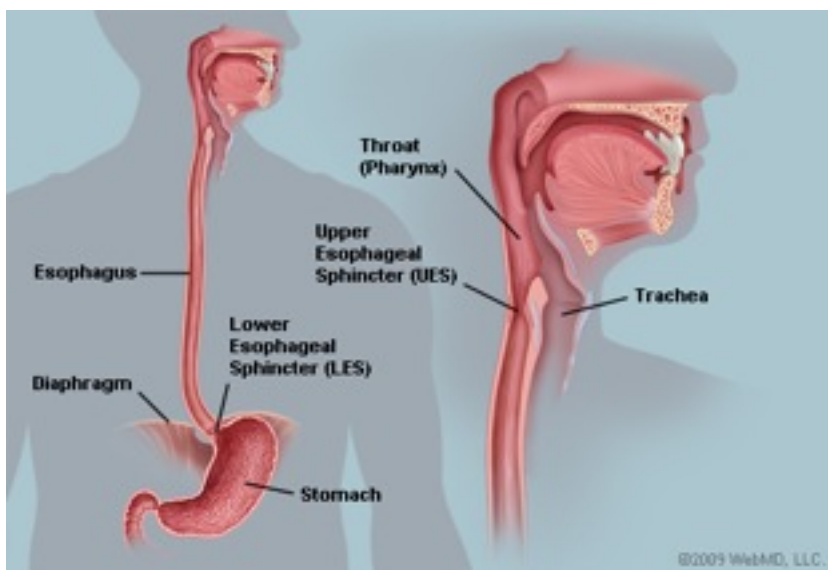
- ॐ Physical; such as arteries, veins, lymphatic vessels, and nerves
- ॐ Mental; such as thought currents
- ॐ Psychic; such as dreams or visions
- ॐ Pranic; such as chakras or in TCM acupuncture meridians

Our yoga practices are designed to open up all these nadis to allow energy to flow through our body. This may be harder to understand in terms of pranic energy; but if we apply it to nadis such as arteries or the esophagus we can easily understand the importance of keeping our nadis open for energy and matter to flow freely throughout the body. In the same way a blocked artery is detrimental -- so too is a pranic nadi that may be blocked.

- ॐ To give you another perspective, if one of your arteries is blocked you have a heart attack; if one of the capillaries to your knee is blocked you will have a "knee attack" -- tissue will die around your knee due to lack of blood flow and O<sub>2</sub>, you might not die but you may have some pain around your knee.

Bhujapidasana helps maintain elasticity of the esophageal tube. Keeping your esophagus flexible prevents many diseases such as hiatal hernia, esophageal constricting, and GERD. As we learn about bhujapidasana and our esophagus we will also learn ways to prevent these common esophageal predicaments.

**The esophagus is the beginning of the GI (gastro-intestinal) tract.** It passes from the back of the oral cavity, behind the trachea, thyroid, behind the heart, through the diaphragm, to the stomach and is 9–10 in. or 23–25 cm long.





Like the rest of the GI tract, the esophagus has a peristaltic movement (movement of food and matter through our “tubes” by the smooth muscle contraction). If there is rigidity in the throat this peristaltic movement is inhibited.

## Tension in the esophagus is what commonly leads to esophagus predicaments:

In the English language we have expressions like, “lump in your throat”, “cat got your tongue”, “choked up” and “gagged with a spoon”. These all allude to mechanical strain in the upper esophagus. When one part of an organ is not functioning properly it effects not only the whole organ but also other organs in coordinates with.

- ॐ The epiglottis is a thin elastic cartilaginous structure located at the root of the tongue that folds over the glottis to prevent food and liquid from entering the trachea during the act of swallowing. At the top, the esophagus descends behind the epiglottis. The epiglottis is what we use to make the sound of the ujjayi breath. Strain or holding in the esophagus can make the clear resonance of our yogic breathing difficult.
- ॐ In the esophagus, this tightness may show up as belching, hiccups, dry throat, excess coughing, heartburn, scratchy throat, difficulty swallowing, etc.
- ॐ In the rest of the GI tract it may reflect gas, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, digestive issues, etc.

The narrow muscular tube of the esophagus passes behind the trachea, the thyroid cartilage wraps around it, the aorta wraps around it, it fits through a hole in the diaphragm and becomes the broad holding sac of the stomach . . . any tension in any of these organs from your thyroid, to your heart (specifically your aorta), to your trachea, your diaphragm, and your stomach can cause esophageal tension (Netters Anatomy Plate 221 see photo to right).

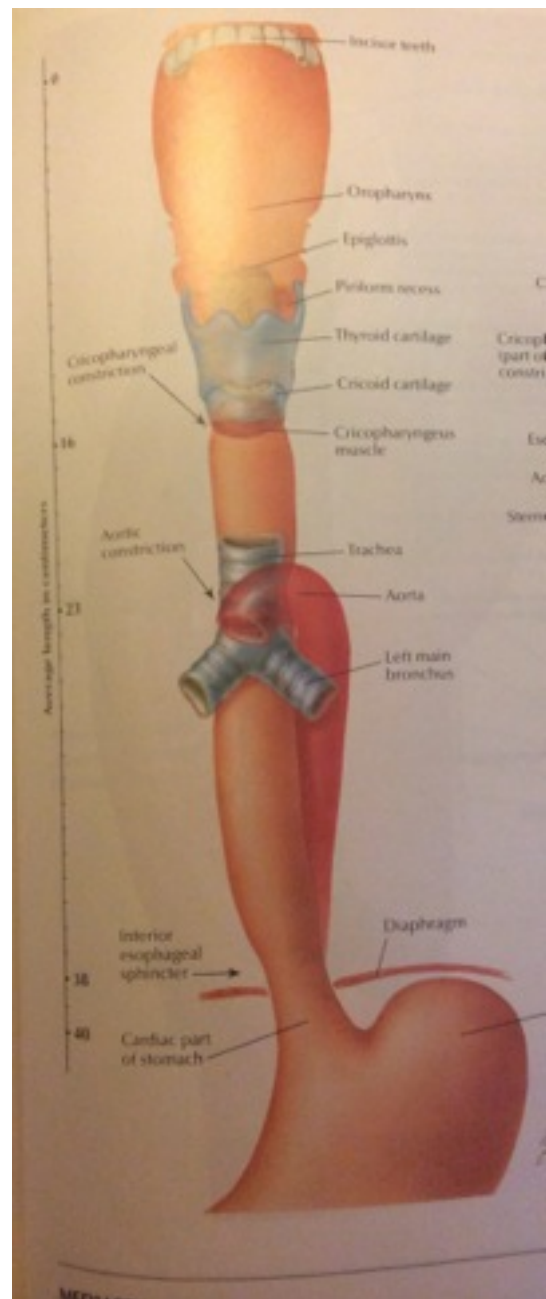
The esophagus perforates the diaphragm at the posterior margin of the diaphragm. This is where the crus (central tendon) of the diaphragm attaches to the spine (T12-L2). This is also where the origin of the psoas fibers inter-weave with the fibers of the respiratory diaphragm and attach to our spine.

- ॐ When there is constriction in the diaphragm due to improper breathing, stress or trauma, the esophagus may be constricted.

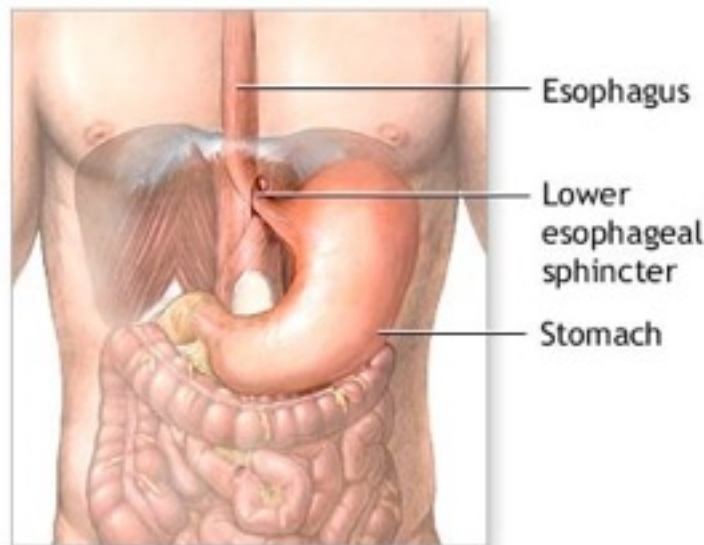
### Esophageal Constriction

Deep breathing and practicing poses that stretch the esophagus like bhujapidasana, setu bandasana, upward facing dog, and other postures where we extend our cervical vertebrae relax the esophagus and allow it to do its job -- move food and fluids along their way . . . **If you suffer with esophageal dysphagia (which is a more severe form of esophageal constriction) most common in obese individuals with syndrome X symptoms pay attention to the food you are putting in your mouth -- your body may be saying I don't want to put that in here!** Here are some other natural options to help deal with the symptoms while you learn Ashtanga yoga, to breathe deep and relax!:

- ॐ Sipping warm water . . . or as I heard it explained “coffee or tea temperature hot” helps relax the esophagus and may help prevent the constricture.



- ॐ Our Vagus nerve comes up here again (see last months topic), the vagus nerve innervates our esophagus (among many other organs), when we learn to use deep breathing and our bandhas to stimulate the vagus nerve it will relax the esophagus by stimulating the relaxation response in our body.
- ॐ Herbal treatments for dysphagia help to strengthen and boost body's immune system. Licorice is a wonderful herb and it helps to reduce spasms, swelling and gives pain relief from gastrointestinal upsets. Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* in Ayurvedic terms) It is regarded as a safe way for the treatment of dysphagia. Licorice is sweet, cooling and heavy to digest. In Ayurveda, it is used extensively as a demulcent, mild expectorant and anti-inflammatory agent.



It is important in yoga practice and meditation training to relax the tongue, soften the throat and jaw. Try to visualize the length of the esophagus and bring relaxation into the entire length of the tube.

**The Gastro-Esophageal Junction** The juncture of the esophagus and stomach is another common place for tension. There is a sphincter-like structure at this junction that is often under duress. (Tension on the left psoas can contribute to restriction where the esophagus meets the stomach (gastroesophageal junction)).

- ॐ This stress can be due to people eating too fast, eating too much, swallowing air when they eat, or improperly chewing their food.
- ॐ Tension can also make the stomach ride up and press against the under-side of the diaphragm, picture a helium balloon stuck on the ceiling . . .
- ॐ When this happens due to nervous tension, stress when eating, poor food combining or high acidic levels in the stomach, contents from the stomach can spit up through the diaphragm into the lower esophagus. This is called GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease). Or a hiatal hernia can develop, in a hiatal hernia a small portion of the stomach passes into the thorax through the esophageal junction.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HIATAL HERNIA AND GERD, INCLUDING NATURAL REMEDIES AND FOOD ADVICE PLEASE SEE: The Topic of the Month for December 2013: <http://www.befityoga.com/philosophy-lifestyle/topic-of-the-month/>**