



TOPIC OF THE MONTH September 2013

INSIDE OUT POSTURING, continued.

Let's look at how core training, specifically how it goes beyond just spine protection — it also effects digestion positively. Most forms of yoga, exercise, mind-body exercises like tai chi and qi gong all reserve a special place for core exercises; in primary series we get navasana.



Navasana :) Boat pose . . . Navasana is beneficial for our spinal cord (Vina-Danda), and strengthening our digestion. In Sanskrit the spine is known as Vina Danda, we know from our asana practice that danda means stick; Vina is a stringed instrument in India. Our spine is likened to the neck or “stick” of a guitar like instrument . . . play it right and it sings a beautiful song . . .

Navasana serves two main purposes: To support our spine and to improve digestion. For more information on Navasana go to: <https://www.befitbodymind.org/yoga/ashtanga-yoga-poses/> and scroll down to navasana.

Navasana and our spine

Strong abdominals support the spine. Many conventional abdominal exercises have you doing crunches . . . crunches are not an effective abdominal exercise; our abdominals' job is not to have us flex our spine -- this creates poor posture. The abdominals job is to stabilize the spine and keep it long with space between the vertebrae. Stabilizing type exercises are most effective -- where you hold neutral spine while something tries to pull you out of neutral spine. Navasana is this -- a weighted stabilizing exercise -- as we lift and float our legs the weight of our legs tries to pull our pelvis to an anterior tilt. We then are trying to keep our pelvis in a neutral alignment -- not tipping our pelvis forward or back (sometimes we are too zealous and tip our pelvis too far back to a posterior tilt) -- as we strengthen our abs to stabilize our spine it improves our posture and keeps the spine long and even. It also keeps the channel in our spine open so the nerves have plenty of space and the neurons can travel up and down the spine freely without being pinched or blocked by poor posture. 80% of the adult population will experience back pain at some time in their lives -- the root cause of much of this back pain is poor posture.

The pick up we do between boat poses, in Sanskrit the pose is called “lollasana”, is another excellent abdominal exercise in that it is training our abdominals to contract from the bottom up -- as we walk about our days our abdominals support our spine from the bottom up making this lift a good ergonomic exercise for our abdominals. And of course this lift trains us to pick ourselves up — emotionally I mean that ! — but also from seated to standing, and from seated to floating back to chaturanga as some do in vinyasas.



Navasana and digestion

Even though this part is shorter, digestion is BIG.
Digestion will determine your vitality.

Beyond you are what you eat — you are what you DIGEST. The tube in our body that goes from mouth to anus is particular about what it lets through our guts and into our bloodstream.

Our nerves, and skin don't just magically recreate themselves — they build themselves from the food we eat.
. . but not just that, from the food we digest.

If you are not digesting good food with lots of nutrients your seven tissues will start to reflect this. Let's get into our food and digestion and how it turns into the tissues of our body.

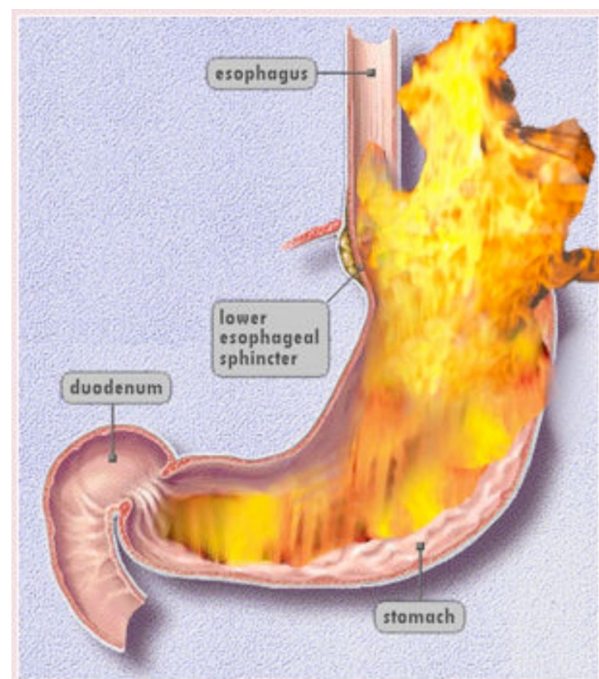
Navasana assists the transportation department in our body . . .

☯ The pressure on the intestines from slightly holding your abdominals in is like an abdominal massage helping to move trapped air out and stimulate the peristalsis effect (wavelike muscular contractions) of the small intestines -- helping food to move along its way . . . The Gastroenterological Society of Australia says exercise strengthens the muscles of the abdomen and stimulates the intestinal muscles to move contents through the digestive system.

Keeping a good muscular support in your abdominals stimulates your agni or digestive fire, staying relaxed with this support is important.

Ayurveda says that 85% of our health depends on our digestion, this is because no matter how well you eat, if your digestion is weak you will not be able to break down the food you eat and absorb the nutrients from it, nor will you be able to detox well. In yoga and Ayurveda the term "Agni" refers to your digestive fire. (Agni is the root of the English word "ignite".) Strong abdominals improve your agni in yoga terms . . . strong abdominals improve your digestion in medical terms. Also if your digestion is weak, then your body does not detox effectively either. Your same pathways of digestion are also used for detoxification (digestive enzymes, the liver, etc.)

☯ There are three steps to digestion and absorption in western terms. Our stomach acids break down food we eat — strong abdominals help this process by gently massaging the stomach and intestines encouraging more of the food particles to get in contact with acids that break them down.



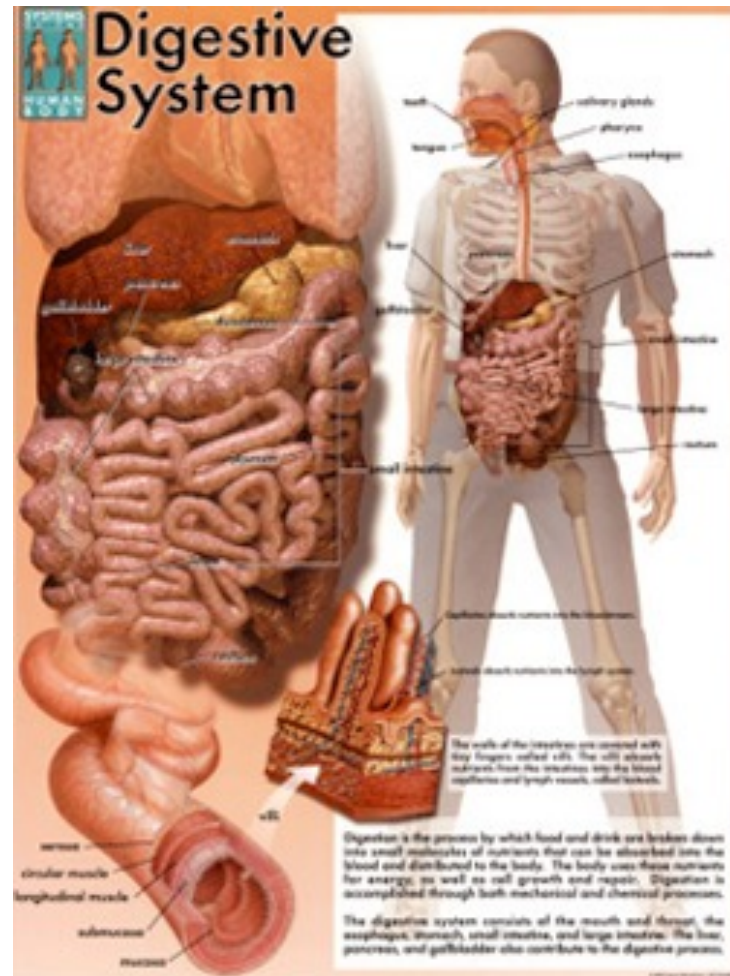
As the food moves into the small intestines, the pancreas excretes its digestive enzymes into the small intestine further breaking down the food.

From there, the nutrients squeeze through the intestinal walls to the blood (strong abdominals help to transport the nutrients through the intestinal walls).

Then our body distributes the nutrients to where we need them.

Our body then uses oxygen (O₂) to combine with the nutrients in the cells to provide our cells with energy.

Digestion (paka) in yoga/ayurvedic terms is first the fire of jatharagni -- the fire agni that breaks down food in our stomach. Then bhutagni -the fire that breaks down the nutrients to one of the five elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether), and finally, dhatwagni, the transformation of the nutrients into building our 7 tissues, then excreting what we don't need.



The building of our 7 tissues: Ayurveda teaches that our food we digest then goes through a 30 day transformation process of nourishing our tissues — it nourishes in a specific order:

1. lymph
2. blood
3. muscle
4. fat
5. bone
6. nerves
7. reproductive tissues

If we have not eaten nourishing foods — or we don't digest the nutrients from them well, you can see the last few steps don't get nourishment — one of the reasons when we are low on energy our libido is low — and our nerves are more easily stressed ... if you notice these symptoms its time to start looking at your digestion and what you are eating, if you do not address your food and digestion issue soon you will start to notice deterioration in other health issues.



Tips to keep your digestion (and detox pathways) healthy:

- ☯ Have periods of fasting each day. When our body has to constantly digest it does not get a chance to detox, and our digestive pathways get over-worked. One of the easiest times to have a period of fasting each day is morning time. Delay your breakfast as long as you comfortably can. Breakfast means break-the-fast . . . I like to wait until about noon most days to eat.
- ☯ Your digestion is strongest from 10am - 2pm. Best to eat your main meal during this time. Try not to eat one big meal too fast, but relax and spread out your meal over several courses. Think about how they eat lunch in Italy.
- ☯ I eat most of the my food in the day between the hours of noon and 3:00pm. If I do feel hungry after teaching all night, a light evening meal is ok. The evening meal is called supper . . .which means supplemental meal. It should be light and easy to digest, like soup or cooked vegetables.

If you feel like your digestion is slow (bloated, windy, feeling full way to long), here are some tips to help improve your digestion:

- ☯ RELAX. Simply put ... if we are stressed we do not digest. Try to relax before, during, and for 10-20 minutes after your meals.
- ☯ Don't talk about stressful events during meal times.
- ☯ Ideally after your main meal rest for 5-20 minutes on your left side. This puts your food in the sac of your stomach where it marinates with more HCl (hydrochloric acid) and breaks down your food better. The right side of your stomach is where food moves from your stomach to your small intestine — lying on your right side might encourage the emptying of your stomach a little too soon.
- ☯ If you are at work, lean on your left side scoot over in your chair and take a mini rest on your left side ...
- ☯ Prior to eating slice up some ginger and sprinkle it with lemon and/or salt. Chew on the slices before you eat.
- ☯ Salt and pepper both aid in digestions, and pepper helps your body absorb nutrients. So use your salt and pepper.
- ☯ Warm lemon water with a sprinkle of salt and pepper works great in a pinch! This is what I do many times when i have to eat out.



☯ Coffee after a meal is a good digestive aid. Black coffee or an espresso is best after your meal. Adding dairy or creamer to your coffee will interfere with its digestive benefit. And I don't recommend sugar in your coffee ...

☯ Ginger tea before a meal will also help with digestion.

☯ Small sips of warm water while eating are helpful — but don't drink too much water this will dilute your digestive juices.

☯ Fermented foods will also help your body digest, include small amounts of fermented foods at each meal.

In a pinch, there is an ayurvedic herb called trikatu. It is a combination of two different types of black pepper and ginger. If I end up eating out, or eating later than I want to, I will take 2 trikatu prior to eating.

Don'ts to help your digestion:

☯ Don't eat while working

☯ don't eat while driving

☯ Don't eat when stressed

☯ Don't eat while playing on your phone or other device.

☯ Don't take antacids or PPIs! More on this when we talk about the esophagus. PPIs disrupts your digestion in a major way, you do not absorb B12, Iron, Zinc, and magnesium on PPIs. These are very important nutrients.

☯ Don't eat too many hard to digest foods (meat and some cheeses)

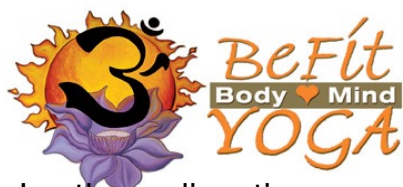
☯ Don't eat processed foods

☯ Don't eat too many cold foods

☯ Don't drink cold water -- especially during a meal

☯ Don't eat standing up ... ayurvedic saying "if you eat standing up, death looks over your shoulder."

STRESS ruins digestion . . . remember from previous lessons, when your body is stressed your energy is sent to your muscles to run and fight and diverted from your organs. Therefore your body does not digest well when stressed, the food will lay in your stomach or gut and rot . . . better to fast when stressed.



Lastly on digestion; as we age digestion seems to get more easily challenged, it is especially important as you gracefully age to make sure you support your digestion.

On an emotional level:

Our agni or digestive fire refers to not only our ability to process foods; but all aspects of life including experiences and memories. Agni is responsible for absorbing the nutrients we need while burning off the waste products we don't need. This applies to our emotions as well; when we have emotions they are released into our bloodstream as a chemical (something non-tangible becomes tangible), these chemicals need to be digested for our emotions just like our body needs food.

If our agni is strong we are able to digest and assimilate our food — if our emotional agni is strong we are able to digest and assimilate our daily experiences. If we do not digest our daily experiences those molecules of emotion remain in our body where they latch onto receptors and block the flow of information in and out of the cell. (ref. Candace Pert "Molecules of Emotion").

If our body does not digest food well then toxins (known as ama in Ayurveda) lodge in our cells; similarly the inability to metabolize emotions will produce toxic residues similarly challenging for our body as undigested food.

Reflect a moment on your digestion, if you feel your digestive power could use a little more power take a moment now and focus on that, make your breathing a little stronger and in your minds eye fan your fires of digestion making them grow bright and strong. See your digestive fire in your stomach breaking down foods and passing them on their way to the small intestine where you can further digest and absorb the nutrients. Then see these nutrients being distributed to where your body needs them.

All this is not magic--it is based on science . . . and yet it is a little magic.

You breathe deep, meditate a little, jump around in a yoga practice squishing this and sticking a heel in that, eat some good food — and a miracle occurs . . . You are healthy.
Miraculous.

The sum is greater than the parts.
Yes, it requires effort, but its worth it!

