

POSE OF THE MONTH
October 2006

Janu Sirsasana C – Head to knee pose. Janu means knee, sirsa means head. Janu C is the final of the head to knee sequence in the Primary Series of Ashtanga Yoga. This pose can literally take 10 years to work into (it did me!), the twist of the knee joint at first seems like a threat to the knee but in actuality it is therapeutic for the knees and has been touted to cure chronic knee inflammation, even so it needs to be carefully approached.

Method:

- ॐ From Downward dog, hop through to Dandasana.
- ॐ Inhaling lift your right leg, thread your right arm inside the right thigh and then underneath the calf, catch your toes with the palm of your right hand and gently pull them back
- ॐ Catch your heel with your left hand and carefully begin to rotate the heel upward as you bring the ball off your foot to the floor trying to match up the arch of your foot around your left inner thigh. **If you suffer from knee pain you may need to remain in the 'holding position' holding your foot off the floor and gently encouraging rotation of the foot and leg.** See picture to the left.



ॐ If you can get the ball of your foot to the floor (again you can hold here for the pose) you want to work your foot toward a vertical position. This is most easily done by lifting your hips and scooting your hips forward closer to your foot.

ॐ Swivel your right hip and knee forward moving your knee in closer to your left leg (ideally your right knee will come in to a 45° angle). See 2nd pic on the bottom left for the option 2 holding position.



ॐ If you are still able to continue with this pose, reach out and catch your left foot with both hands, inhale extend your spine and pull your lower abdomen in, exhaling forward bend over your left leg, while aiming your heel just below your navel. If you feel pressure on your pinky toe you can reach down and slide the toe toward the other toes to relieve pressure or carefully try to rotate your foot slightly more.

ॐ Stay here for five deep breaths. Drishti is toward

toes.

ॐ Inhale come up for vinyasa and switch sides.





Benefits

During Janu Sirsasana C in females the heel presses into the uterus, this is therapeutic for the female reproductive system, just as the B position is therapeutic for the male reproductive system.

The entire Janu Sirsasana series of poses has a powerful effect. Of importance is the pressure from the heel placed on the nerve which stimulates the parasympathetic response (in B position), and in C position the heel presses into the small intestines stimulating the peristalsis effect. See below.

In addition the heel generates heat which adds a therapeutic effect.

Peristalsis

Motility = "Motility" is a term used to describe the contraction of the muscles that mix and propel contents in the gastrointestinal tract. Organs and cells also have a motility function, for example the pancreas secreting insulin into the blood stream is a motility of the pancreas. Sperm has motility as it moves in the body. Cells have a motility in the form of tissue regeneration and embryological development. At a cellular level there are many types of motility; our bacteria — good or bad — is also a form of cellular motility, for example E.coli swims by rotating, amoebas crawl, and other bacteria swarm or glide inside us.

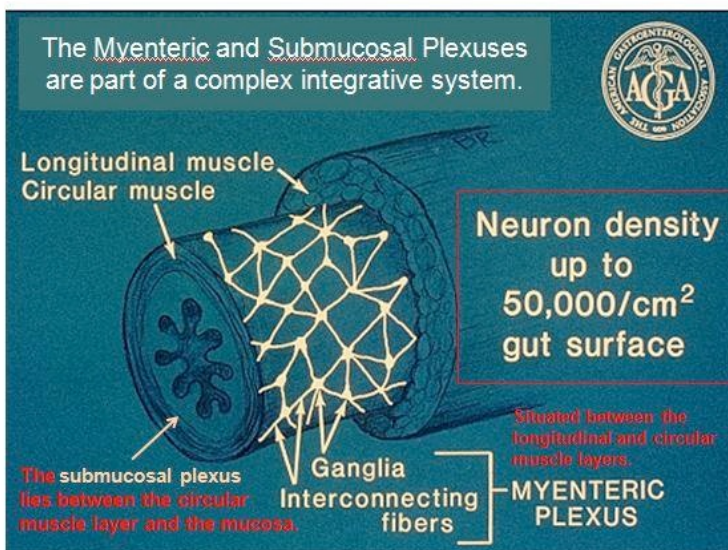
Keeping everything moving in the body is one of the many reasons we do this yoga; motility is an important function. So how does Janu Sirsasana C help with the body's motility?

Janu Sirsasana C also has connection to controlling the release of insulin from the pancreas -- this is through the gut-pancreas-vagus nerve connection which connects to our digestive nervous system called the enteric nervous system - which connects to the central nervous system — pretty much connecting our whole body.

We can stimulate this connection through the myenteric plexus to all the "tubes" in our digestive system.

The myenteric plexus is a network of unmyelinated nerve fibers and neuron cell bodies that are tucked in among the layers of our esophagus, stomach and intestines — or pretty much from mouth to anas. It tells the smooth muscles to contract to move matter along its path. Unmyelinated nerves moves slower than nerves that have a myelin sheath around them.

The myenteric plexus functions as part of the Enteric Nervous System or ENS (the nervous system of the intestines and digestion). The main "job" of the myenteric plexus is motor





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activity -- moving something along its path. The secondary function of the myenteric plexus neurons is controlling the secretion of enzymes. It receives its messages from the vagus nerve and responds by transmitting the message to muscle cells, which are thereby activated to contract.

The myenteric plexus controls secretion of hormones into the blood (ex. insulin), absorption, blood flow and the interactions between the organs (for example opening a sphincter so food can pass from one organ to the next). Making the gut-pancreas connection an important connection in how the body times digestion and absorption of nutrients.

The yoga text books give credit to the Janu Sirsasana series as helping to control diabetes

This plexus is an important component of the entire digestive tract. There is only one myenteric plexus by the way; since the neurons are present in the different organs I thought each organ had its own plexus . . . this is not the case they all connect through the ENS and are one plexus.

Putting your heel in your gut as in Janu Sirsasana C position would put pressure on these nerves in the intestines stimulating their action throughout the entire digestive tract.