

POSE OF THE MONTH
MARCH 2007

Navasana (boat pose)– nava means boat, it is pronounced na-wa as most ‘V’ sounds in Sanskrit are pronounced as a ‘W’.

Everyone’s favorite pose! Boat pose is about developing core strength to support your spine and improve your digestion. The abdominals and hip flexors (psoas and iliacus) work together to lift the legs in this pose. The pick-up between boat poses, *lollasana*, is an excellent way to strengthen the abdominals, this pose teaches us how to eventually pull through from seated to Chaturanga Dandasana without touching down.

Method:

ॐ From Downward facing dog, hop though keeping your legs elevated off the floor, touch your sitting bones to the floor and extend your arms and legs into boat pose ;) (This takes many years of practice to accomplish!)

EVERYONE ELSE:

ॐ From Downward facing dog hop through and have a seat.

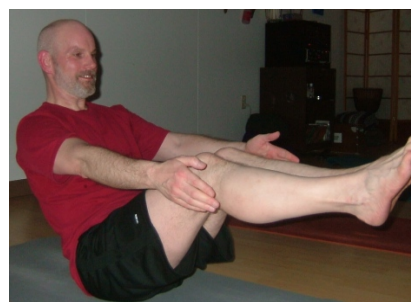
ॐ Bend your knees with the soles of your feet flat on the floor and close to your hips, catch your legs just below your knee caps.

ॐ Engage all your abdominals pulling inward and upward with your uddiyana bandha. Lean back lifting your legs off the floor but still gently holding on to them, rolling back slightly on the sitting bone until you feel your abdominals working to support you. See 1st picture.

ॐ Release your legs extend your arms at shoulder level palms facing in, see 2nd picture. If this is challenging stay here for 5 breaths, if your lower back collapses then remain in the previous pose as in 1st picture.

ॐ To progress; keeping your knees bent move your shins toward parallel to the floor (3rd picture). You can stay here for 5 breaths or

ॐ Continue extending your legs until they are straight, toes pointed and at eye level (4th picture). Extending your legs not only requires abdominal and hip flexor strength but hamstring flexibility as well, if you are a member of the “tight hamstring club” you will need to





keep your knees bent to protect your lower back until your hamstrings lengthen. Maintain a 90° angle between your torso and legs, less angle means less strength work, too big of an angle can strain the lower back. Remain here for 5 breaths. Pay attention to not sag in the lower back or arch your lower back forward. **MAINTAIN A NEUTRAL SPINE AND PELVIS**, lift your heart while knitting your ribs together, slide your shoulder blades down your back and pull your arms into their shoulder joints.



ॐ Drishti is toes or nose.

Pick yourself up in between boat poses:

Lollasana - The Sanskrit word lolla can be translated as "fickle, frequently changing, trembling, quivering, or dangling to and fro like an earring." Interestingly, Lolla is also another name for the goddess of fortune and wealth, Lakshmi, who represents the power of multiplicity:

ॐ Exhaling cross your legs, ground your hands close to your hips and between your hips and feet.

ॐ Inhaling tip forward and pick up—tuck your legs up into your body and lift your hip bones toward your ribs shortening your torso from the bottom up. Even if you can not lift off the floor it is important to try to do so. The effort of the lift is more important than getting lift off! **DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH!**

ॐ Exhaling release downward and repeat boat pose and lollasana for a total of 5 repetitions, pulling through on the fifth lollasana for vinyasa to the next pose. The benefits of navasana are so important you get to do it 5 times ;)

Benefits:

Navasana is beneficial for the spinal cord, the abdominals are also strengthened and toned helping to increase digestive fire and stimulation; as a result the intestines are stimulated due to the increase in agni (digestive fire). The spinal column, anal channel, ribs and lower abdomen are all purified from this 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 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.

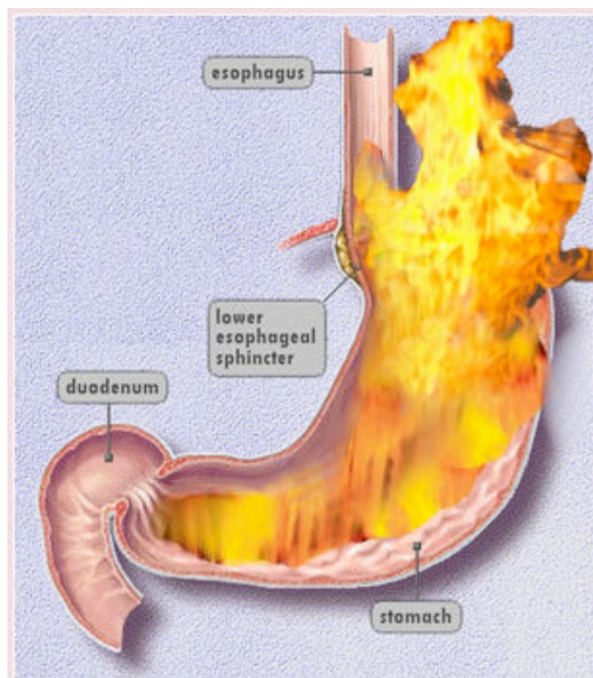
Our nerves, and skin don't just magically recreate themselves -- they build themselves from the food we eat. . . but not just that, from the food we digest.

If you are not digesting good food with lots of nutrients -- your health -- and specifically your seven tissues of the body 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 — increasing not only your ability to digest, but also your ability to detox. Staying relaxed with this support is important though so you are not putting tension around your abdomen — just gentle support with the bandhas.

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.

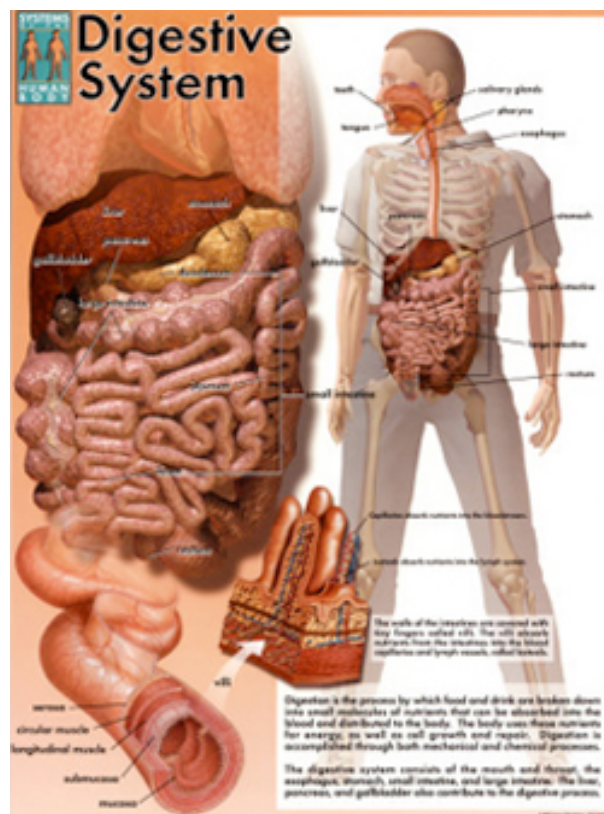
☯ As the food moves into the small intestines, the pancreas excretes its digestive enzymes into the small intestine further breaking down the food.

☯ 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,





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dhatwagni, the transformation of the nutrients into building our 7 tissues (blood, fat, flesh, bone, marrow, skin, and semen/ova), then excreting what we don't need.

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 the 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.