



## Developing a Home Practice Handout week 8

*The following practice should take approx. 15 minutes if you include the focus and the relaxation, or 10 minutes if you exclude these elements.*

Find a quiet space where you have enough room to work on your mat and you won't be disturbed. Ensure you leave 2 hours after a meal before practicing, and follow the precautions mentioned in this handout. *If at any time you feel uncomfortable or unwell please stop immediately and seek appropriate advice.*

### **Step 1: Centering the mind – 1 minute**

Come to a comfortable seated position and focus into the breath. Breathe in and out through the nostrils and be aware of the rise and fall of the chest and abdomen as you breathe. Observe how you feel. Do not force the breath, but allow it to come and go gently and smoothly as you concentrate on drawing in energy on the inhale, and letting go of tension on the exhale.



### **Step 2: Preparatory work – 5 - 8 minutes**

**Apanasana:** lying on your back, bend the knees and draw them in towards the chest. Keep them together. Take the hands around the shins, and begin to gently circle the knees in one direction. Take the circle in the other direction. Then separate the knees and circle them in opposite directions, warming the hip joints. Reverse direction.



**Hamstring Stretching:** Lying on the back, take the feet and place them on the floor a little way away from the buttocks. On an inhale take the sole of the right foot up towards the ceiling. Clasp the hands behind the thigh to support it. Begin to point and flex the foot strongly, feeling the stretch in the calf and in the shin. Then take a strap or tie, and place it around the ball of the foot, or clasp the hands behind the thigh. Bring the knee in towards the abdomen and place the thigh on the abdomen. Maintaining this contact, begin to stretch the foot away over the head, gradually straightening the leg. Breathe into the back of the knee and hold. Repeat both steps on the left. Then take a strap or tie, and place it around the ball of the foot, or clasp the hands behind the thigh. Bring the knee in towards the abdomen and place the thigh on the abdomen. Maintaining this contact, begin to stretch the foot away over the head, gradually straightening the leg. Breathe into the back of the knee and hold. Repeat both steps on the left.

**Knee Down Twist:** Lie on your back, with your legs straight. Place the arch of the right foot over the left knee. Take the right knee with left hand and encourage it down towards the mat, allowing right hip to come up. Take the right hand out to shoulder level along the mat. Stay here if your shoulders are very stiff: otherwise, begin to make circles by tracing the right arm up and around and back again, without lifting the fingers off the mat. Repeat on the other side.

### **Step 3: Postures – 10 minutes**

**Utkatasana, awkward pose:** Begin standing in Mountain pose, feet and ankles together. On an inhale, lower the hips back and down, keeping the spine and torso as tall as possible. At the same time raise the hands with arms outstretched slightly above the face, palms together or at shoulder width if the shoulders are stiff, and look to thumbs. Hold and breathe for three to eight breaths. Exhale to come out and stand in mountain pose. Repeat as a dynamic flow 3 – 5 times or hold for longer periods to strengthen the thighs. If this is too strong initially, stand near a wall and lower hips to rest against it as you “sit” into the posture.



**Garudasana, Eagle:** Begin in Mountain pose, Tadasana. Bring hands to hips. Transfer the weight to the left foot and bend the left knee. Bend the right knee and wrap the right upper thigh over the left as tightly as possible, bringing the right toes around the left calf if you can. Sink into the left knee bend a little further. Stay here if this is enough work. To add the arms, bring both arms out in front of you and bend at the elbows. Take the left elbow over the right, and place the backs of the hands together. To complete the posture, take the left hand in front of the right take it backwards towards the left and place the palms together. Lean forward slightly as you sink into the posture. Repeat on the other side. NB to work up to this posture practice just the legs or just the arms. You can use a wall for help with balance when practicing the legs.



**Shalabhasana, Locust:** Lie flat on the mat on the belly, nose down to the floor, hands by the sides, palms facing upwards. Feet and legs are together. On an inhale first pull the navel back in towards the spine, then raise the head, shoulders, feet, and legs off the floor. Hold for three deep breaths then release back down. Repeat twice more. Legs can be a few inches apart for a slightly easier version. *Nb this is strong in the lower back, avoid if you have a back injury or weak spine.*

### **Step 4: Relaxation.**

Ensure you put on an extra layer or cover yourself with a blanket. Lying onto the back, take your feet mat width apart. Take the arms slightly out from the sides, palms turning upwards. Support the head and neck if desired, and ensure you are completely comfortable. Allow the eyes to close and focus into the breath, concentrating on the breath and letting any outside thoughts go. Focus on letting go with every out breath. Stay for 3 minutes, or longer if desired. Namaste.

