

YOGA AND AGING

SHIFTING
PERSPECTIVE
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YOGA

*Aging and The Internal Organs - A Balancing Act
with Karin Stephan
Sunday January 29th 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm*

WAYS YOGA ASANAS CAN INFLUENCE THE INTERNAL ORGANS

1. MASSAGING THE ORGANS

a. DIRECT STIMULATION / MASSAGING THE ORGANS

By specifically placing the body in such a way that the muscles push up against an organ and squeeze it. For example, in backbends the muscles along the mid-spine push up into the kidneys. When the pose is released, fresh blood rushes back into the organ, cleansing and purifying it.

b. INDIRECT STIMULATION

Through applying pressure in one area, blood flows into another area and nourishes that area. For example, when legs are in lotus position in a shoulder stand, the tops of the thighs are squeezed, pushing blood into the bladder, lower intestines, and reproductive organs.

2. REDIRECTING THE FLOW OF BLOOD

By placing the body in certain positions so as to facilitate blood flow to specific glands or meridians. For example, an inversion such as shoulder stand brings blood to the lungs and the thyroid gland, as well as to the intestine, liver and gallbladder meridians.

3. ACTIVATING AND STRETCHING THE MERIDIANS

Stretching certain meridians in the body helps to stimulate those meridians. Meridians “crinkle up” when not stimulated. For example, Uttanasana [standing forward bend] stretches the bladder meridian in the backs of the legs.

4. BREATHWORK (PRANAYAMA)

Slow, steady breathing brings nourishment to each and every cell of the body as well as calming the mind and the body. We can direct this effect to a specific organ, for example, practicing Ujjayi pranayama [3 slow inhalations, 3 slow exhalations, 3 times] can be used to calm an overly excited condition resulting from the malfunctioning of the heart and small intestines.

5. BALANCING THE ENDOCRINE SYSTEM

Yoga asanas bring blood and energy to the various glands, stimulating them and reestablishing their normal balance. For example, shoulder stand brings blood to the thyroid, thereby stimulating it, and hence all the other glands.

**The *meridians* are energetic highways, paths that form a network throughout the entire body, through which life-energy, known as *qi*, and other fundamental substances flow.

ORGAN PAIRS	NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	POSITIVE EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS
LIVER / GALLBLADDER	Impatience Short-tempered Easily angered	Patience Endurance
HEART / SMALL INTESTINE	Excessive laughter Overexcitability Excessively talkative	Tranquility Gentleness Joy
STOMACH / SPLEEN / PANCREAS	Worry Irritability Criticism Skepticism	Sympathy Understanding
LUNGS / LARGE INTESTINE	Sadness Depression Grief / Sorrow	Happiness Sense of wholeness
KIDNEY / BLADDER	Fear Hopelessness Loss of self esteem Lack of will	Confidence Courage Curiosity Ambition Will

ORGANS	ENERGETICS	POSITIVE SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS	DAILY BIOENERGY AND TYPE OF ASANA
LIVER / GALLBLADDER	WOOD Tree-like Upward energy ACTIVE	Aspiring Idealistic Spiritual	MORNING Sun salutations Back bends Handstands
HEART / SMALL INTESTINE	FIRE Fire-like Explosive energy HIGHLY ACTIVE	Bright, radiant mind Intuitive comprehension Feelings of oneness	NOON Twists Chest openers Standing poses
STOMACH / SPLEEN / PANCREAS	SOIL Soil-like Downward energy CENTERING	Mind balanced between physical and spiritual wisdom Intellectualizing spirit	LATE AFTERNOON/ EARLY EVENING Forward bends Headstands - timings Shoulder stands - timings
LUNG / LARGE INTESTINE	METAL Metal-like Deepening energy GATHERING	Self-reflective Analytical Physicalized spirit	EVENING Restorative poses Pranayama
KIDNEY / BLADDER	WATER Water-like Still energy FLOATING	Adaptable Observing mind Spirit of Inspiration	NIGHT Deep relaxation Yoga Nidra Savasana Meditation

WARRIOR ARCHETYPES

The one who is flexible on the outside and firm on the inside will continually flourish.

The one who is weak on the outside and strong on the inside will gradually progress.

The one who is flexible on the outside and weak on the inside will lose what one has.

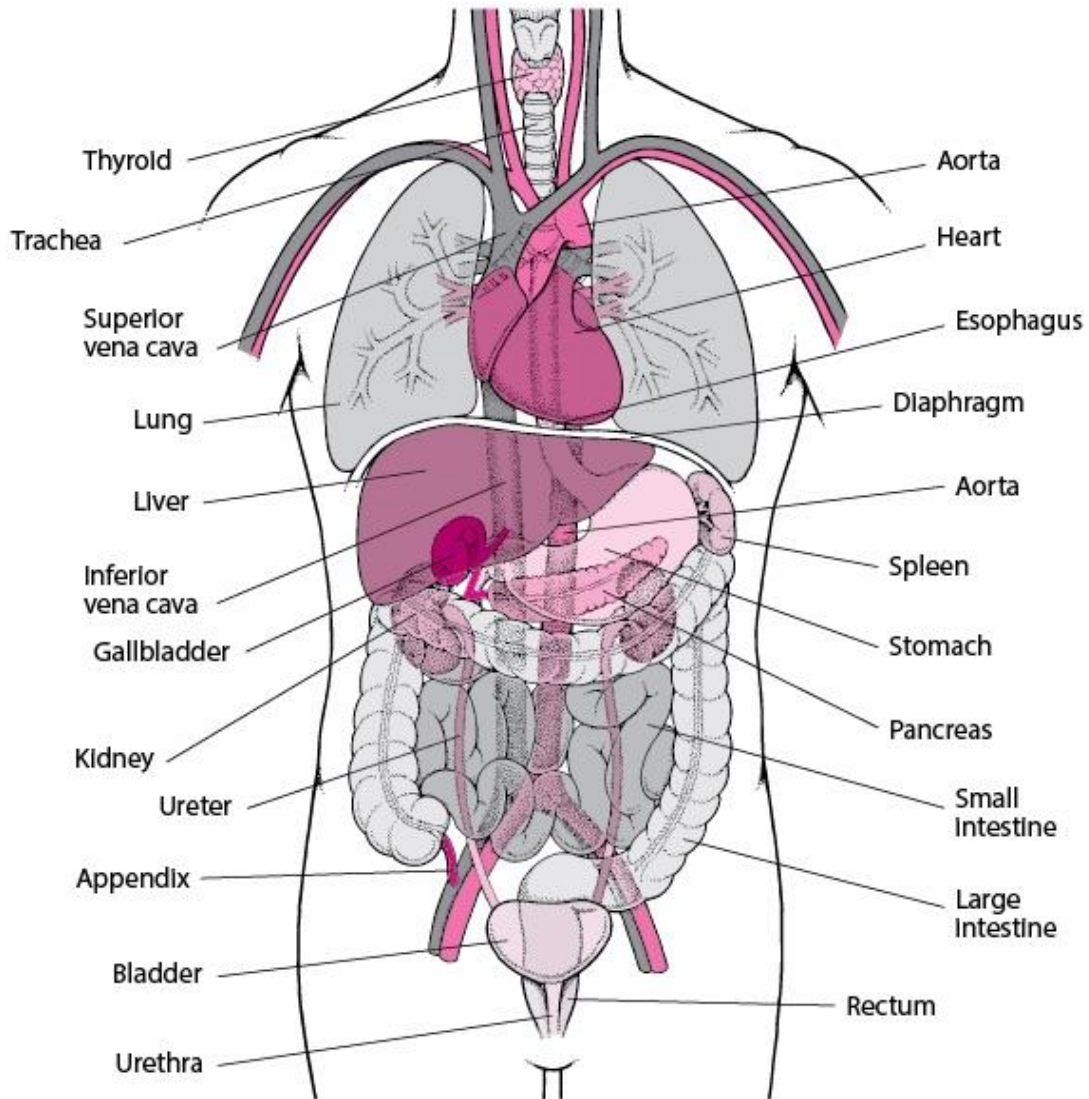
The one who is solid on the outside and strong on the inside will inevitably be destroyed.

-Sun Tsu from *The Art of War*

Two types of yin - flexibility and weakness

Two types of yang - solidity [firmness] and strength

LOCATION OF THE ORGANS



SETS OF ORGAN PAIRS

[with recommended asanas for each pair]

“...every asana has a many-fold action on all the body systems. One cannot isolate one particular asana for one body system and another for another system. Each pose is a general tonic for the whole body, acting in total on: circulation, respiration, digestion, the nervous system, the endocrine system.”

-*Seventy Glorious Years of Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar*, p.281

Students will practice specific asanas from each set as Karin illustrates their impact on the organs.

SET I - LIVER AND GALLBLADDER

LIVER

1. Utthita Trikonasana
2. Utthita Parsvakonasana
3. All twists but especially Marichyasana III
4. Supta Virasana
5. Utkatasana
6. Surya Namaskar I & II several times in a row using Ujjayi breath
7. Ustrasana with hands on a bolster over the feet to accurately place pressure on the liver
8. Natarajasana
9. Urdhva Dhanurasana [or Dhanurasana]
10. Upavistha Konasana for liver meridian

GALLBLADDER

1. Virabhadrasana II
2. Utthita Parsvakonasana
3. Parivrtta Trikonasana and Parivrtta Utthita Parsvakonasana
4. Forearm Balance
5. Backbend work

SET II- HEART AND SMALL INTESTINE

HEART

1. **Surya Namaskar** - slow, steady, and quiet, matching the rhythm of the breath with the movements of the body, 3-4 per session
2. **Supta Baddha Konasana** with upper back over the bolster, then using Ujjayi breath
3. **Passive forward bends** and/or timings in forward bends using bolsters or blankets on the legs with head on the bolster or blankets, arms relaxed.
4. **Surya Namaskar** - slow, steady, and quiet, matching the rhythm of the breath with the movements of the body, 3-4 per session
5. **Supta Baddha Konasana** with upper back over the bolster, then using Ujjayi breath
6. **Passive forward bends** and/or timings in forward bends using bolsters or blankets on the legs with forehead on the bolster or blankets, arms relaxed.
7. **Supta Virasana** modified as necessary
8. **Inversions** such as headstand, shoulder stand, Viparita Karani
9. **Passive Halasana** with legs on the chair
10. **Pranayama and Savasana** - regular practice of both

SMALL INTESTINE

1. **Setu Bandhasana** over a block or over a Setu Bandhasana bench, the goal being to stretch the muscles, skin, and soft tissue over the small intestines to help stimulate activity there.
2. **Viparita Karani** with the pelvis on a bolster, or modified shoulder stand with a chair
3. **Forward bends in Virasana**
4. **Paschimottanasana** with a blanket roll inserted under the belly and on the top of the thighs
5. **Beginning drop over** from Tadasana into Urdhva Dhanurasana with belt or dowel in your hands

SET III - STOMACH AND SPLEEN/PANCREAS

1. **Supta Baddha Konasana** - timings of 10-15 minutes with slow Ujjayi breath
2. **Trikonasana, Virabhadrasana I, and Ardha Chandrasana** – to stretch the skin and muscles across the diaphragmatic area
3. **Twisting poses** - Chair twist [seated and standing] or Parivrtta Utthita Trikonasana
4. **Ustrasana, Urdhva Dhanurasana or Viparita Dandasana** and modifications of any of these poses
5. **Setu Bandhasana in Sarvangasana**
6. **Forearm balance [Pincha Mayurasana]** or preparation
7. **Marichyasana III**

SET IV - LUNGS AND LARGE INTESTINE

LUNGS

1. **Upper back openers** – Arms out to the side, with the bolster going horizontal to the mat and a block behind the head.
2. **Upper lung opener** – With 2 bolsters, long edges parallel with the long sides of the mat, Head on the floor, short edge of the bolster going into the upper part of the lungs. Legs belted.
3. **Floor twist** focusing primarily on the upper pectoral area moving away from the center.
4. **Virabhadrasana I** using the chair – Facing the chair, bring one arm up at a time and then both arms.
5. **Trikonasana**
6. Strengthening the diaphragmatic area
 - a) **Supported forward bends** with the chair
 - b) **Ustrasana**
 - c) **Chair twist**
7. **Preparation for forearm balance** in downward dog position and forearm balance
8. **Shoulder stand and variations, Viparita Karani and variations**

LARGE INTESTINE

1. **Timings in forward bends** – Paschimottanasana, Janu Sirsasana and/or Ardha Baddha Eka Pada Paschimottanasana using a blanket or bolster on the legs to rest forehead, or put forehead on the seat of a chair if necessary.
2. **Navasana and Ardha Navasana**
3. **Prasarita Padottanasana** with the crown of the head on the floor or on a block placed in between the legs at the level of the toes.
4. **Modified headstand** near the wall with the interlaced hands pressed against a block
5. **Headstand and headstand variations**
6. **Virabhadrasana II**
7. **Utthita Parsvakonasana.**
8. **Setu Bandhasana** with the sacrum on the bolster and the legs in Baddha Konasana.
9. **Mini back bends** with the front body on the floor
10. **Ustrasana** with thighs against a bolster placed against the wall, perpendicular to the floor.
11. **Backbends with the feet supported** on two or three blocks to be higher than the hands.

SET V - KIDNEYS AND BLADDER

KIDNEYS

1. **Seated chair twist** focusing especially on the upper back work
2. **Standing chair twist** with one foot on the chair and one foot on the floor
3. **Parivrtta Upavistha Konasana** beginning part
4. **Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana**
5. **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana** with hands on the chair and then with hands on blocks
6. **Adho Mukha Svanasana** with knees bent
7. **Upper back opener** over a bolster
8. **Urdhva Dhanurasana** preferably with hands on blocks

9. **Legs in the air**, belt around the feet
10. **Upavistha Konasana**

BLADDER

1. **Leg lifts** with head on the block to strengthen the core
2. **Setu Bandhasana**
3. **Parivirtta Janu Sirsasana** with belt - Use core muscles to do the twisting
4. **Supta Baddha Konasana** with pelvis on the bolster
5. **Timings in forward bends** - especially Paschimottanasana
6. **Modified shoulder stand** or Viparita Karani

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Jennifer Raye is an acupuncturist and yoga teacher who has her doctorate in TCM. Her website is comprehensive and includes free resources: <https://www.youtube.com/@jenniferraye>.

Her YouTube channel has a nice series about the meridians, and using pressure points in your yoga practice. <https://jenniferraye.com/>

Seventy Glorious Years of Yogacharya B. K. S. Iyengar, edited and published by the Light on Yoga Research Trust, Bombay 1990.

This wonderful book is out-of-print but copies are sometimes available from used book sellers online.



Auguste Rodin, *Seated Nude* c.1900-1908

“In asana, we are playing with the elements. When we twist, for example, we are squeezing space out of the kidney, and on release, space returns, but space renewed. Similarly, we are squeezing water, fire, and air, as well as to some extent earth, out of the organ when we twist or contract. When we release, circulation comes back, restoring revitalized elements. We think of this as washing and cleansing the organs.”

-B.K.S. Iyengar from *Light on Life*