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TIPS ON TEACHING AND PRACTICING PRANAYAMA



PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS OF PRANAYAMA

- **WHY Do We Need Pranayama?**
- Pranayama=To extend prana
- Puraka= INHALE=to take in prana/set our intention
- Rechaka=EXHALE= to improve apana/let go of tension or eliminate toxins
- Kumbhaka=HOLD=to intensify the effect of the breath
 - Antar Kumbhaka-Inhale hold
 - Bahir Kumbhaka-Exhale hold

TO MOVE PRANA

- Asana alone cannot give us all of the intended benefits of yoga.
- We bring additional prana into the body with the breath. Breath is the vehicle of prana. Prana cannot be stored.
- We use breath to improve and balance prana.
- When there is irregular breathing, (most beginners) prana is dispersed and weak.

Prana
(Reception)

Udana
(Mind)

Vyana
(Circulation)

Samana
(Digestion)

Apana
(Excretion)

TO MOVE PRANA

- Regular breathing effectively and strongly moves prana within the body.
- We can more effectively move prana through the energy channels when blockages are eliminated so that prana can reach the whole system.

TO UNBLOCK ENERGY BLOCKAGES

- Pranayama unblocks the granthis.
- Granthis are 'energy knots' in the body. They are ways of being that somehow limit our energy, and our potential.



Rudra Granthi

Vishnu Granthi

Brahma Granthi

The diagram shows a human figure in a meditative pose with three energy knots labeled Rudra Granthi, Vishnu Granthi, and Brahma Granthi. Rudra Granthi is located at the throat, Vishnu Granthi is at the heart, and Brahma Granthi is at the base of the spine. The figure is shown in a light blue color against a darker blue background.

- They are three main granthis, each of which is associated with a group of chakras, and they represent 'psychic blocks' common to most humans.

TO FOCUS THE MIND

- *Calevatam calecittam; Niscalam niscalam bhavet.*
- ‘If the breath is steady, the mind is steady. If the breath is unsteady, the mind is unsteady.’ Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Just as the emotions affect the breath, by using conscious controlled breath, we can affect the emotions at will. We can balance the mind by balancing the breath.

AS A GUIDE TO ASANA PRACTICE

- **Sutra 2.46-Sthirasukhamasanam-***"The body should be steady and comfortable in the posture."* If not, then the breath will be unsteady and/or the mind will not be focused on the breath.



WHAT TYPE OF BREATHING?

- For new beginners, natural breathing in asana is fine
- As we progress, subtle ujjayi breath is used in asana practice, and in yoga therapy
- **Why?**
- **Sutra 2.50**-Breath should be 'dirga suksma'-long and smooth. (As we progress in pranayama, the breath becomes longer and smoother, as we have more control over the movement of prana in our system.)
- Focuses the mind on the sound and the sensation

WHEN TO INTRODUCE PRANAYAMA

- Sutra 2.49-*"Pranayama is the conscious, deliberate regulation of breath to replace unconscious breathing."*
- *It is only possible only after a reasonable mastery of asana practice."*

CATEGORIES OF PRANAYAMA

- **1. Basic Breathing Techniques**
- Natural Breath Awareness-should ALWAYS come first and always be present before any other technique is introduced.
- Abdominal Breathing-First CHECK natural movement of abdomen is there before any other technique is introduced-if not, help them to retrain
- Thoracic Breathing-AFTER abdominal breathing is mastered. Not necessary for yoga therapy but is important in regular yoga practitioners to build movement of prana and improve alignment of thoracic spine.



2. EXPANDING BREATH CAPACITY TECHNIQUES

- Complete Breathing/Top to Bottom Breathing
- (Breathe IN to lift the heart space-expand the area of prana, breathe OUT drawing lower abdomen in and up-to improve and strengthen the area of apana)

Once basic breathing techniques are mastered

- Ujjayi Breath

2. EXPANDING BREATH CAPACITY TECHNIQUES

- This is best introduced along with Top to Bottom breathing technique
- Viloma on the Inhalation
- Once ujjayi breathing is comfortable and at least 5:0:5:0. Start with 3 stages only, and on every other inhalation.

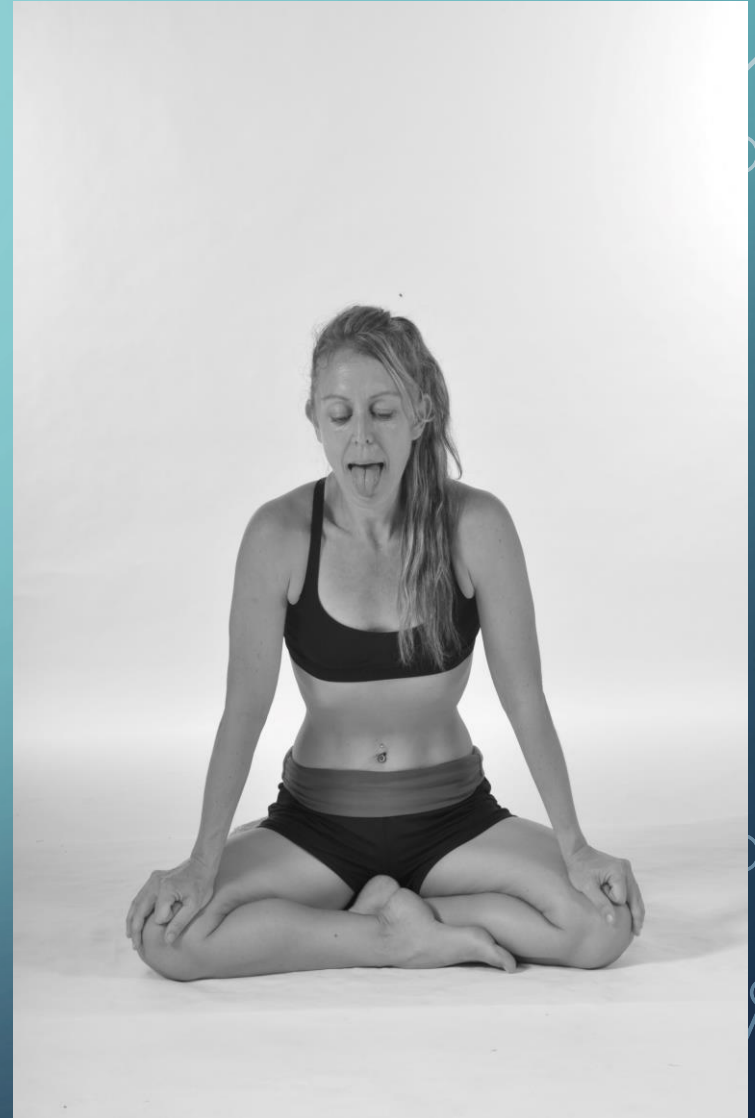
3. BALANCING TECHNIQUES

- Nadi Shodana is the simplest of these
- Can be taught to fairly new beginners, with no count
- Inhale both nostrils, exhale left
- Inhale left, exhale right
- Inhale right, exhale left. This is one round. Finish with exhale left.
- To progress this pranayama, a count can be added
- Then holds
- Restrict the nostrils slightly to strengthen the lungs and diaphragm and move prana more strongly..



4. ENERGISING, HEATING & CLEANSING TECHNIQUES

- Long ujjayi inhale (with a count) and AK-a simple way to increase prana and feel more energized. Can be taught once free ujjayi is comfortable. Only count the inhalation to start with! AK can be short.
- Swana, the 'panting' breath
- Kapalbhati, the 'skull shining' breath
- Swana is OK for relative beginners if taught mindfully (just a few rounds at a time with rest between rounds).



4. ENERGISING, HEATING & CLEANSING TECHNIQUES

- Swana provides a preparation for the stronger practice of kapalbhati.
- Agni Sara, or alternate nostril kapalbhati is stronger still. Both kapalbhati and nadi shodana provide a preparation for this practice.
- With all these practices, remember contra-indications and provide alternatives, and start with just a few rounds with rest between rounds.

5. COOLING AND SOOTHING PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES

- Long ujjayi exhale (with a count) and BK-Can be taught to beginners. Only count the Exhale. BK can be added if comfortable.
- Sitali/Sheetkari
- Bhramari
- Viloma on the EX. (3 stages, only every other out breath to start with).

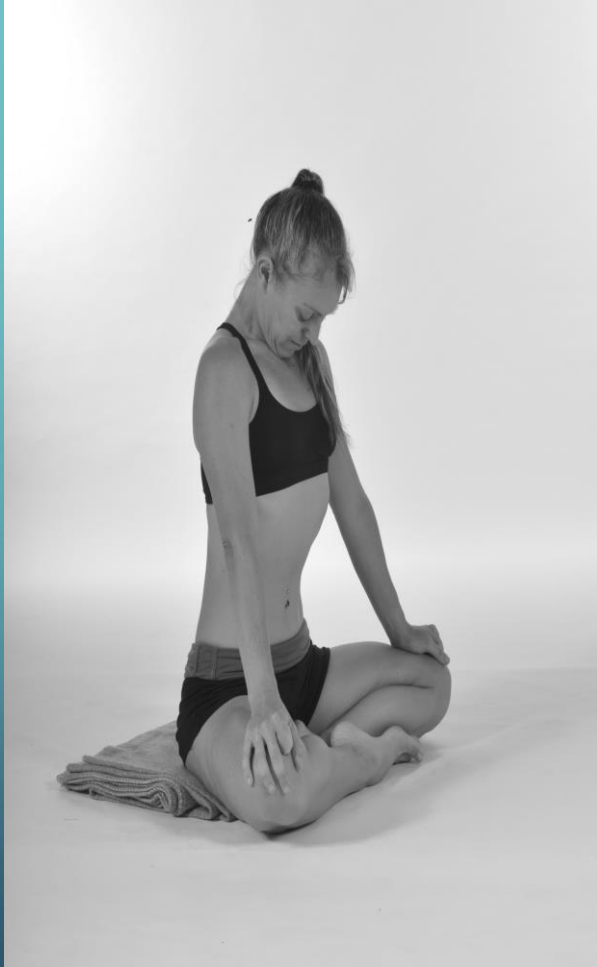


6. SENSITISING TECHNIQUES



- Due to their calming nature, cooling and soothing techniques can be taught to beginners (being mindful of contraindications and suggesting alternatives of course.)
- **Sensitising Techniques**
- These are more ‘esoteric’ practices involving visualisation, sound/mantra, and or hand movements.
- Examples are: Prana Mudra and Hasta Mudra Pranayama. See “Prana Pranayama Prana Vidya” Sw Niranjanananda Saraswati

UJJAYI



- The ujjayi breath is perhaps the most important breathing technique- “The Victorious Breath”
- We can utilize the ujjayi breath to expand our breathing capacity, and therefore our ability to move prana and apana in the system, and introduce bandha and kumbhaka to strongly remove energetic blocks.
- Using different breath ratios, we can create different energetic effects and target what is most needed.

UJJAYI BREATH

- We can use this breath as a formal seated practice, or in a comfortable and relaxed supine position (check spine alignment-chin should tilt down) but we can also use it during asana practice.
- When used in synchrony with movement, the benefits of both the breath and the asana are enhanced
- And we can use the quality and length of the breath as a guide to practice.

UJJAYI BREATH-TEACHING AND PRACTICE

- **Steps and Order in Teaching/Practice;**
- Make sure the body is comfortable and relaxed. Simple savasana best for beginners
- First, natural breath awareness
- Next, start to lengthen the breath and smooth it out
- Then introduce the ujjayi. Describe the technique- restricting the airway of the throat to make a narrow tube, creating the action of fogging a mirror but with the mouth closed...etc

UJJAYI BREATH

- Describe the sound—a hissing or sighing sound, like the sound of air rushing through a tunnel, like the sound heard when a shell is placed next to the ear—etc.
- If possible, make the sound and go around to new students to make sure they can hear it, and are also making a soft sound.

INTELLIGENT STEPS TO PROGRESSION IN UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

- Now introduce a count
- To emphasise the effect of that part of the breath, only create a count for either IN or EX. (ie count the IN for emphasis on prana/strengthening/energising effect. Count the EX for emphasis on apana/relaxing/detoxifying effect (F:0:4:0)
- For new beginners, start with a count for the EX only.
- Slowly lengthen the count to 4-5-6 seconds (F:0:6:0)
- Inhale has no count. This gives 'recovery' time.

INTELLIGENT STEPS TO PROGRESSION IN UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

- If comfortable/down the track, a short BK (exhale hold/bahir kumbhaka) can be introduced-maybe one or two counts to begin with (F:0:6:2)
- After some time of regular practice, then count the IN only, (4:0:F:0)
- Gradually lengthen the count. Down the track introduce a short AK (IN hold/antar kumbhaka). (6:2:F:0)
- When IN or EX are at a comfortable 5-6 seconds then instruct an even count for both (5:0:5:0 or 6:0:6:0)

INTELLIGENT STEPS TO PROGRESSION IN UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

- When creating an even count, use the shorter count to begin, then gradually extend (ie from 4:0:5:0 go to 4:0:4:0 then extend if comfortable to 5:0:5:0 and gradually to 6:0:6:0).
- Add in a BK-EX hold-start with 1-2 counts.
- Over time, work on increasing length of BK to 3 (a hold of $1/2$ the length of the breath verifies the component before it)-6:0:6:3

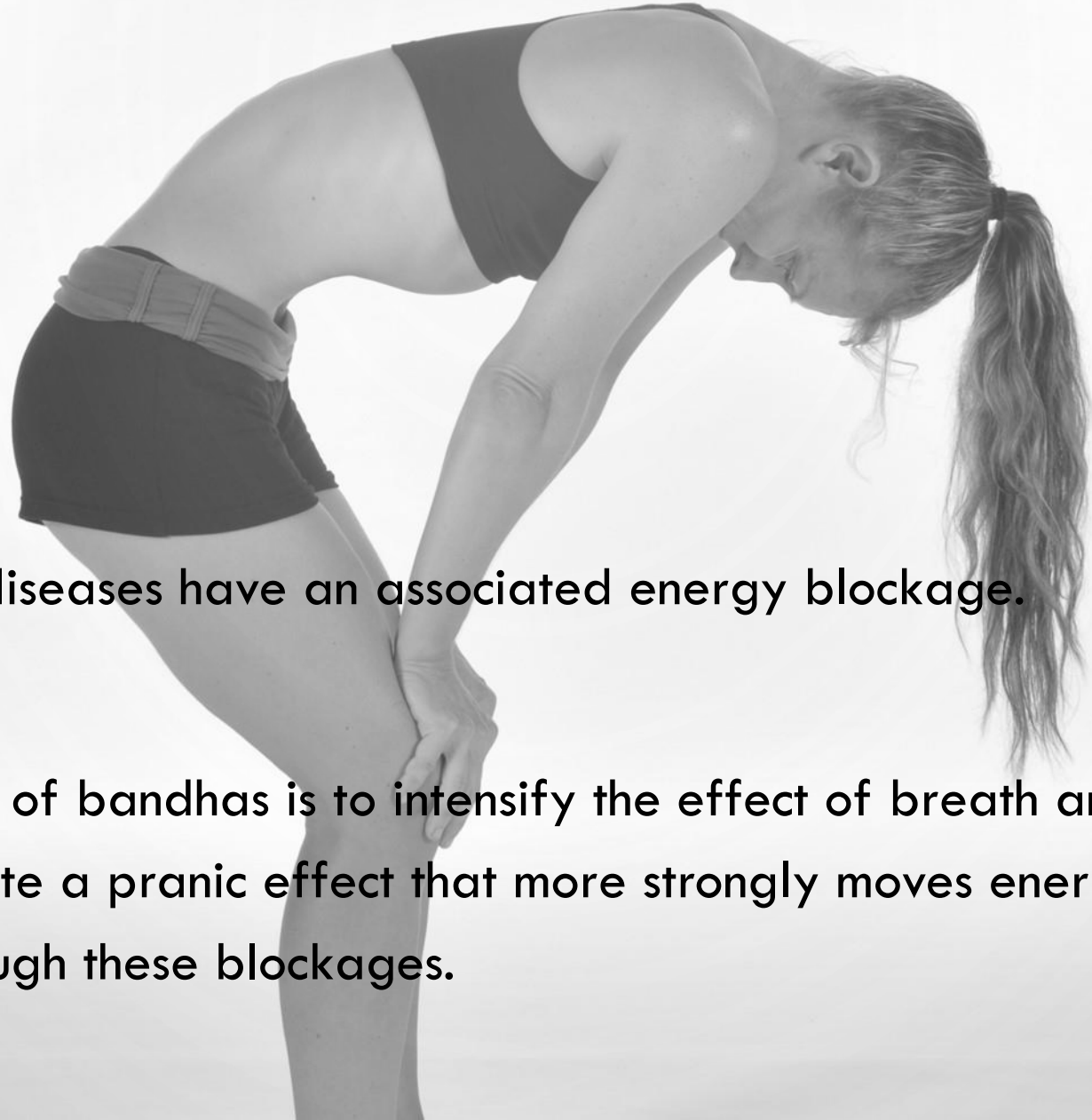
INTELLIGENT STEPS TO PROGRESSION IN UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

- Then add in the AK-IN hold. Start with a count of 1-2 and over time extend to 3. (6:3:6:3)
- Lengthen over time to samavritti ratio 6.6.6.6
- Then lengthen all until you have a longer breathing cycle with samavritti. Start by lengthening the EX, then the BK, then the IN and then the AK, ie;
 - 6:6:8:6, 6:6:8:8, 8:6:8:8, 8:8:8:8
 - Samavritti=Same length
 - Visamvritti=Not the same length

INTELLIGENT STEPS TO PROGRESSION IN UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

- All of this takes time! First rule is No Strain.
- If they are practicing every day, each progression may be given after one week. If they are practicing only once a week, each transition may only be safe to give every 3-4 weeks.
- If they are only practicing once a week, achieving 6:3:6:3 may take many months.

ROLE OF BANDHAS



- All diseases have an associated energy blockage.
- Role of bandhas is to intensify the effect of breath and to create a pranic effect that more strongly moves energy through these blockages.

ROLE OF BANDHAS

- **Amrit**-Nectar of life/Immortality
- Jalam=Nectar
- Mritam=to die
- Amritam=to not die
- Said to come from the pituitary gland (ajna) and drops down into agni where it burns.

ROLE OF BANDHAS

- **Jalandhara Bandha** (JB) prevents this.
- JB locks prana to agni
- Also helps to release the 'knot' of rudra granthi
- Also opens Kham-lifts the diaphragm
- Also strengthens the axial alignment

ROLE OF BANDHAS

- **Moola Bandha** (MB)-seals apana, and moves it upwards towards agni.
- Holds and supports agni
- Helps to release the 'knot' of brahma granthi

ROLE OF BANDHAS

- **Uddiyana Bandha** (UB)-holds impurities and lifts them up into the flame of agni in order to remove them.
- Also strengthens agni
- Helps to release the 'knot' of vishnu granthi

ROLE OF BANDHAS

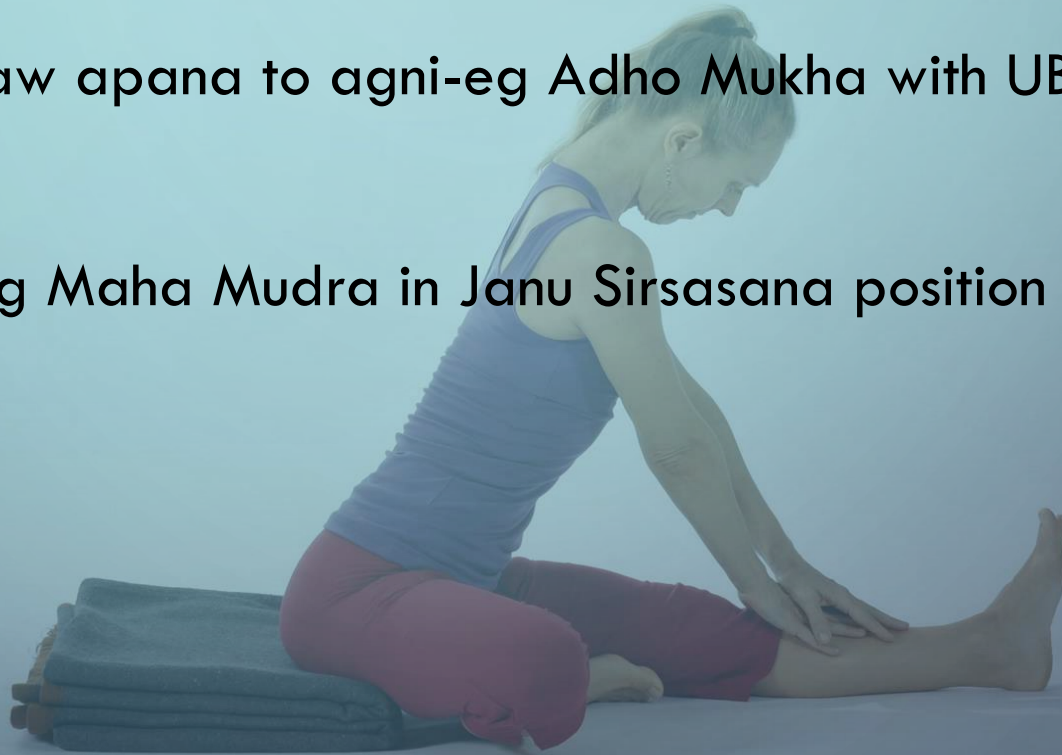
- Bandha intensifies the effect of pranayama.
- We would only start to use bandha once a long breathing cycle had been established, ie IN:EX:HOLDS all minimum of 6
- 6:6:6:6

ROLE OF BANDHAS

- We need a six second exhalation to create a strong abdominal contraction on exhalation;
- 2 secs to apply
- 2 sec to hold
- 2 secs to release
- Then we can start to work with bandha

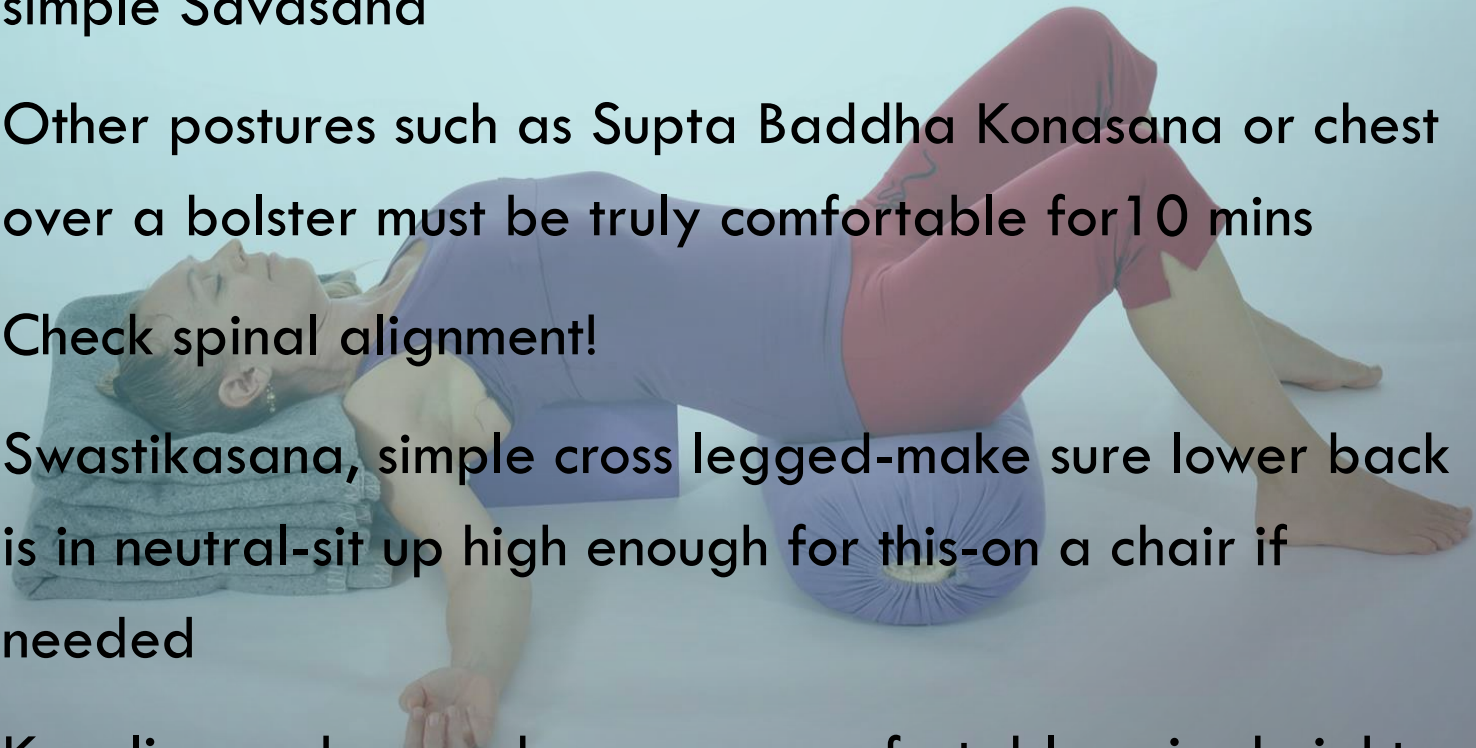
ORDER OF TEACHING/APPLYING BANDHAS

- JB-lock prana to agni-eg Tadasana/Vira I with JB
- UB-strengthen agni-eg Tadaka mudra with UB
- MB-draw apana to agni-eg Adho Mukha with UB and MB
- All 3-eg Maha Mudra in Janu Sirsasana position



POSTURES SUITABLE FOR PRANAYAMA

- Main thing is body should be comfortable-for beginners, simple Savasana
- Other postures such as Supta Baddha Konasana or chest over a bolster must be truly comfortable for 10 mins
- Check spinal alignment!
- Swastikasana, simple cross legged-make sure lower back is in neutral-sit up high enough for this-on a chair if needed
- Kneeling-make sure knees are comfortable-raise height of sit bones on a bolster



POSTURES FOR PRANAYAMA

- Eventually, all postures are for pranayama!
- When building awareness of breath in asana and using counts, holds and bandhas, start with simple postures with good spinal alignment, eg Tadasana, Savasana, Downward Dog.

A SIMPLE PRANAYAMA PRACTICE SUITABLE FOR BEGINNERS

- Supine-Natural breath awareness
- Slowly lengthen breath
- Top to Bottom Breath
- Ujjayi Breath
- Long EX with a count and BK if comfortable
- Seated/kneeling-Nadi Shodana
- Bhramari