



strength * spirit * solace

Newsletter

January 2006

Dear friend...

The current norms call for us to eat fast food, packaged food, preservatives, artificial ingredients — and to eat enormous quantities of unhealthy sugars and fats for pure entertainment. The norms also call for us to be mostly sedentary (at work, at play and everywhere in between) during the vast majority of our waking hours. The norms call for us to get sick and tired and then reach for quick fixes. And finally, the norms call for us to put our concerns with material wealth far ahead of our deeper values for life balance and our priorities for spiritual, ethical and personal reflection.

This year, instead of making a resolution to, say, lose 10 or 20 pounds or get six-pack abs, choose to *choose*: Look for ways that you may currently be allowing your life choices to be made for you. Select just one small choice to start with, and commit to shifting that choice in a more conscious direction. Once you are even a few steps off the beaten path, I think you'll find your view — and your way of life — much improved.

Keep up the great work and let your light shine on!

Namasté,

Sara

Meditation

We live in an age of quantity. The media shapes us with the notion that larger, faster, and more are often synonymous with better. We are told that we need to find more time, more possessions, and more love to be truly happy. A smaller quantity of

anything that is high in quality will almost always be more satisfying. A single piece of our favorite chocolate or a thin spread of freshly made preserves can satisfy us more than a full bucket of a product that we aren't very fond of. Similarly, one fulfilling experience can eclipse many empty moments strung together. It is not the quantity of time that matters, but the quality that you experience during each moment. Every minute is an opportunity to love yourself and others, develop confidence and self-respect, and exhibit courage.

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Poses You Can Do at Home

Virabhadrasana III (Warrior III Pose)



Virabhadra = the name of a fierce warrior, an incarnation of Shiva, described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet; wielding a thousand clubs; and wearing a tiger's skin.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ankles and legs
- Strengthens the shoulders and muscles of the back
- Tones the abdomen
- Improves balance and posture

Contraindications

- High blood pressure

Step by Step

1. Stand in Tadasana, exhale and fold forward to Uttanasana. From Uttanasana, exhale and step your left foot back into a high lunge position. Your right knee should be more or less at a right angle. Lay the midline of your torso (from the pubis to the sternum) down on the midline of the right thigh (from the knee to the hip crease) and bring your hands to your right knee, right hand to the outer knee, left hand to the inner. Squeeze the knee with your hands, lift your torso slightly, and with an exhalation, turn it slightly to the right.
2. Now from the lunge position, stretch your arms forward, parallel to the floor and parallel to each other, palms facing each other. Exhale and press the head of the right thighbone back and press the heel actively into the floor. Synchronize the

straightening of the front leg and the lifting of the back leg. As you lift the back leg, resist by pressing the tailbone into the pelvis.

3. Normally students come up into Virabhadrasana III by lunging the torso forward. This tends to shift the body weight onto the ball of the front foot and unbalance the position. Don't allow the torso to swing forward as you move into position; instead, as you straighten the front knee, think of pressing the head of the thighbone back. This centers the femur in the hip joint, grounds the heel into the floor, and stabilizes the position.
4. The arms, torso, and raised leg should be positioned relatively parallel to the floor. For many students the pelvis tends to tilt. Release the hip [of the raised leg] toward the floor until the two hip points are even and parallel to the floor. Energize the back leg and extend it strongly toward the wall behind you; reach just as actively in the opposite direction with the arms. Bring the head up slightly and look forward, but be sure not to compress the back of your neck.
5. Stay in this position for 30 seconds to a minute. Release back to the lunge on an exhalation. Bring your hands to the floor on either side of the right foot, and on an exhalation, step your left foot forward to meet your right. Stay in this forward bend for a few breaths, then repeat for the same length of time on the other side.

Anatomical Focus

- Thighs
- Hamstrings
- Calves
- Ankles
- Hips
- Shoulders
- Spine

Modifications & Props

Balancing in this pose can be very challenging for beginners. Prepare for the pose with a chair positioned in front of you, just a bit in front of your sticky mat (face the back of the chair toward you). When you stretch your arms forward (as described in step 3 above), take hold of the top of the chair. As you rise up into the full pose, push on and slide the chair away from you and use it to support your arms. Try to hold the chair as lightly as possible.

Variations

In Virabhadrasana III you can vary the position of your arms. Try stretching the arms out to the sides, like the wings of an airplane, or reaching them back, palms facing up, along the sides of your torso.

Beginners Tip

When you straighten the front knee by pushing the head of the thighbone back, imagine that the same-leg calf is resisting forward against the shin. These two opposing movements prevent the knee from locking or hyperextending and further stabilize the position.

** Poses You Can Do at Home are from Yoga Journal.*

Nutrition – Tips for Male Fertility

In the United States, it is estimated that as many as fifteen percent of all couples have difficulty conceiving a child. Today, infertility is just as much a man's issue as a woman's — up to 40 percent of fertility problems can be traced to men. Current estimates suggest about six percent of men between the ages of fifteen and fifty are infertile. Pinpointing the exact cause of male infertility is difficult. The most common cause is a low sperm count or poor sperm quality. Nutrition has a direct impact on the potency of sperm. Research shows that poor eating habits can lower the quality and quantity of sperm, making conception more difficult.

The dad-to-be's diet should be every bit as balanced, varied, and nutritious as his partner's. Specifically, future dads should eat foods that contain high amounts of the following dietary nutrients:

- Eat plenty of foods rich in vitamin C and other antioxidants: They help prevent sperm defects and boost its motility (movement). An eight-ounce glass of orange juice contains 124 milligrams.
- Get more zinc in the diet. Several studies show that even short-term zinc deficiencies can reduce semen volume and blood testosterone levels. Great sources to help get zinc in the diet include oysters (six medium oysters have a whopping 76.3 mg), extra-lean ground beef (a three-ounce serving has 4.5 mg), baked beans (a one-cup serving has 3.55 mg), and dark chicken meat (2.38 mg per three ounces).
- Fuel up on folic acid. Studies suggest that men with low levels of this key B vitamin — the same one women need to reduce the risk of neural tube birth defects — have low sperm counts. A man can get the amount he needs (400 micrograms a day) from fortified breakfast cereals, leafy greens, legumes, and orange juice.
- Increase dietary intake of calcium, vitamin E and vitamin D. Infertility researchers at the University of Wisconsin at Madison suggest that consuming 1,000 mg of calcium and 10 micrograms of vitamin D each day may improve men's fertility. Good sources of calcium include low-fat milk (an eight-ounce glass has 414 mg) and yogurt (one cup has 302 mg of calcium). Vitamin D can be increased with as little as 15 minutes of direct sunshine per day. Researchers at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia have found supplemental vitamin E to dramatically improve sperm mobility and viability. Vitamin E is readily available in olive oil, wheat germ, nuts and seeds, and avocados (eat ¼ cup raw pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds each day.)
- Have a cup of coffee?! Drinking more than one cup of coffee a day may have a negative effect on fertility for women, but may increase sperm motility in men if drunk before making love.

What NOT to eat

- A new report finds that a diet high in fish and shellfish might be linked to infertility in men and women as a result of the high levels of toxic mercury in seafood. Mercury, which is found in nearly all fish, can permanently damage the brain,

nervous system, and kidneys. Sharks and swordfish contain the highest amounts of mercury.

- Strict adherence to a gluten free diet has helped some previously sterile men to become fathers.
- Avoid dietary sources of free radicals, saturated fats, hydrogenated oils, trans-fatty acids, and cottonseed oil.

Lifestyle changes

- Consume a diet that focuses on whole, unprocessed foods: whole grains, legumes, fruits and dark-colored vegetables, essential fatty acids, lean sources of animal protein, and soy.
- Get regular exercise.
- Perform a relaxation exercise (deep breathing, meditation, prayer, visualization, etc.) 10-15 minutes per day.
- Drink at least one half of your body weight in ounces of pure spring water each day.
- Cut out or cut back on alcohol. While an occasional drink is generally considered safe, studies show that daily consumption of wine, beer, or hard liquor can decrease testosterone levels and sperm counts and increase the number of abnormal sperm in the ejaculate.
- Stop Smoking! Recent research confirms that men who smoke have fewer sperm in their ejaculate. Additionally, second-hand smoke is dangerous for the man's partner and the fetus.
- Stop using drugs! Marijuana and cocaine can decrease sperm's motility and can affect the brain chemistry responsible for releasing reproductive hormones.

Supplements

Many studies and experts agree that nutritional supplementation may provide an alternative or complement to conventional fertility therapies. Vitamins, minerals and specific cofactors play a major role in fertility function. Good nutrition is a prerequisite for fertility and is particularly important for men and women wishing to conceive at a more advanced age.

The following may be added to a diet rich in whole, organic foods:

- High potency multiple-vitamin and mineral supplement
- Vitamin C: 500-3,000 mg three times per day
- Vitamin E: 600-800 IU per day
- Beta-carotene: 100,000-200,000 IU per day
- Folic acid: 400 mcg per day
- Vitamin B12: 1,000 mcg per day
- Zinc: 30-60 mg per day
- L-carnitine is an amino acid that has been shown to be critical to the formation of healthy, active sperm. Take 300 milligrams three times per day.
- Ferulic acid, an antioxidant found in Dong quai, has also been shown to improve sperm quality. The antioxidant Green tea extract and Selenium improve overall reproductive health which help improve sperm counts and quality.

Botanical medicines:

- *Panax ginseng*, standardized extract: 100-200 mg three times per day – may help promote growth of the testes, increase sperm formation and testosterone levels and increase sexual activity.
- *Pygeum africanum*: 100-200 mg per day in divided doses – may help to increase prostate secretion.

The male fertility diet plan

Meal and Snack Suggestions

BREAKFAST

Option one

Oatmeal with 2 tablespoons wheat germ
Skim milk
Fresh fruit and fresh-squeezed orange juice

Option two

Whole wheat toast with almond butter
Yogurt with fresh strawberries
Fresh-squeezed orange juice

LUNCH

Option one

Grilled cheese sandwich on wheat germ bread
Raspberry and spinach salad

Option two

Turkey wrap with fresh shredded vegetables in a whole wheat tortilla
Fresh fruit
Skim milk

DINNER

Option one

Turkey with oyster stuffing
Acorn squash
Green beans
Herb tea

Option two

Lentil Soup
Tomato and avocado slices
Corn bread
Frozen yogurt

Option three

Beef brisket
Garlic mashed potatoes
Tossed green salad with pumpkin seeds

SNACKS

Smoked oysters on wheat germ crackers
Handful of mixed nuts including peanuts, Brazil nuts and pecans

Your Questions Answered!

Do you have a question? Email it to me at sara@saradelaney.com.

Q: *I had a beautiful baby girl in August, and I am just beginning to get my body back. What are some poses I can do to slowly ease my way back into my yoga practice?*

A:

For new mamas, a whole other different set of physical conditions often accompanies the bliss of loving your little creation. Luckily, a few simple yoga poses address the most common concerns. Our bodies are always in transition, so don't think that you have to

be exactly the way you were before pregnancy. But you can expect to be healthy, vital, and strong again.

Weakened Abs

Along with growing and birthing a baby comes weakened and stretched abdomen muscles. Make sure to ask your doctor before starting any ab work: the standard recommendation is to wait four to six weeks after a vaginal birth, and eight weeks after a cesarean birth. It is important to strengthen your pelvic floor before starting abdominal work; otherwise you could create too much pressure in the pelvic floor, which could lead to pain and complications.

The key to maintaining a healthy abdomen after birth? Starting gently and moving slowly. Lay on your back and tuck your belly button in toward your spine; exhale and tilt your pelvis up, inhale and tilt your pelvis back. Continue to rock your pelvis back and forth for gentle strengthening of the abdomen. Repeat 20 times.

Fatigue

Waking up every few hours to tend to the little one doesn't exactly make for a well-rested person. Although you won't cut out all of your sleepless nights, you can deal with fatigue to make your waking hours more manageable.

When you feel exhausted, your breath becomes more shallow. A restorative pose such as Legs up the Wall Pose helps open the chest, encourages you to take deeper breaths, and aids relaxation and rejuvenation. Lay with your right hip against the wall and a pillow under both hips. Then slowly swing your legs up onto the wall, bring your arms out to the sides, and breathe deeply. Hold for two minutes.

Aching neck and shoulders

Whether you are breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, many new moms experience neck and shoulder aches—the result of many hours spent bending forward to feed the baby. The resulting hunched-over position can lead to the dreaded "forward head" position that may cause other problems such as headaches and back pain.

While feeding, focus on keeping the shoulders away from the ears and the shoulder blades down the back. For a more active approach, try Gomukhasana Arms: Bring the right arm overhead and turn the palm inward. Bring the left arm out to the side and parallel to the floor and turn the palm outward. Bring palms together behind the back, using a strap if they don't touch. Hold for five breaths, release, and repeat to the other side.

Loss of Endurance

After your baby is born, you might notice that running up the stairs isn't as easy as it was a year ago. With your body recovering from labor, fatigue from caring for a newborn, and a change in your exercise routine while pregnant, a shift in endurance level makes sense.

Standing poses like Warrior II build stamina and are highly accessible to most women.

New moms like to feel they are building strength, and with standing poses they can feel it in their body. Try Warrior II, named after the fierce warrior Virabhadra: with legs four feet apart, turn the right foot in and the left foot out 90 degrees. Bring your arms out to the sides, parallel to the floor, as you bend the left knee over the left ankle. Reach out with your arms and hold for five breaths. Repeat on the other side.

Contemplate...

The more we learn about what's *in* most of the processed and prepared foods we're served, the less willing many of us are to passively eat whatever's put in front of us. It's not that we like micromanaging our meals, or that we want to forgo all of life's pleasurable indulgences. It's just that we want to eat healthy *and* enjoy our food more. And out in the mainstream, that can be tough to do.



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*"When you come to the edge of all that you know, you must believe one of two things:
There will be earth upon which to stand, or you will be given wings to fly."*

DISCLAIMER: *This information is for educational purposes only and should not be considered medical advice. This information is provided to help you make informed decisions about your health. It is not meant to replace the advice of your primary physician. Choosing a holistic approach to nutrition means choosing personal responsibility for your health care. Sara Delaney is not liable or responsible for any harm, damage or illness arising from the use of the information contained herein.*