

We may often think that yoga is for those who are strong and flexible. But there is a softer side to yoga. Practicing the Bandhas or "locks" can assist with strengthening a posture from the inside out. Proper muscle tone and quality of the muscles of the pelvic floor can help to find the middle ground of this power center. If you're working with an aging population, or any population, this might be the missing component, not just for yoga but for all forms of exercise. These poses will show how to help reeducate the muscles of the pelvic floor through yoga.

1. UTKATASANA: CHAIR POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Headache or low blood pressure
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Mountain pose (standing tall with mula banda slightly engaged, leg muscles activated to prevent locking the knees out, root down into the big toe mound and for both sides of the heel evenly and taking several deep breaths.)
 - Standing Forward Fold (keeping knees bent, letting the head and neck relax towards the earth, continue to breathe deeply)
- **Tips:**
 - Try this pose by the wall feeling supported to stay for a few more breaths, especially if new to chair pose or taking care of knees.

2. UTKATA KONASANA: GODDESS POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Chronic or recent injury to the hips, legs.
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Standing Straddle Split (Realigning from the hip joint, Turning the toes in from goddess pose, allowing the outside edges of the feet to align with the edge of the mat, allowing the head and neck to relax, breathing deeply)
 - Mountain Pose
 - Flowing Chair Pose
- **Tips:** Try different arm variations if taking care of shoulders.
 - Eagle arms: Using the arm placement found in Eagle pose, keeping the legs in Goddess squat. Or for shoulder or wrist issues, can bring hands to heart center or hug opposite shoulder and switch.
 - Hands to hips (Especially if there have any shoulder injuries) or hands on blocks.

3. URDHVA PRASARITA EKA PADASANA: STANDING SPLIT POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Back, knee or ankle injury
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Childs Pose (Come to hands and knees, bring the knees together or out wide, sinking the hips towards the heels and rest arms out in front or on either side of the body. If your forehead does not rest comfortably in the floor, use a block or bolster to rest on).
- **Tips:** Use one or two blocks to bring the floor closer to you or a blanket behind the knees.

4. VIRABHADRASANA III: WARRIOR THREE POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Low back injury, knee or ankle injury
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Standing Forward Fold (allowing for a deep hip hinge, keep knees bent, letting head and neck relax towards the earth, continue to breathe deeply)
 - Cobra pose (lay flat on belly, hands underneath the shoulders, lengthening the neck and lifting the chest and drawing shoulder blades towards each other, lowering down, and repeating a few times.)
- **Tips:**
 - Start from Mountain pose and slowly tilting forward lifting and floating one foot off the ground only about two inches, maintaining a strong line of the body from the ball of the foot to the crown of the head and continue hinging forward to point of control and breathing. This pose is about strengthening the posterior muscles so maintaining spinal alignment is very important.

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- Also, try different arm variations. With arms or hands out by the side by or on the hips or palms touch in front of the heart.

5. SALABHASANA: LOCUST POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Pregnancy, neck or spine injury
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Child's Pose
- **Tips:**
 - Keeping the crown of the head in line with the spine. Maintaining a neutral spine with the chin slightly tucked.
 - Continue making sure to keep drawing the shoulder blades towards each other and drawing them back toward the sitting bones. Softening the belly while engaging mula banda. Pressing the top of the feet into the mat. If any back discomfort arises lowering upper or lower body and legs.

6. SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA: BRIDGE POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Neck, shoulder or knee injury
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Knees to Chest. Laying down flat on the back and gently bring one knee at time knees into the chest. Adding in any movements such as rocking or stirring at each hip joint.
- **Tips:**
 - Arms can stay alongside the body pressing into the mat.
 - Adding in the flow of raising and lowering from bridge with the option of adding in the flow of the arms alongside and overhead.
 - Keeping the tailbone reaching towards the heels to protect the lower back and balance the work of the glutes, hamstrings and core. Again, engaging root lock.
 - Using a block at the inner thighs helps to engage adductor muscles connecting to the pelvic floor and deep transverse muscles.

7. MĀLĀSANA: YOGI SQUAT POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Hip, knee or ankle injury. Tight glutes or outer hip.
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Standing Forward Fold (keeping knees bent, letting the head and neck relax towards the earth, continue to breathe deeply)
- **Tips:**
 - Staying more upright in Goddess Pose/Goddess Squat.
 - Placing a blanket underneath the heels if they do not touch the ground (which is perfectly fine!)
 - Letting the hips sink towards the earth but keeping heart lifted.
 - Taking care of knees by only lower into the squat for what is safe and keeping knees behind the toes.

8. SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA: SUPINE BOUND ANGLE POSE

- **Contraindications:**
 - Knee injury or tight hips
- **Counter stretch pose:**
 - Knees to Chest: Slowly bringing the knees together and then towards the chest, gently rocking side to side massaging the low back. Add in movements of the hip joint or take the legs wider apart if comfortable.
- **Tips:**
 - If the hips are tight and knees are high, placing a block underneath each thigh to help support through the stretch.
 - Practicing the posture on the back (supine) and again, adding a block underneath the outside of each thigh or knee.
 - Experiencing each posture for at least 5 to 10 deep inhales and exhales. Checking in the Mula Banda (Root Lock) is properly and safely engaged.

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