

POSE OF THE MONTH

June 2006

Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottanasana – half bound lotus intense west stretch (Ardha means half; Baddha means bound caught or restrained; padma means lotus; paschima means west; Uttana means intense.)

Forward bending with the foot in half lotus has a powerful effect on the liver and spleen. This is the purpose of forward bending with your heel pressing into your abdomen—to stimulate the liver and spleen.

Method

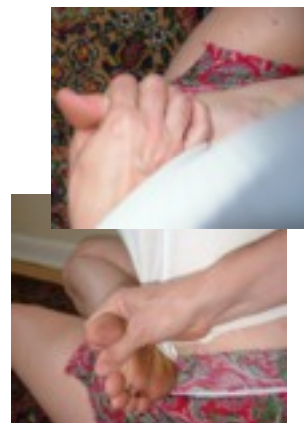
ॐ From Dandasana, place your right leg into the half lotus position, heel moving toward your navel, ankle on top of your left thigh and right knee moving toward left knee. Try to turn the sole of your foot upward as you bring your leg into half lotus, this will help to alleviate some twisting on the knee.

ॐ Reach around your back with your right hand and try to bind or catch your foot. If you can not catch your foot (keep coming back, sometimes we need to work externally on the hip joint before we can work internally on the organs ;) then take both hands out to your left foot.

ॐ With your left hand, catch the outer edge of your left foot if possible, inhale lift your head and extend your spine
 ॐ Exhale forward bending, forehead or chin moving toward your knee or shin. Take five deep steady breaths here.

ॐ Inhale head up, exhale ground your hands, inhaling

lift up for vinyasa or to switch your feet.

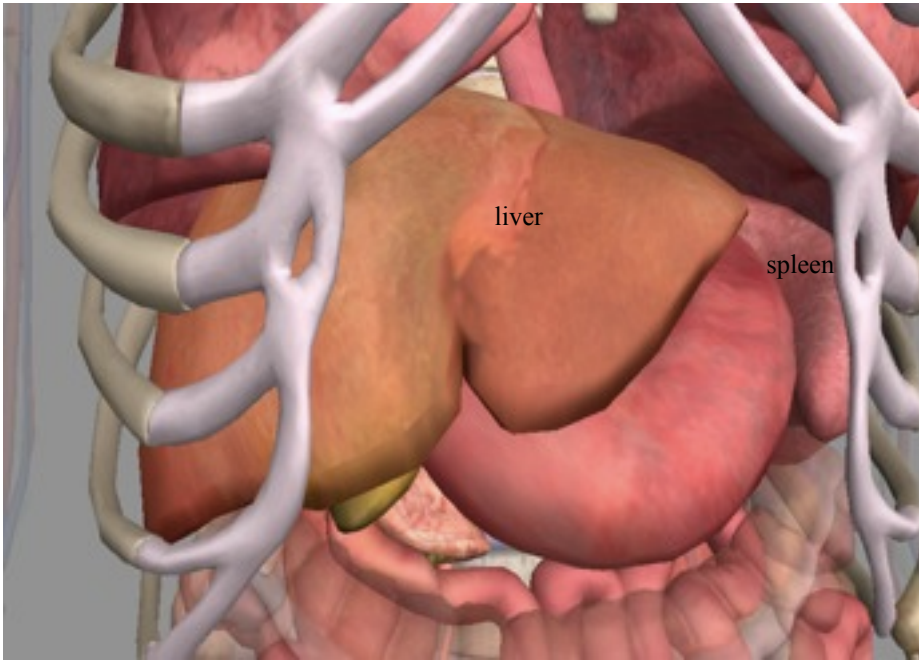


Note of caution regarding knees and hips, if you have knee problems half lotus needs to be approached very carefully. The lotus position puts a slight twist on the knee -- some may need to modify this position -- but do not try to push your knee down, this can put more twist on the knee causing pain.

Benefits

This asana benefits the liver and spleen; both organs play a part in the digestive processes. The liver controls digestion of fats and contributes to the control of your metabolism; the spleen purifies the blood and strengthens the immune system. Once the liver is working correctly the spleen is automatically corrected. Gastric problems and constipation are also alleviated with this asana.

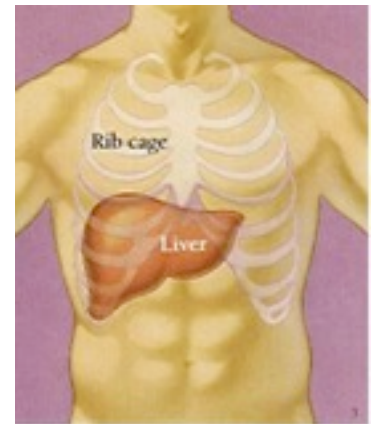
A golden rule for correct digestion when eating is 'the stomach should be filled half with food, one quarter with liquid, and one quarter air'.



INTERNAL CLEANSING

Liver and Spleen

Our right heel aims for the spleen (picture below) which is tucked behind the stomach between the 9th and 10th rib (the last two "attached" ribs). As you forward bend with your right heel in your gut, dorsiflex your foot and tuck your heel in under your ribs.



The liver is a little easier to access as it is more superior and external than the spleen, and it is very large. It sits on the right side of your

belly, under the diaphragm and above your stomach, mostly under the rib cage. As you put your left foot in lotus and forward bend aim your heel above your navel, just to the left of your right ribs.



The LIVER

The liver is amazing! It is the only organ that can regenerate itself. You can lose up to 75% of your liver and it will still grow back to full function and size.

(Interesting to note; Remember Prometheus? Greek myth of Prometheus -- Prometheus is a [Titan](#) and [trickster](#) figure who is credited with [theft of fire](#) for human use, an act that enabled progress and civilization. He is known for his intelligence, and as a champion of humanity. (Prometheus means "Fore Thinker").

The punishment of Prometheus as a consequence of the theft: [Zeus](#), king of the [Olympian gods](#),

sentenced the Titan to eternal torment for his transgression. The immortal Prometheus was bound to a rock, where each



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day an [eagle](#), the emblem of Zeus, was sent to feed on his [liver](#), which would then grow back to be eaten again the next day. In some stories, Prometheus is freed at last by the [hero Heracles \(Hercules\)](#).

The liver is the largest and one of the most complex organs in the body. The liver performs over 500 vital functions! Some of the most important include:

- ॐ The liver's main job is to filter the blood coming from the digestive tract (stomach and intestines) before passing it to the rest of the body, detoxifying chemicals and metabolizing drugs.
- ॐ It also controls the management of bile and its diversion to the intestines which helps carry away waste products and toxins from the liver.
- ॐ Controlling digestion and metabolism, helping our body metabolize and utilize sugars, fats, and proteins.
- ॐ Aids in blood coagulation.
- ॐ It is one of the major filtering and detoxifying organs in the body.

The liver cleansing is why in Ashtanga yoga we always do right leg first in lotus, Pattabhi Jois says “left leg first is of no use”.

And another IMPORTANT factor concerning your liver: DIET!

Since the liver is the organ responsible for removing toxins from the food we eat; the cleaner you eat, the healthier your liver! And I want to point out some of the latest research on this; soda and processed foods are much harder on your liver than alcohol! We are seeing fatty liver and liver disease now in adolescents! This is because High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) (like all fructose) has to go to the liver to be metabolized before it can be used by the body, whereas glucose can get directly to a cell without being metabolized by the liver. Soda and most processed foods contain large amounts of HFCS, when ingested, causes a burden to the liver.

And remember, if your external body is not allowing your heel to get close to your liver due to tightness or pain -- keep practicing! And use your mind power, as you are in the posture breathing, direct your thoughts toward the liver, this will not only help your body to relax and “get there” but it will also provide much of the same benefit as if your heel were “there”.

The SPLEEN

- ॐ it is another purifier of our blood, it is connected to our lymph system and is a key organ in removing toxins and filtering bad bacteria from our body preventing infections.
- ॐ It supports our immune system -- think of it as a big lymph node in that it produces white blood cells.
- ॐ It also collects old red blood cells and recycles them, as well as recycling iron.
- ॐ The spleen stores a large amount of blood
- ॐ The spleen also plays an important role in trauma. When our body is under duress — such as hemorrhaging or not breathing — our spleen contracts and expels large quantities of red blood cells -- and therefore O2 -- into our bloodstream to help oxygenate the cells during the “emergency”.



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☯ This also happens during pranayama when you hold your breath, the first breath hold (kumbhaka) is always the hardest -- after the first kumbhaka the spleen contracts and expels red blood cells and O₂ into our bloodstream thus making the remaining kumbhakas much easier.

IN THE EMOTIONAL BODY

Beyond their physiology, all organs have a metaphysical (beyond the physical) dimension. Consider the symbolic and psychological aspects of the heart. We 'speak from the heart', 'give our heart' to others, suffer a 'broken heart', etc.

Since the **SPLEEN**'s job is to battle "invaders" (bacterial invaders); spleen issues may signify 'feeling invaded'. It can range from a more global "bacterial invading" (man's pollution of the earth), to an individual level (feeling betrayed by a friend).

At the positive end of the spectrum, the spleen represents our oneness -- our unity.

Illnesses involving the spleen, like frequent infections, prompt us to check the monkeys in our mind . . . remove the layers (of fear) that are hiding our true nature -- or who we really are. Open and connect with others remembering we share a oneness -- we all have similar struggles.

Symbolically, the **LIVER** represents our struggles with anger and frustration. For example, if you suffer from a liver disorder (or even undue tightness or restriction in that area) you perhaps have difficulty expressing anger outwardly, instead holding it in (holding it in your liver!), if not detoxed anger will become toxic in us just like the bad foods and chemicals our liver detoxes.

Yet organs also have a positive dimension, for the liver also embodies our innate drive toward 'path and purpose' - the search for meaning to life. Liver = Live, reason for living. Here liver issues might also indicate the need to reflect on one's sense of destiny, of connection with deeper purpose. Sometimes society or our tribe (family) impresses upon us what they think or feel is best for us; so we may do what they say even though it goes against the grain of what we feel we should be doing (getting a "day" job for example). In this case we might experience pain or tightness around the liver.

Many of our yoga postures cleanse the liver, as you wring out your liver you may feel bouts of anger -- do not repress it, instead identify it for what it is. You do not need to act on it, just openly identify it and let those emotions flow through and out of your body. Your liver may be telling you its time to digest what's going on around you -- open yourself up to your path and purpose and see how fun and fulfilling it is to go with the flow of the Universe :)