

TOPIC OF THE MONTH

September 2013

INSIDE OUT POSTURING, continued.

Navasana :) Boat pose . . . Navasana is beneficial for our spinal cord (Vina-Danda), and strengthening our digestion. In Sanskrit the spine is known as Vina Danda, we know from our asana practice that danda means stick; Vina is a stringed instrument in India. Our spine is likened to the neck or "stick" of a guitar like instrument . . . play it right and it sings a beautiful song . . .



Navasana serves two main purposes: To support our spine and to improve digestion. For more information on Navasana go to: <http://www.befityoga.com/philosophy-lifestyle/ashtanga-yoga-poses/> and scroll down to navasana.

Navasana and our spine

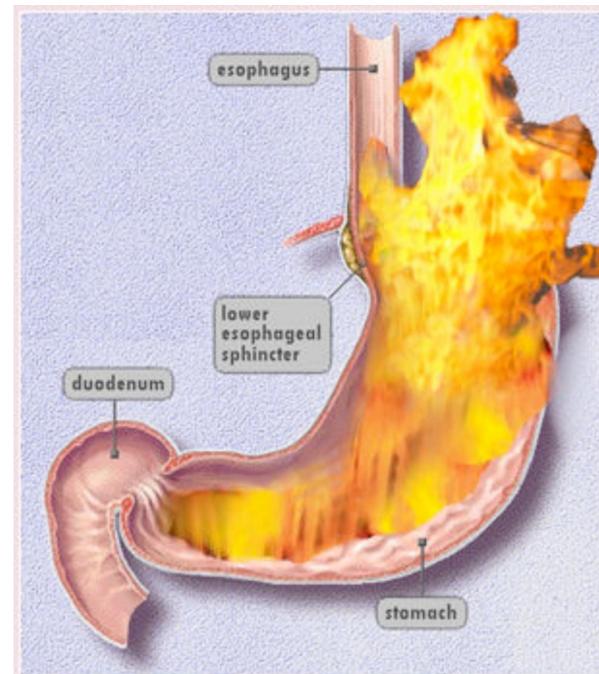
Strong abdominals support the spine. Many conventional abdominal exercises have you doing crunches . . . crunches are not an effective abdominal exercise; our abdominals' job is not to have us flex our spine -- this creates poor posture. The abdominals job is to stabilize the spine and keep it long with space between the vertebrae. Stabilizing type exercises are most effective -- where you hold neutral spine while something tries to pull you out of neutral spine. Navasana is this -- a weighted stabilizing exercise -- as we lift and float our legs the weight of our legs tries to pull our pelvis to an anterior tilt. We then are trying to keep our pelvis in a neutral alignment -- not tipping our pelvis forward or back (sometimes we are too zealous and tip our pelvis too far back to a posterior tilt) -- as we strengthen our abs to stabilize our spine it improves our posture and keeps the spine long and even. It also keeps the channel in our spine open so the nerves have plenty of space and the neurons can travel up and down the spine freely without being pinched or blocked by poor posture. 80% of the adult population will experience back pain at some time in their lives -- the root cause of this back pain is poor posture.

The pick up we do between boat poses, in Sanskrit the pose is called "lollasana", is another excellent abdominal exercise in that it is training our abdominals to contract from the bottom up -- as we walk about our days our abdominals support our spine from the bottom up making this lift a good ergonomic exercise for our abdominals. And of course this lift trains us to pick ourselves up from seated and float back to chaturanga.

Navasana and digestion

Navasana assists the transportation department in our body . . .

The pressure on the intestines from slightly holding your abdominals in is like an abdominal massage

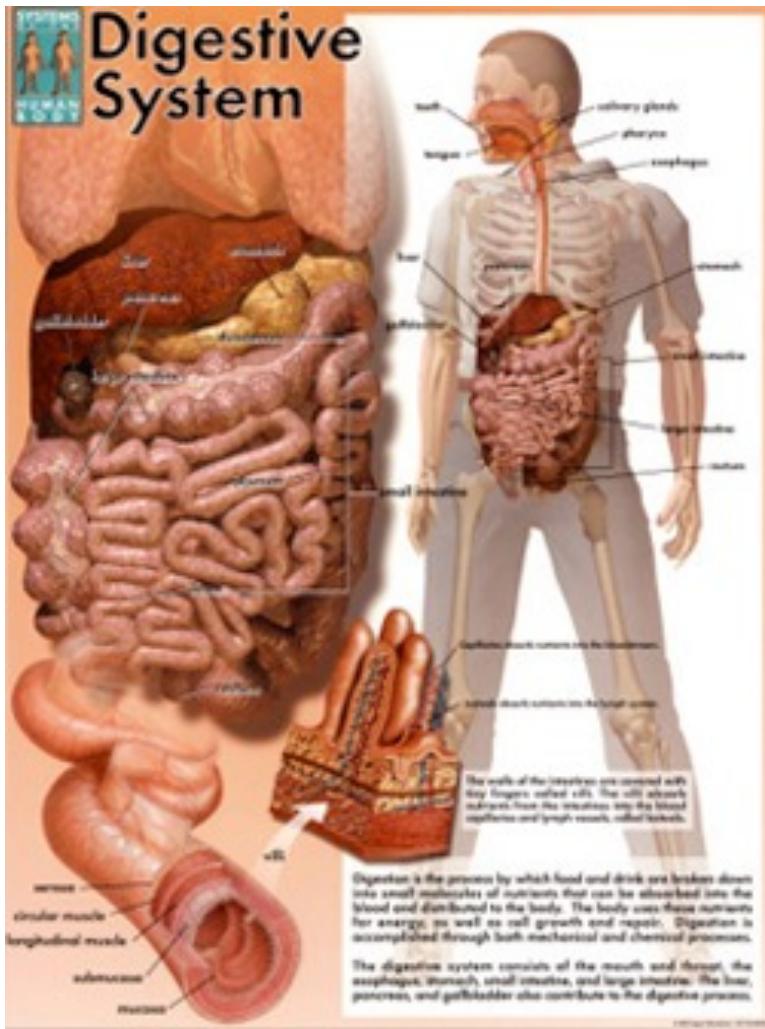


helping to move trapped air out and stimulate the peristalsis effect (wavelike muscular contractions) of the small intestines -- helping food to move along its way . . . The Gastroenterological Society of Australia says exercise strengthens the muscles of the abdomen and stimulates the intestinal muscles to move contents through the digestive system.

Yoga texts say keeping a little good tension in your abdominals stimulates your agni or digestive fire. **Ayurveda says that 85% of our health depends on our digestion, this is because no matter how well you eat, if your digestion is weak you will not be able to break down the food you eat and absorb the nutrients from it, nor will you be able to detox well.** In yoga and Ayurveda the term "Agni" refers to your digestive fire. (Agni is the root of the English word "ignite") Strong abdominals improve your agni in yoga terms . . . strong abdominals improve your digestion in medical terms. Also **if your digestion is weak, then your body does not detox effectively either.** Your same pathways of digestion are also used for detoxification (digestive enzymes, the liver, etc.)

 There are three steps to digestion and absorption in western terms. Our stomach acids break down food we eat (strong abdominals help this process by gently massaging the stomach and intestines encouraging more of the food particles to get in contact with acids that break them down). As the food moves into the small intestines, the pancreas excretes its digestive enzymes into the small intestine further breaking down the food. From there, the nutrients squeeze through the intestinal walls to the blood (strong abdominals help to transport the nutrients through the intestinal walls). Then our body distributes the nutrients to where we need them. Our body then uses oxygen (O_2) to combine with the nutrients in the cells to provide our cells with energy.

 Digestion (paka) in yoga/ayurvedic terms is first the fire of **jatharagni** -- the fire agni that breaks down food in our stomach. Then **bhutagni** -the fire that breaks down the nutrients to one of the five elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether), and finally, **dhatwagni**, the transformation of the nutrients into building our 7 tissues (blood, fat, flesh, bone, marrow, skin, and semen/ova), then excreting what we don't need.



Tips to keep your digestion (and detox pathways) healthy:

 Have periods of fasting each day. When our body has to constantly digest it does not get a chance to detox, and our digestive pathways get over-worked. One of the easiest times to have a period of fasting each day is morning time. Delay your breakfast as long as you comfortable can. Breakfast means break-the-fast . . . I like to wait until about noon most days to eat.

 Your digestion is strongest from 10am - 2pm. Best to eat your main meal during this time. Try not to eat one big meal too fast, but relax and spread out your meal over several courses. I eat most of the my food in the day between the hours of noon and 3:oopm. If I do feel hungry after teaching all night, a light evening meal is ok. The evening meal is called supper . . which means supplemental meal. It should be light and easy to digest, like soup or cooked vegetables.

 If you feel like your digestion is slow (bloated, windy, feeling full way to long), here are some tips to help improve your digestion:

 Prior to eating slice up some ginger and sprinkle it with lemon and/or salt. Chew on the slices before you eat.

 Salt and pepper both aid in digestions, and pepper helps your body absorb nutrients. So use your salt and pepper.

 Coffee after a meal is a good digestive aid. Black coffee or an espresso is best after your meal.

 Fermented foods will also help your body digest, include small amounts of fermented foods at each meal.

STRESS ruins digestion . . . remember from previous lessons, when your body is stressed your energy is sent to your muscles to run and fight and diverted from your organs. Therefore your body does not digest well when stressed, the food will lay in your stomach or gut and rot . . . better to fast when stressed.

On an emotional level:

Our agni or digestive fire refers to not only our ability to process foods; but all aspects of life including experiences and memories. Agni is responsible for absorbing the nutrients we need while burning off the waste products we don't need. If our agni is strong we are able to digest and assimilate our food and our daily experiences. If our body does not digest food well then toxins (known as ama in Ayurveda) lodge in our cells; similarly the inability to metabolize emotions produces just as much toxic residue as undigested food.

All this is not magic--it is based on science . . . and yet it is a little magic . . . a miracle occurs . . . you jump and breath, and squish this, and stick your heel here, and move and realign . . . and you are miraculously healthy . . .

The sum is greater than the parts. Yes, it requires effort, but its worth it!

