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Urdhva Prasarita Padasana

~ Lying Wide Angle Pose

1. *It's fundamental principles*

Supine asanas are generally renowned for being restorative and integrative asanas. However there can also be an active component. The benefit though, of active work in a supine position is that the weight of the upper body is supported by the floor. This enables the spine to begin to release and lengthen/broaden (whether it be during a relaxed or more active asana).

2. *The structural and functional physiology involved*

Urdhva Prasarita Padasana:

- Strengthens the abdominal muscles
- Massages the abdominal organs
- Strengthens the digestive system (by strengthening the muscles in the surrounding area and increasing circulation)
- Strengthens the lower back muscles, the pelvic muscles, and can help correct prolapse

(Saraswati, 1996; class notes, 2004)

3. *The yogic or subtle physiology involved*

Chakras: Much of the benefits and focus of this asana tend to be around the abdominal area, around Manipura chakra. By strengthening this area the student also strengthens this chakra, building their will, sense of power, discipline and tapas. This is particularly so if abdominal work is brought in with leg raises etc.

Awareness however can be brought to anahata (whether to lift energy upwards or to bring a different focus) simply by extending the arms above the head (refer to picture) which expands the lung capacity. As the student breathes in filling their lungs, they

can watch the gentle rise and fall of their chest around anahata, perhaps even imagine they are breathing into anahata, filling that space with energy and with love (clichéd perhaps? But always nice to do)

Koshas: As mentioned in other previous asana assignments.

4. How it relates to other asanas in the group

In urdhva prasarita padasana the student is encouraged to give their weight to the floor, allowing their spine to lengthen, their upper back to broaden, and their lower back to be supported – particularly during the more active component that engages the abdominal muscles (class notes, 2004). For me this was always beneficial as it created an awareness of the support my abdominal muscles could (but usually don't...) provide my lower back. In this way, urdhva prasarita padasana gains the restorative/supportive component of supine asanas, but it is in fact quite an active/strengthening asana also.

5. How it may be sequenced in a practise/class?

Generally I've tended to practise this asana once my spine had been warmed up.

Preparatory poses:

Majariasana – to warm the spine

Vyaghrasana – to bring awareness of engaging the abdominal muscles to support the lower back

Surya Namaskar – to warm the spine

Ardho mukha purvottanasana – to bring awareness of engaging core muscles

Chatturunga dandasana – again to bring awareness of engaging core

Bhujangasana – to bring awareness of engaging core to support lower back

Salabhasana – again to bring awareness of engaging core to support lower back, without gripping other (generally larger) muscle groups

******Whilst practising Urdhva Prasarita Padasana, it can be nice (she types through gritted teeth) to sequence leg raises either one at a time, or together for a much stronger exercise, crunches, and oblique rotations. Alternatively, pointing the toes and then engaging them so they are parallel to the ceiling can further strengthen the major muscle groups in the legs.

Subsequent poses:

Apanasana or Urdhva Mukha Virasana – to release and lengthen/broaden through the spine and lower back

Gentle rocking from side to side, back and forth in apanasana

Supta padangusthasana – again to release and broaden across the lower back, whilst lengthening the spine in a supported forward bend. Alternatively rock backwards and forwards a few times coming up into a seated position, and into paschimottanasana for a forward bend.

Shava Udarakarshanasana (universal twist)

Savasana

6. Variations according to needs and major precautions and/or contra-indications

Pre-cautions/Contra-indications:

- This asana is not recommended during pregnancy
- Support (either by placing hands underneath the lower back, or placing a blanket under the lower back) is essential if there are any lower back sensitivities/weaknesses (depending on the student, they may need to bend their knees to reduce the strength required, do fewer core muscles exercises, or do none of the exercises at all)
- If there is a slipped/compressed disc in the spine it is important the student doesn't participate in a practise that may encourage arching of the spine as it may cause further/re-injury. Spine lengthening exercises would be more appropriate.

(Saraswati, 1996; class discussions, 2004)

7. Main indications for adjustment.

I've noticed in classes that it is quite common for people who do not necessarily have the abdominal strength (myself included) to arch through their lower back. Unfortunately then, much of the strength required is actually coming from the muscles in the lower back. Sometimes it is simply a question of awareness. As in, encouraging students to identify the neutral position of their pelvis (simple pelvic tilts can do this), and so become aware of how much of their spine is actually not touching the floor. Then by placing their hands under their lower back during the movement, they can become aware of when the greatest stress on the lower back occurs (arching through the spine, or pushing into the floor).

Working in a supine position is ideally meant to encourage the lower back to feel supported, sometimes however, additional support is necessary. Either placing a blanket or towel under the lower back to help reduce the gap, or again simply encouraging the students to place their hands under their lower back or to bend their knees.

References

Class notes, teacher's instructions, own experience. etc. 2004

Saraswati, S.S. (1996). *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. Yoga Publications Trust. Bihar, India.