

Agni Sara and its Companionate Practices

The main focus of the practice called, Agni Sara, or “solar or fire center energizer” is the area of the physical solar plexus and Manipura Chakra. This psycho-physical complex governs digestion, assimilation and elimination to a large degree. The practice has myriad benefits beyond digestion to the reproductive, nervous, immune, and circulatory systems as well. Swami Rama used to say that if you only have time for one practice in a day, do agni sara. With the practice, as well the abdominal muscles are strengthened which then are better able to support the internal organs and the low back. When the practice includes applying the root lock, the pelvic diaphragm is strengthened as well. The internal organs are also toned with this practice.

This practice is counter-indicated for those with un-medicated high blood pressure, a stomach ulcer, hiatal hernia, or when pregnant. Women should skip this practice when menstruating, and possibly a few days prior to its onset. Those under treatment for cancer and other acute conditions should not do this practice until they are no longer in an acute state and receiving treatment.

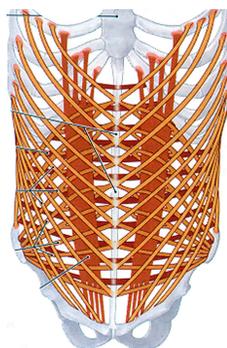
The practice should be done on an empty stomach. It’s best to begin slowly. For healthy people, it’s good to begin with two or three practice sessions of five to ten repetitions of each action, then gradually work up to about 25. With people in recovery from a longer-term illness, progressing more slowly is necessary.

The Progression of Practice of Agni Sara

1. Akunchana and Prasarana or A & P

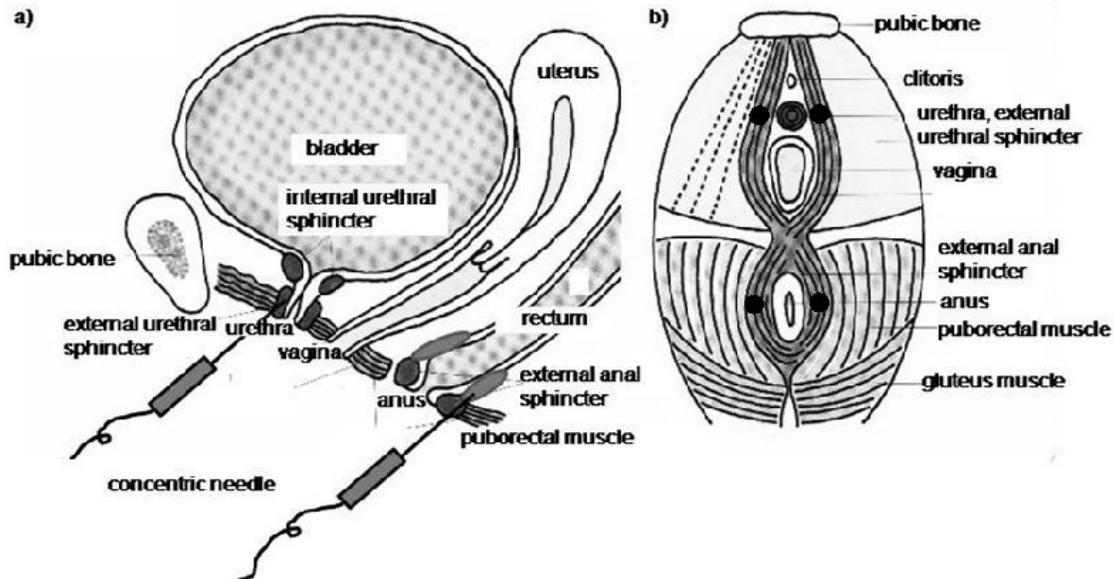
Akunchana means “squeezing” and prasarana means “releasing”, as the muscles in this practice squeeze and release. From a standing position, with feet slightly apart and knees bent, bend slightly forward, placing the hands on the thighs just above the knees. (This will help you support some of the torso’s weight on the arms in order to free the abdominals for motion.) relax the abdomen. Establish diaphragmatic breathing. To begin the practice, gradually pull the abdominal wall inward as you exhale as if you could bring your navel center back to touch the front of your spine. The maximum inward movement of the abdominal wall should happen as you complete the exhalation. Without pause, begin inhaling while you gradually allow the abdominal muscles to relax. Don’t allow the breath to pause at any point of this cycle. Continue to repeat this as many times as you like.

This practice can also be done on hands and knees, or by sitting on the heels with the toes tucked under.



2. Root Lock Preparation: Ashwini Mudra

Stand or kneel as above. Slowly contract the anal and urinary sphincter muscles along with the muscles of the buttocks. Hold for a few (3-6) seconds and release as smoothly as possible. Repeat 5-10 times.



3. The Root Lock: Mula Bandha

The classical (male pelvis oriented) root lock involves contracting the anal and urinary sphincter muscles and holding them in this contraction. Once Ashwini Mudra is learned, the root lock is often easier to master in that it isolates only the sphincter muscles. In this practice, you contract them without activating the buttocks muscles. As you exhale contract the sphincter muscles. As you inhale allow them to relax. If doing this practice as a stand-alone practice, you can hold the contract about half way through the inhale before releasing.

For women, it is often more beneficial to add the vaginal wall muscles to this practice, as the tone of these muscles are important to the placement and health of the uterus. So as the anal and urinary sphincters are contracted, contract as well the vaginal barrel. Release all together on the inhalation as well.

A more general way to teach Root Lock that most people can do is to teach it with activation of the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles are often very lax and can be the cause of various health issues. To do this more general version of the root lock, envision the area of the pelvic floor as a canoe running from front to back at the base of the torso. Slowly squeeze this area toward a central point (the perineal body), drawing it up slightly. Then slowly release.

To add the vaginal barrel muscles, first contract the pelvic floor to the center point as you begin to exhale. Then lift the pelvic floor and tighten the lowest part of the vaginal barrel, then the middle and then the uppermost portion. As you inhale, release in reverse order. 10-25 repetitions are a good practice.

4. Combining A & P with the Root Lock: “Agni Sara”

Assume the same starting position you have chosen above and establish diaphragmatic breathing. As you exhale, contract perform whichever version of the root lock you like, continue to exhale and contract the muscles of the lower abdominal area below the navel. Continue exhaling and add the contraction of the abdominal muscles above the navel area. Without pausing, begin to inhale and release in reverse order: the upper abdominals, the lower, then the root lock. Repeat the sequence to your comfortable capacity.

5. The Abdominal Lift: Uddiyana Bandha

Position body as above, and exhale completely. Flex the neck and place your chin in your neck’s hollow (jaladhara bandha= chin lock). Sweep the abdominal muscles inward and pull the stomach up under the ribs. You can also achieve this by expanding the chest as if you are taking in a deep breath but without doing so. Hold briefly, then slowly release lifting your head and inhaling. Repeat 10 times.

6. The Full Agni Sara “Advanced Agni Sara”

In the starting position, on the long, gradual exhalation:

- a. Apply the root lock
- b. Contract the lower abdomen to the navel center
- c. Contract the upper abdomen above the navel center
- d. Retain the exhale, and apply the chin lock, to add uddiyana bandha, which is to lift the abdominal wall up under the ribcage.

The return:

- e. Release the abdominal lift only to the point where uddiyana bandha began.
- f. Begin to gradually inhale and slowly release the upper abdominal muscles.
- g. Then release the lower abdominal muscles
- h. Release the root lock near the end of the inhalation.
- i. Repeat without pause to your comfortable capacity.



A wonderful online reference is: <https://yogainternational.com/article/view/guide-to-agni-sara>