

## Spanda® Yoga for Resilient Aging™

### Practicing Alignment for Healthy Joint Function

Good alignment not only maximizes the benefits of yoga practice, it also helps prevent injuries and joint wear. Faulty bodily use (sometimes called poor posture) also impedes the flow of energy in the body and this can have a negative impact on mood and state of mind. Good alignment gives ease and efficiency to movement. Even though there are many different body types and structural characteristics that contribute to our uniqueness, some generalities make alignment practical.

#### Mountain Pose

Mountain Pose (*Tadasana*), also called Simple Standing Pose, is the touchstone yoga posture for alignment assessment and practice. It can be observed readily from the side in terms of several bony landmarks:

- greater maleolus (ankle bone),
- slightly behind center of the knee,
- greater trochanter (hip bone),
- center of side of ribs, center of shoulder (or where it should be ☺),
- center of ear or back of ear (depending on ear shape and size!)

Once aligned using the above guide, add a gentle lift, like feeling you are in a good mood! If you can learn gradually to align your body in this simple pose, it will translate over time into better awareness and bodily use in all other yoga postures and in daily activities.

#### Using Mountain Pose to Improve Postural Muscle Tone

Practicing standing with good alignment in Mountain Pose strengthens the postural muscles of the spine, hips and legs. When the body is not aligned well, it is left to recruit additional muscles to keep upright. These muscles are not designed for this purpose and so they tire more easily, become tight, stiff, and can spasm. In fact, if someone chronically uses their body with poor alignment, the postural muscles themselves will weaken and atrophy to some extent. Practicing Mountain Pose, although not glamorous or particularly challenging in the way we think of physical challenge, can be extraordinarily helpful in strengthening the postural muscles thus improving posture.

#### Three Body Weights and Five Spinal Curves

The human body standing erect has three body weights and five spinal curves. The weights are the pelvis, thorax or chest, and the head. The curves are, from low to high, the coccygeal (tailbone), lumbar (low back), thoracic (chest), cervical (neck), and cranial (head). It's important to remember that these are natural and helpful in movement and that good standing posture does not mean these curves need to flatten out! Gentle elongating the torso, as in feeling great or having a positive outlook is enough. That famous yogi mentioned above also said, "Right posture from a standpoint of yoga, is by no means the rigid stance of a soldier on parade. One must be relaxed even while standing straight."

#### Neural-Muscular Habits

The practice of yoga poses helps to reduce and balance overall tension throughout the entire torso and body. A balanced practice will gently free spinal muscles, hips and other areas of undue tension. Also, neurological pathways are created between the muscles and the brain when we form muscular habits—useful or not. It takes practice of good alignment to reprogram these connections. This pay off in new habits of bodily use that lead to more energy flow, ease in the body, and more efficient and effective movement patterns. This all translates into less wear on the joints.