

# Yoga & Menstruation

## General Hints

Menstruation is a time of purification on psychological as well as physical levels. There is an open wound in the uterus, and women tend to feel more sensitive and more vulnerable at this time. This is an opportunity to be gentle, to attune to the body's needs and to adjust yoga practices accordingly. Some women choose not to do any postures for a few days. However, if the body is sluggish or crampy, some movement can help. Other women, who have a regular practice may decide to continue their practice but with modifications.

During menstruation, there is a lot of heat in the body. Cooling postures, such as forward bends and pranayama can be done to counteract this. It's important to avoid over-exertion. Allow yourself to be gentle, slow, and to avoid jerky movements. You may wish to use some yoga props such as pillows, ties, a chair, the wall to assist you in the postures and to provide extra support.

## Beneficial Postures and Pranayama

### Postures to Stretch the Abdomen

- Boat and Half Boat
- Bow and Half Bow
- Bridge
- Camel (hands on lower back)
- Cobra (with cushion)
- Half Locust (abdominals relaxed)

### Postures to Massage the Abdomen

- Abdominal Massage (bending forward)
- Abdominal Massage (lying on back)
- Hara Rocking (lying on cushion)
- Child Pose
- Yoga Mudra
- Hero
- Posterior Stretch
- Wind Relieving Pose

### Postures to Relieve Lower Back Tension

- Child Pose
- Head to Knee (cushion under forehead)
- Posterior Stretch (cushion under forehead)

- Knee down Twist (after forward bends)
- Sacral Massage (pelvic clock)
- Spinal Rocking (forward and back)
- Spinal Rocking (side to side)
- Cat and Dog Stretches
- Spinal Lift (feet on ground, chair on wall)

### **Postures to Open Hips and Legs**

- Hip Rotations
- Hip Series Warm-ups
- Squatting
- Bound Angle (against wall)
- Supine Bound Angle (cushion under back & head)
- Frog
- Pigeon (with head and chest down)
- Hero
- Diamond Pose (sitting between heels)
- Supine Diamond (cushions under back & head)
- Seated Angle (against wall)

### **Postures to Open Chest**

- Bridge (cushions under back)
- Camel (hands on lower back)
- Fish (cushion(s) under chest)

### **Postures and Pranayama to Balance, Relax, Remove Fatigue**

- Lying on back (feet on chair)
- Lying on back (legs & buttocks against wall)
- Corpse Pose
- Yoga Nidra
- Anuloma Viloma
- Three-Part Yogic Breathing
- Ujjayi Breath

*(All Pranayama may be done in corpse or seated position)*

## **Contraindications**

1. **No Hara Breathing:** This type of breathing not only tenses the abdominal muscles but also draws energy into the abdominal area, creating more fire energy. When menstruating, the fire energy is already very active and more fire can set the system off balance. This can result in releasing excessive amounts of toxins into the system and can create excessive bleeding, abdominal cramping, headaches, nausea and even vomiting.

**Alternative:** Hara warm-ups are fine if done gently, without breathing forcefully into the abdominal region. Instead of hara breathing, long slow cleansing breaths (inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the open mouth) will help release toxins from the system.

2. **No Kapalabhati or Bhastrika Breathing:** It is OK to do just a couple of rounds of alternate nostril Kapalabhati to clear the nostrils, but not any more. Again, it is not advisable to increase the fire energy when menstruating. **Alternatives:** Ujjayi, Complete Breath or Anuloma Viloma, (limit or eliminate holding the breath; and focus on the hara rather than the “third eye” to keep the energy grounded).
3. **No Root Lock (Mula Bandha) or Abdominal Lock (Uddiyana Bandha):** The muscles in the entire area need to be open and relaxed to facilitate menstruation as nature wants the energy to go down and out (not locked in and drawn upward). **OK to do:** Chin Lock (Jalandhara Bandha).
4. **No Abdominal Pumping (Agni Sara):** "Agni" means fire. Again, these exercises increase the fire energy. Furthermore, they draw the energy upward. Nature wants the energy to move down and out with menstruation. **Alternatives:** postures to massage the abdomen (see previous page).
5. **No Inverted Postures** during which the pelvis is tilted upside down. Avoid **Shoulder Stand, Plow, Headstand, Full Locust** (with feet over head). In these postures, the pull of gravity is reversed and the energy is drawn upward toward the head and neck. While menstruating, the energy needs to go down and out with gravity’s pull back towards the earth. **Alternatives:** Inverted legs (lying on the back with palms down beneath the pelvis or with buttocks and legs against a wall). Also, semi-inverted postures with soles of feet grounded, such as Bridge, Downward Dog and any standing forward bending postures (with minimal holding and only if not too tired).
6. **No Abdominal Strengtheners:** These exercises create tension in the abdominal region and can lead to cramping and menstrual discomfort. When menstruating, the muscles of the entire abdominal area need to be relaxed and open to assist nature’s purification. Avoid Leg Lifts, Sit Ups, and similar movements. **Alternatives:** postures to massage the abdomen (see previous page).
7. **No Extreme Backbends:** These can stop the menstrual flow because of intense pressure on the vertebrae near the lilac crest (pelvic girdle). **Alternatives:** *moderate back bending postures are excellent during menstruation* to open the abdominal area and to press the shiatsu points along the lilac crest which alleviates menstrual discomforts.
8. **No Prolonged Holding of Standing Postures:** These postures can be strenuous. Gentle stretching is OK, but do not hold the postures for long. Avoid them completely if tired. In the practice of standing postures, the abdominal muscles should be gently drawn in and up to avoid undue pressure on the uterus. **Alternatives:** Explore modifying standing postures to kneeling, sitting or lying down positions.