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Rola Tassabehji

Yoga & Menopause

BALANCING PITTA

Power of PILGRIMAGE

HIP-OPENING

YOGA

Living Namaste



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On the cover

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Take a Desk Break

Hip-opening for Summer



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Author: Freddie Panichi, British Wheel of
Yoga Foundation Course Tutor

Like most people today, I spend an awful lot of time sitting in front of a computer. When I catch myself slouching or feel that dull nagging discomfort, it becomes a clear reminder: it's time to step away, move, and practise some targeted asanas to counteract the effects of modern life.

In the heat of summer especially, hip-opening can be a wonderful way to help the body feel more spacious, supple and, in a sense, rehydrated from the inside out. By restoring balance in the body, which in turn positively affects the mind, I aim to create sukha through my yoga practice.

As suggested by yoga teacher Richard Rosen, sukha means “good space” (literally translated from the Sanskrit syllables su, meaning “good”, and kha, meaning “space”). It points to a state of ease, health and happiness, where we feel comfortable physically, mentally and emotionally.

The sequence invites you to slow down and explore the hips with patience and curiosity. Its longer-held stretches and emphasis on softening rather than striving give it a yin-like quality, making it an ideal companion to the slower rhythms of late summer.

In a season that can be both energising and depleting, this practice offers a chance to calm the nervous system, release unnecessary effort, and create space from the inside out. As you move through the poses, notice not just where you feel sensation, but how your experience changes when you meet it with breath and attention rather than force.

The aim is not to achieve maximum flexibility, but to cultivate ease and responsiveness in both body and mind. After spending time in deeper stretches, consider balancing this more inward, yielding quality with something more active - a walk in fresh air, a few weighted squats, or another form of gentle strengthening - help the body integrate the effects of the practice and restore a sense of support, stability and grounded energy.

What is ‘hip-opening’?

I’m using the term “hip-opening” simply because it’s the phrase most commonly heard in yoga classes. It usually refers to one particular movement of the hip joint: external rotation, where the thigh turns outwards and away from the body’s midline.



External rotation is just one of the six movements available at the hip joint. The others are flexion, extension, adduction, abduction and internal rotation. None is more important than the others. However, because of the poses commonly practised in modern yoga, external rotation tends to receive more attention, perhaps because stretches targeting the inner and front hip often create a satisfying sense of release.

For this reason, I encourage yoga practitioners to explore the full range of hip movements rather than focusing solely on “opening” the hips. Healthy hips need variety. Mobility, strength and adaptability come from moving in many different ways, not just one.

Approaching the hips with care

The hips are like a junction where the legs and pelvis meet. They form a bridge between the lower and upper halves of the body. In many yoga traditions, this region is associated with stability, support and our connection to the ground. Anyone who has practised yoga for a while knows that the hips can be stubborn. They rarely “open” after one class or even a few weeks of practice. Instead, they respond gradually to a combination of time, patience, perseverance and inner awareness.

Working with hip-opening poses asks us to slow down and listen. It becomes almost impossible not to pay attention to the sensations that arise. As we move into deeper hip work, we may notice layers of resistance. This can be a powerful opportunity to practise mindfulness in the posture – staying with the breath, observing sensations and remaining curious about what is happening rather than forcing a particular outcome.

Because the hips are such complex joints, it is essential to approach them with care. There is a difference between

healthy sensation and strain. Throughout the sequence, it is important to avoid practising anything that feels too taxing or sharp for your body. Some of the poses can be quite intense, especially if you are not used to this kind of work. It is always better to simplify a pose, come out earlier, or skip it altogether than to push into pain. Props such as blocks, bolsters, blankets or even a folded towel can be invaluable allies, allowing you to adjust the level of intensity and support yourself in a safe range of motion.



You might choose to approach this sequence as a complete practice, taking time to move slowly from one pose to another and resting at the end. Equally, you could select just one or two poses to integrate into your day as short “movement snacks” between periods of sitting or other work. For example, a simple standing hip mobilisation or a supported lunge can make a surprising difference when done consistently. Over time, these small, regular interventions may help maintain a healthier range of movement and reduce the sense of stiffness that often accompanies a busy, sedentary lifestyle.



Arriving and settling

1 Reclining Bound Angle

Bring the soles of the feet together and allow the knees to fall out to the sides. Support each leg with a rolled blanket if needed and rest your hands on your abdomen, allowing the breath to soften the body before moving into the practice.



2 Half Happy Baby

Draw one knee towards your chest and hold the big toe, foot or shin, while the other leg stays bent or extends along the floor. Working one side at a time encourages a gradual, mindful stretch without overwhelming the hips.



3 Eye of the Needle

Cross one ankle over the opposite thigh and draw the legs towards you, holding behind the thigh. A gentle rocking motion can help release unnecessary tension and invite more ease around the outer hip.



Eye of the Needle

Expanding movement and mobility

4 Cat

From hands and knees, slowly round and arch your spine, allowing the pelvis to move freely with the breath. Place cushioning under the knees if needed to stay comfortable as you gently mobilise the spine and hips.



Cat

5 Downward Facing Dog

Lift the hips and lengthen through the spine, keeping a generous bend in the knees if needed. Pedalling the feet or adding small movements helps the pose feel spacious rather than rigid.



Downward Facing Dog

6 Low Lunge

Step one foot forward and lower the back knee to the floor. Rest your hands on your thigh or on blocks as you lengthen through the front of the back hip while keeping your breath relaxed.



Low Lunge

7 Standing Forward Bend

Fold forwards with soft knees, holding opposite elbows and allowing the upper body to hang heavily. A gentle sway encourages the hips, spine and shoulders to release unnecessary effort.



Standing Forward Bend

8 Garland

Lower into a comfortable squat, lifting the heels onto a folded blanket or block if needed. This position explores deep hip flexion while encouraging balance, mobility and a grounded connection with the floor.



Garland

9 Side Lunge

From Standing Forward Bend, step into a wide stance and bend one knee while lengthening the opposite leg. Keep your hands on the floor or blocks as you explore the inner thighs and side hips before repeating on the other side.



12 Pigeon

Bring one shin towards the front of the mat and extend the opposite leg behind you. Support the front hip if needed, or choose a seated variation if your knees prefer, allowing time to settle into the posture.



10 Lizard

Bring both hands inside the front foot and lower onto blocks or your forearms if comfortable. This pose offers a deeper stretch through the hips and groins while encouraging steady, unhurried breathing.



13 Cow's Face

Sit with the knees comfortably stacked, raising the hips on a block if this feels more accessible. Keep the hands on the knees or add the arm position if it feels appropriate, creating space through both the hips and upper body.



11 Twisted Lizard

From Lizard, rotate your chest towards the front leg, reaching the upper arm skywards or exploring a half bind or quad stretch. The twist adds a new dimension to the pose without losing the sense of ease.



Integration and rest

14 Bridge Pose

Lift the hips or rest them on a block or bolster for a more restorative variation. After the deeper hip work, this gentle backbend brings support and balance to the pelvis and spine.



15 Supine Twist

With both knees bent, allow them to fall softly to one side as you turn your head in the opposite direction if comfortable. This gentle twist helps the body unwind before relaxation.



16 Corpse Pose

Lie down in a position of complete comfort, supporting yourself with blankets or a bolster under the knees if you wish. As Donna Farhi, one of my teachers, reminds us, “we have a high standard for comfort”: give yourself permission to rest completely and absorb the effects of the practice.



In a world where many of us spend so much time seated and absorbed in screens, taking time to explore this junction between legs and pelvis can be a simple yet profound act of self-care. By restoring mobility and balance in this region, we support the whole body, and in doing so we move a little closer towards sukha – that “good space” of wellbeing and contentment that yoga invites us to cultivate.

Freddie has been teaching yoga in London since 2007 and is a Foundation Course Tutor for the British Wheel of Yoga. She teaches Slow Flow classes online and across North London, drawing on applied anatomy, movement science and embodied awareness to create creative, breath-led classes that build mobility, strength and resilience.



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