

# YOGA HILLSBORO & THE STRESS REDUCTION CLINIC RESOURCE BOOK



"Sharing what we can do for ourselves to heal and stay well."

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HANNAH AT 4



HANNAH AT 7

Our four year old niece Hannah passed by the dining room table one day as we worked on a draft of this resource book. She saw the pictures and began a delightful and hilarious sequence of poses running back to the book each time to find a new one. We want to acknowledge her leadership in experiencing the "joy of being alive" through the guidance provided by this workbook.



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# MINDFUL YOGA ESSENTIALS

Yoga is both a science and an art. It is a science whose laboratory is your life and whose method of investigation is your direct experience of movement, alignment, sensation, breath, thought and every other dimension of your existence. It is an art of creative expression whose palette of exquisite colors contains your weakness, strength, pain, emotion, thought, ambition, dislikes, health, illness, joy and everything else. In practicing mindful yoga you are asked to look inward in your investigations to learn more about who you are. You may find that you are an utterly unique portrait and yoga enables you to have more say in painting that portrait with exquisite colors.

The word yoga translates as “yoking” or “bringing together.” In practice, the effect is to reintegrate those parts of life that seem to have been forgotten during the challenges of daily living; the neglected and perhaps sore aspects of our bodies, minds, and hearts. This reintegration is fertile ground to soften the suffering we encounter in life: sore backs, dark moods, angry reactions, headaches and more. It is a practice that gets us back in touch with what Joseph Campbell called the “rapture of being alive.” It gets us in touch with the miracle of this moment and to what is vastly bigger than us.

Yoga has been around for a very long time and has taken many forms. A venerable authority on the subject, Swami Rama, wrote that yoga is not the product of eastern or western cultures but is universal (Swami Rama, 2006). The labels may be different but turning inward to pay attention and directly experience what is happening right now has always been a dimension of contemplative traditions, poetry, and art everywhere. The particular practice we call yoga today can be traced back thousands of years to its roots in Asia.

The cornerstone of what is called classical yoga is a 2000 year-old manuscript called the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali (Hartranft, 2003). The Yoga Sutra explains that yoga is the practice of calming the mind and that yoga is not philosophy but an inquiry based on direct personal experience.

Yoga practice has taken many forms over the millennia. The form most familiar to us today is hatha yoga, which is based on practices that include the yoga postures so common in North American glossy magazines, fitness centers and yoga studios. There are dozens of varieties of hatha yoga: Asthanga, Iyengar, Anusara, Bikram, Kripalu, and more. As yoga has become vogue it has sometimes taken directions that reduce it to an exercise regimen, a fashion statement, a money making scheme, or religious cult, none of which reflect the original intent of this practice.

Traditionally hatha yoga instructors had worked in a particularly personal way with students so as to honor their individuality while learning. Our approach to teaching reflects this tradition. More than adhering to dogmas of any particular school of hatha

yoga, our way of teaching relies mostly on our direct personal experience of yoga practice, Brant's extensive training and teaching of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (see appendices), the experience of fellow teachers, and the experiences of our students.

A good name for what we teach is mindful yoga (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Our instructions request that you turn toward your personal experience rather than attempting to emulate some ideal or achieve a "good" pose. It's a practice of paying attention to movement, breathing, and experience moment-to-moment without judgment. In this practice we learn to be with "what is" rather than striving for what "should be." Equipped with more of the truth about our limitations and capabilities we are more capable of living fully and honestly; caring for others, being healthier, and acting with compassion rather than fear.

Brant couldn't agree more with the notion put forth by Dr. Loren Fishman that physical movement is nourishment for the human body and that yoga, when properly adapted, is an extremely good diet. Dr. Fishman practices physical medicine and is a yoga instructor. He is the author of a number of excellent books including *Yoga for Osteoporosis* (Fishman, 2010).

Just as our body requires protein, vitamins, water, and oxygen, our body hungers for physical movement. It's how we are made; to move. Unless we are moving in the appropriate way for our particular genetics and current state of health we are in this sense malnourished. In the way we are mindful of the effects of the foods on our health and learn to eat well, we can learn to move mindfully and in ways that will help us heal and stay well; heart, mind and body. We hope this book will support you in doing so.

# POSES ON FOUR CORNERS

## TABLE , CAT/COW, HAPPY DOG, HIP ROTATIONS



TABLE POSE

TABLE POSE: Place your hands directly below your shoulders with strong arms. Take your fingers wide, and press the finger pads down firmly, all ten knuckles pressing down equally. Soften your heart toward the floor and keep your low back slightly arched, not collapsed. Keep knees below or slightly behind your hips. Draw your ears upward to keep your neck in line with your back.

CAT/COW: Keep the arm and leg alignments of Table Pose, and with your exhale round your back up to the sky, draw your tailbone down and release your head downward. With your inhale soften your heart and belly toward the floor as you lift your tailbone and float your ears upward. Allow your natural breath rhythm to guide this. Don't force breathing. Allow the breath and movement to occur naturally.

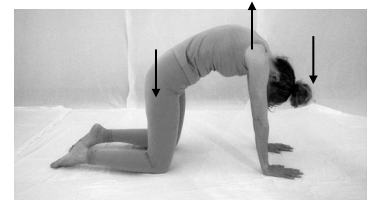
HAPPY DOG: From Table Pose slowly begin to sidebend your torso and neck to the right to look back. Draw or "wag" your tail in the same direction. Change sides.

HIP ROTATIONS: Start in Table Pose. Imagine you have a paintbrush in your navel. Begin to draw big circles on the floor. Change directions.

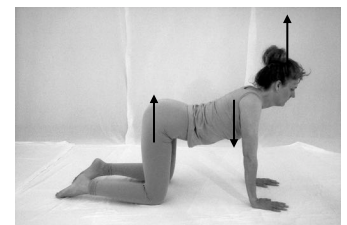
MODIFICATIONS: Use blankets under your knees if they are tender. Use wedges or part of a rolled mat to support under the wrists if it is a strain to weight bear through them.

BENEFITS: These are excellent poses to begin a yoga practice with. They wake up the spine, core muscles and breath.

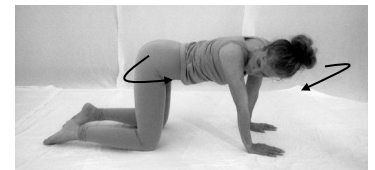
CAUTIONS: Avoid rounding your back strongly in Cat/Cow, or extremes of motion with osteoporosis. Avoid straining your neck, especially in Cow Pose. Use wrist wedges or other modifications for supporting wrists with any discomfort.



CAT EXHALE



COW INHALE



HAPPY DOG



HIP ROTATIONS

## SIDE PLANK POSE, VASISTHASANA



BEGINNING POSE

### GENERAL POSE:

Start in Plank Pose. Rotate onto the right side of your right foot, stack your left foot on top of your right. Turn your body to the left opening your heart, gaze and left arm to the sky. Extend your spine long, keep your feet active, your legs strong, and core muscles engaged in this pose.

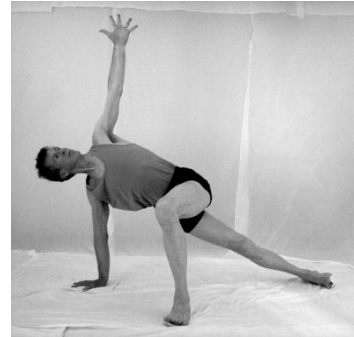
**MODIFICATIONS:** Modified Beginning Pose: As you turn your body open to the left, instead of stacking the left foot on top of the right, bring it to the floor in front of your hips. This will allow you to experience the shape of the pose without the full weight of the body.

**Gentle Pose:** Start lying on your side with your knees bent to a right angle and thighs in line with your torso. Place your right hand or elbow just beneath your right shoulder. Lift your torso up into a straight line.

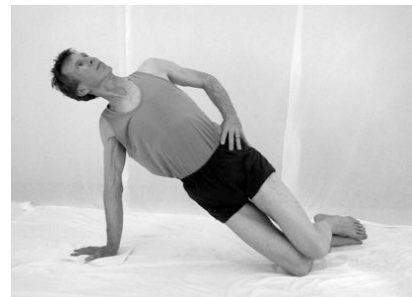
**BENEFITS:** Strengthening, especially for the lower back.

**AVOID:** Make sure to keep the hand under the shoulder. Come down to your elbow if you have any wrist discomfort. Keep the heart open and shoulders back.

**CAUTIONS:** This is a challenging pose for wrist and shoulder alignment as well as core stability. Avoid this until you consulted your teacher and physician if you have wrist or shoulder injuries, or pelvic instability. Use modifications generously as you learn this posture.



MODIFIED BEGINNING POSE



GENTLE POSE (OR ON ELBOW)