

working with mudras

by Nerissa Fields



'Mudra' is the Sanskrit word for gesture or attitude. They can be described as psychic, emotional, devotional and aesthetic gestures. They are the seal of authenticity. Mudras are scientifically designed to influence both the dense physical and the subtle bodies. Thus the subtle, physical movements of mudras alter mood, attitude and perception as well as deepening awareness and concentration. They are said to heal illness, rejuvenate the immune system and increase overall well-being. Specific mudras can be used in healing an individual by channelling, releasing and working with energy flow.

Mudras can be used with the hands; they can involve the whole body or parts of the body; they can be used for meditation and they can be used in conjunction with the bandhas or locks. Mudras enhance yogic practice whether it be with asanas, pranayama or meditation. They can help conserve and direct energy flow in the body as well as promote a state of meditation in action.

Traditional Indian dances use mudras to express feelings and emotions through bodily gestures. Mudras are also used in Buddhism. However, we often use mudras without being aware that we are doing so. Only the other day, one of my sons was holding his hands in 'hakini mudra', this where the palms are open and the fingertips and thumbs meet and is good for the brain and thinking.

Rock and roll bands regularly use 'apana mudra', this is where the middle two fingers hold the tip or the root of the thumb, the index finger and little finger are stretched upwards. This mudra gives energy and self-confidence, perfect for this kind of music. But do they also realise it is also good for constipation and urinary problems - it is a great detox mudra?!

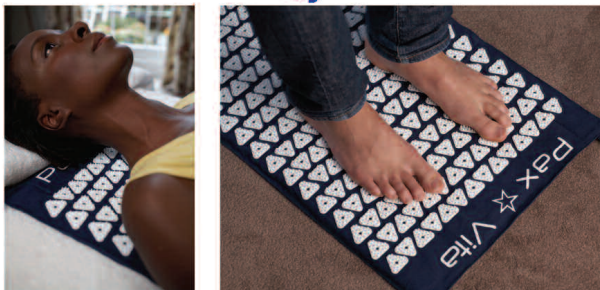
The word 'chakra' comes from the Sanskrit word meaning, wheel. Chakras are vortices of energy situated in subtle form along the spine in areas which correspond to the nervous and endocrine systems. They can also be related to the elements, the planets, sounds and specific colours. The chakras store, filter and regulate the flow of subtle energy throughout the body. Spiritual/emotional problems have the potential to block these chakras and thus the flow of energy. This in turn affects our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. The chakras offer points for developing concentration and each have a deep significance within themselves. They are connected and energised through a network of channels, known as 'nadis' in Yoga. These are similar to what we know as meridians in acupuncture.

The endocrine system consists of an integrated system of small organs within the body that produce hormones. These act as chemical messengers which are secreted into the blood stream and which stimulate or inhibit physical processes. The endocrine system works to maintain optimum health, regulating hormone balance and metabolism. Thus there is a deep connection between our emotional and physical well-being. Working with the chakras helps the flow and release of this energy.

Each chakra is depicted symbolically as lotus flowers, each having a particular number of petals and colour.

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We are working in greater depth in our Yoga practice when we focus on a specific point with each asana: mind, body and breath working together.

It is important to remember that different traditions may suggest different sets of colours for the chakras. I am working with the rainbow system. Some also suggest different points of concentration, as well as a slightly different *bija mantra*, ie seed sound or chant. Mudras are also given different names according to different traditions.

Working with mudras and the chakras is a wonderful way for the experienced Yogi/ni to increase the depth of their Yoga practice. In my booklet *The 7-Way Stretch*, I offer sets of movements which work in slightly different ways.

7-Way Stretch No 16 works through the movements while chanting Om at the same time as visualising each chakra in turn. Enjoy!

7-way stretch (No 16)

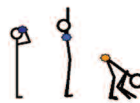
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Tadasana



Stand in *Tadasana*, the Mountain pose. 'Tada' means mountain. The heels sink down, keeping the feet parallel and slightly apart. The crown of the head rises up. Allow the tailbone to lengthen towards the floor as you elongate the spine. The abdominal muscles are gently toned. Let the shoulders drop. Keep the chin loose, the chest open. Bring your palms together while focusing on *Anahata Chakra* (the heart chakra). Chant 'Om'.

Stretch 1 & 2 - Backward & Forward Bend



Inhale as you bring your palms to your eyebrow centre. Focusing on *Ajna Chakra*, chant 'Om'. Focus on *Vishuddhi Chakra* (throat chakra). Inhale as you stretch both arms up. Looking up, chant 'Om'. Inhale into the stretch.

Focus on *Swadhisthana Chakra* (base chakra). Chant 'Om' as you stretch into the Forward Bend keeping the knees soft. Inhale as you slowly uncurl and return to standing. Bring the palms together and chant 'Om' in *Tadasana*.

Stretch 3 & 4 - Twist



Inhale as you stretch both arms out in front, focusing on *Anahata Chakra* (heart chakra). Chant 'Om' as you bring one arm round to the back, looking at your hand. Keep the knees and feet facing forwards, moving the hips as little as possible. Inhale as you return to centre. Repeat on the other side. Chant 'Om' as your palms come back to the chest.

Stretch 5 & 6 - Side Bend



Inhale as you stretch your legs apart and, with palms together, raise both arms over your head. Focusing on *Manipura Chakra* (navel chakra), chant 'Om' as you stretch to one side. Inhale as you return to centre. Repeat on the other side. Chant 'Om' with your arms up stretched, palms together.

Stretch 7



Inhale as you stretch your arms into a star shape. Chant 'Om' down to *Muladhara Chakra* 3 times. Inhale as you bring your palms back together. Chant 'Om' as you bring your palms to the chest and return to *Tadasana*. Softly close your eyes, observing

mind, body and breath. Sink your heels down, the crown of your head rising up.

You are tall.
You are strong.
You are powerful.

Enquiries for Kathak, Yoga or Photography direct to Chi Kri Ltd: 0208 866 5255 or e-mail info@chikri.com.