

THE SADHAKA

the seeker

A Monthly Newsletter from the Seattle Holistic Center

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Celebrating Movement

Many of us get more active as the days grow longer and warmer. This month's Sadhaka has articles that will help with your movement.

A reflection on yoga's meaning will inspire you to practice differently, and recipes and stretches for leg cramps will help get those legs moving again.

We've also got a primer on cranial sacral therapy, some fun ideas for staying active in (very) late pregnancy, including the one item you must have in your labor bag.

Dear Friends,

The day before I left to be with my Guru, Amma, the women in Tuesday's Gentle Yoga class gathered together in a circle quite spontaneously. These women ranged in age from 20 something to 80, which included maidens to mothers to grandmothers. Susan roused our hearts in her jazzy way with a Stevie Wonder love song. Next, Lorraine, the well known founder of the childrens singing group, Tickle Tune Typhoon, opened our hearts by leading us in "Magic Penny," - *hold on tight and you won't have any; lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many. They'll roll all over the floor.* It may seem silly to those of you reading this, but the love that flowed between each of us was as palpable as our beating hearts. We all left the yoga class full, energized and smiling from ear to ear.

Every year in the Seattle metropolitan area thousands gather, many for the first time, to see Amma and receive her Darshan or blessing. It comes in the form of a hug like a mother holding her child. Amma is one of the greatest humanitarians of our time. She has hugged over 30 million people from all over the world day after day for over 40 years. Each hug is like the first. I've seen adults break down and cry in her arms; policemen timidly ask, "Can I have a hug too?" and bitter looking faces beam with sweet smiles, all while being in her arms. What is her method to unlocking these hearts? Love.

Love and compassion is Amma's message. As the late Yolanda King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has said, "Amma not only walks the talk and is an embodiment of unconditional love, but she expresses that love in action. She walks the talk."

Today one of the grandmothers from that Tuesday class shared that she is singing, "Magic Penny" with her grandchildren and how heart opening it is to them and to her. Whether singing a song like "Magic Penny", smiling to a stranger or taking a meal to your sick neighbor what is vital to peace and harmony is the expression of our humanness. Love is life itself.

Blessings,

Colette

Breathing Yoga

By Robin Rothenberg

Like a labyrinth, the practice of yoga has taken me in an ever deepening spiral towards the core of my being.

After a childhood plagued with bronchitis, strep throat, and chronic fatigue, strong *Iyengar asana* enabled me to move beyond the apparent weakness of my physical being, to access the inherent



strength underlying it.

As I developed a degree of mastery in asana, my body soared through the barriers of fear and self imposed limitations. Handstands, backbends, and arm balances offered me a whole new perspective on who I was and what I was capable of doing. Asana practice made me bold and decisive in my life.

My teachers encouraged my devotion, always emphasizing what more my body could do; a bit more length in the back leg, more opening in the chest. When 10 backbends seemed like a Herculean feat, they'd ask for 15. Overachiever that I was, I thrived on this demand for excellence. Determined to get the "A," I'd push beyond my physical capacity and routinely end up injuring myself.

Over many years of loathing various body parts for not being flexible enough, strong enough or open enough, I became aware of a void between my physical practice and the philosophical and spiritual pursuit of yoga. "The Yoga Sutra" by Patanjali states that the practice of yoga is a process of recognizing ignorance, *avidya*, in our lives, and developing clarity of mind, *nirodha*, so we can eliminate suffering, *dukkha*. My body and mind were suffering, and I understood that the perfect asana wasn't going to fix me.

Around the time that I began to question what lay beyond the mechanics of posture, I was blessed with a teacher who was able to help steer me toward transformation of the mind. Gary Kraftsow of Krishnamacharya's Viniyoga tradition defined yoga as the process of *vairaghyam*, or learning to see clearly, without color or distortion, like a perfect crystal. Most of us, he theorized, are "rosy quartz crystals" or "smoky quartz crystals." Our own perspective clouds our ability to see things as they are.

The crystal metaphor reflected truth, more keenly than my best Downward Facing Dog. I remembered all these blank pages in the coloring books of my childhood which I hungrily filled with sea foam green, tangerine, and violet. Even now when I paint, the white space gnaws on me, until I consume it in bright washes of color. Had I ever engaged in any class, relationship, discussion, or event without splattering the rainbow of my own perceptions all over it?

On my hands and knees, rounding my back in an exaggerated cat stretch as I had been taught NOT to do for 10 years, I found myself roadblocked by my own rigidity. "Feel the breath initiating the movement," Gary explained. "With the inhale, feel the expansion of the ribs, extend the spine, opening the chest; with the exhale, lift the belly and stretch into the low back, releasing the buttocks down towards the heels."

While my body pulsed and purred to Gary's fluid instructions, my mind rebelled like an adolescent. Where were my knees supposed to be? He hadn't said. What about my hands? Why are we repeating this movement over and over again, instead of holding it steady? What kind of yoga was this anyway?

Fearful that I was doing it wrong, I scanned the room only to see as many variations of the pose as there were bodies present. Most people's eyes were closed, their faces relaxed. Fear turned to anger. He was a lousy teacher. He wasn't even giving basic instructions. This kind of yoga was probably dangerous, I reasoned. Yet, even while my mind grasped for familiar demarcations of right and wrong, my body hummed with satisfaction. Every movement was orchestrated with the flow of breath. Each breath seemed to irrigate my joints, cool my fiery temperament, and soothe the rough edges of suspicion. I had to admit that it felt really good.

That was years ago, and I have since received my certification as a Viniyoga teacher. My practice and teaching have shifted a great deal. When I took yoga out of the box of asana, it came alive as a living, breathing, authentic teaching which could heal my spirit as well as my body.

"Namo Namaha," Gary repeats often. He explains that this is one of the most precious of all mantras passed down from his teacher's teacher to him. "If we can just remember, namo namaha, it's not all about ME, we'll be so much better off," he advises. "Cultivate gratitude, acknowledge the support that exists and affirms your life on all levels, and look within yourself for *sraddha*(faith)- for that is where the heart is most at rest."

Faith has guided me along this path toward integration where I am learning to link mind and body together through the breath of awareness. It has taken a lot of breath to unravel the knots my mind has made of yoga, but through the process I have become more at ease with the white spaces of my life.

Rothenberg is the director of The Yoga Barn in Fall City. This piece is reprinted from The Sadhaka Vol. 5 Issue No. 1.

Understanding Cranial Sacral Therapy

By Joseph Rodin

People often wonder how such a light touch can be so effective with adults and especially with the wide array of problems one sees in children and newborns. Part of the reason lies in the fact that the twelve nerves exiting the cranium are responsible for many of the primary bodily functions.

With this in mind, one can see how a difficult delivery or trauma that effects a child's head can impact one of the main cranial nerves and impair their function. This can then lead to problems with the sucking reflex, breathing, colic, attention and motor skills and a variety of others.

Often, through Cranial Sacral treatments these constrictions are released, alleviating troublesome and seemingly random symptoms.

With adults, this same principle applies, but more sophisticated techniques are available to match the more complex symptoms such as headaches, jaw problems, insomnia, and various somatic complaints. In many of these instances, cranial work can play a primary or supportive role in the full reduction of symptoms.

Rodin is a practitioner of the advanced techniques of Cranial Sacral Therapy. This piece is reprinted from The Sadhaka, Vol. 2, Issue No. 3.

Don't Forget the Green Coconut Water!

By Colette Crawford, RN, BSN

Labor is vigorous and demanding of the body, like running a marathon or engaging in other intense sports. Athletes know that hydration and replacement of the body's essential electrolytes are paramount to healthy functioning of muscles and organs. The same is true for a laboring woman, yet in the hospital we deny her energizing food and fluids other than ice chips, water and clear juice.

The carbohydrate is the most important fuel for energy. It's stored in the liver and muscles as glycogen, and if these stores



run low it can cause fatigue. The bigger the glycogen stores in your muscles, the longer you can perform. Before a rigorous event, athletes load up on carbohydrates like bread, rice, pasta, cereals, potatoes, fruit and vegetables. Carbohydrates and electrolytes help the body absorb water faster and provide energy.

As a birth attendant, I have had women drink green coconut water in labor with extraordinary results. It has five electrolytes, more potassium than a banana, no fat, no added sugar and no preservatives. The potassium helps regulate blood pressure and heart function, effectively rehydrates and keeps the body cool. It is especially helpful in reducing fever related to dehydration and gives the laboring woman a boost of energy.

So, when packing your bag for the hospital, add a 6-pack of green coconut water. Keep some in your refrigerator for those warm days when you are sweating more than usual. During labor, eat easy to digest foods such as rice, vegetable or chicken broth or miso soup. Indian mothers make a steamed rice cake called [ldli](#) for their daughters to snack on during labor, which gives them more energy.

Pregnancy and birth are normal physiological functions of the human body, which has the ability to adapt appropriately, even with added challenges and stress. But the necessary nutrients are essential.

Green coconut water is available at several area health food stores, like PCC and Whole Foods, and in the Seattle Holistic Center store.

Give Leg Cramps the Boot!

Many pregnant women in our classes talk about experiencing leg cramps, especially during the second trimester. They can be surprisingly painful, with muscle aches lasting for days. The rest of us can also get leg cramps this time of year, with our increased activities, and the dehydration that sometimes comes with it!



To help avoid leg cramps, make sure you are getting potassium, sodium, calcium and magnesium - in the right ratio.

Foods that are high in these minerals are: bananas, oranges, grapefruit, yogurt, cottage cheese, dark green leafy vegetables, like kale, salmon, sardines, almonds and others. Eat plenty of these foods to help prevent leg cramps.

Carbonated beverages are also known to interfere with your body's calcium uptake, so do your best to avoid drinking these and sodas on a regular basis. Instead, brew a pot of raspberry leaf and nettle tea. Mix half of the tea with orange juice and you'll have a wonderful supply of these minerals to discourage leg cramps.

Another benefit for pregnant women is that these herbs tone the uterus, which can help during labor and birth. Sometimes pregnant women experience restless legs, when legs ache or jerk, especially at night. This may indicate anemia or low iron. Nettles are high in iron so it is beneficial to drink nettle tea.

If you get a leg cramp: flex your foot - bring the toes toward the ankle - and extend through the ball of the foot and heel. Do not point your toes as this can increase the cramp.

If you have varicose veins do not massage your leg or apply heat until a clot is ruled out.

Also try these poses:

Runner's stretch - Stand with your hands supported, about 3 feet from a wall or table. Bring your right foot forward and step your left foot back. Bend the right knee and straighten your left leg. Breathe steadily and deeply. Soften into the left calf muscle as you exhale. Change sides.

Pyramid pose - Place your hands on a wall or table with the right foot about 2 feet away from the wall. Step your left leg back with the toes turned in about 60 degrees. Have your heels in line. Square your hips, firm your legs and as you exhale bend forward at the hips. Walk the hands up the wall to extend your spine. Root strongly through the feet. This pose also helps with sciatica and hip pain.

Surviving Late Pregnancy

By Shawna Gamache

This time last year, I was very, very pregnant. My due date had come and gone and I'd stopped working a few weeks before, so my primary occupation was waiting for my baby.

Throughout my pregnancy, I had heard that the average first baby comes about ten days after the due date, but I still didn't expect that to happen to ME. My baby had turned head down early, she had dropped early, and my Braxton Hicks had been building for months. At 40-plus weeks, squatting in yoga placed intense pressure on my cervix, and my cute round belly had started looking more like a deflated beach ball. I was ready to pop any moment, wasn't I??!!



Amazingly, the two weeks between my due date and my baby's birth ended up being a pretty magical time. During week 40-41, I rented silly, girly movies to watch "with my daughter," spent an hour or two a day in the Magnolia Pool and practiced yoga three times a week. I walked the hills of Phinney Ridge, sat and read in my baby's nursery and sucked on fruit popsicles. I did a million cat-cow poses.

During week 41-42, I made play lists that I could use for the different stages of labor, including some of my favorite upbeat songs for the early, giddy moments, more mellow stuff for the middle, and ocean waves and didgeridoo for transition and beyond. I took copious notes on every early contraction during the three days that my early labor built. I walked around Greenlake and enjoyed people's horrified reactions after they asked me when I was "due." "Is your car nearby?" they would always ask, slightly panicked.

The hardest part was surviving the constant calls and emails from well-meaning family and friends. I would have three different "Are you still pregnant?" texts and messages awaiting me each morning, and receive dozens more throughout the day. Baby inquiries littered my wall on Facebook. I toyed with leaving a preemptive message myself: "I promise to tell you when I'm no longer pregnant, but only if you stop asking."

Instead, my husband and I decided to make and eat a [Dutch Baby](#) every morning until our real baby arrived. We took a picture every day of the crisp, eggy pancake, sometimes with lemon and powdered sugar, other times with fresh berries or bananas and cinnamon, and posted it on our baby blog. "If you see a

new Dutch Baby on the blog," we told our relatives, "there is no real baby yet."

On the thirteenth day after my due date, I ate my last Dutch Baby with blueberries and lemon juice. We went to the pool in the morning, then I had my third acupuncture session. I had strong early contractions all day and listened to my upbeat labor playlists. By 5 a.m. the next morning, I was listening to the didgeridoo at the birth center.

At 11:30 a.m. on June 14, I gave a last hard push and felt my little girl come surging out in to my midwife's arms. She let out a small, healthy little cry as I let out a long, well-deserved sigh of relief. I lifted my head to look at her tiny, perfect face as she rested on my chest. She smiled faintly and settled her cheek on to my belly, my husband's arms around us both. I'm grateful that we all had the extra time to prepare.

Gamache is co-founder of [Moms Alive](#), a blog and website that aims to inspire and inform new Seattle-area mamas. She is also editor of Sadhaka.

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