



## Ground Work

Everyday challenges can so easily tip you off-balance. Nancy Jackson offers techniques to stay grounded and “hold your asana” even as the world dances around you.

**B**eing grounded is a sense of staying strong and connected regardless of what’s happening in your life. Like a rod that diverts a lightning bolt into earth, grounding helps divert the impact of an upheaval. At the same time, being grounded is helpful for everyday life, as so many of us have the tendency to do too much. Unbalance from any impact can push you too far into the elusive aspects of your mind and emotions. One of the most renewing practices of yoga is to reconnect with solid ground.

### **HOLD YOUR ASANA**

If you’ve practiced yoga or listened to yoga sessions, you are likely to have heard the instruction, “Hold,”



meaning to hold the posture, or asana. The word asana means 'seated' and refers directly to being steady while holding an individual yoga posture. From the Yoga Sutras (2.46), the yogi Patanjali says, Asana is to be seated in a position that is firm but relaxed. It is also translated as steady and comfortable.

Certainly most people wobble in some postures, but the idea is that once you are in a posture you hold it steady, even if someone were to try to push you out of the posture. Naturally, this is easier in postures that link you to the ground, such as sitting with your legs crossed or lying down. In a broader sense, to hold

your asana is to keep your place, to stay firm in yourself regardless of outside influences.

Holding your asana is the practice of being grounded. This is the ability to remain present, without wandering too far away with your thoughts and feelings. It brings you to the here and now and sets the foundation of strength to engage in this moment. Being grounded is to be fully conscious, aware of your body and where you are, while also being aware of your state of mind and levels of feeling secure and peaceful.

Typically, you may have noticed that some people are more grounded than others. Your default grounding

position may be more flighty or more solid, and usually fluctuates, depending on age, events, other people, and a wide variety of situations. Being tired or busy, travel, work or family demands, or just everyday life all challenge your ability to stay centred and well-balanced.

Whether you have experienced a crisis or just feel that you can't get a grip on daily life, the perfect antidote is to ground yourself. Grounding skills help manage overwhelming emotions or an intense situation. When you are grounded it is easier to be calm.

### **NOT GROUNDED**

In Yoga Sutra 1.30, Patanjali tells us that not being grounded is an obstacle to steadiness. Everyone has moments of being preoccupied, which naturally result in lack of focus. You have a sense of being elsewhere, lost in thought, or carried away by a situation. It's as though your mind is a kite darting among crosswinds, this way and that. Then when you realise your state, you refocus and reel yourself back to the present moment.

Likewise from time to time you respond to what life throws at you by being upset or absent-minded. It could be an indication of a transition. Breaks in studies, time between jobs, adjusting to a baby, or phases of your children's lives all can leave you in a whirl. Sometimes it seems as though difficult people or situations present themselves frequently and you feel overwhelmed or inadequate. Being ungrounded can pass or can accumulate with a sense of lack of control.

Most important is how you feel. You might be drained of physical or emotional energy, or find yourself highly sensitive, especially to other people's energy or moods. You might feel irritable, scattered, or lightheaded. What about when you overreact or lose your temper at the wrong person? These are signs of not being grounded.

## HERE ARE SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.

**PHYSICALLY UNWELL.** One of the first questions to ask yourself is, how am I physically? Injuries, illness, or chronic conditions impact emotional and spiritual balance.

**AFFECTED BY THE WEATHER.** As simple as it seems, too much wind, heat, rain, or dampness unsettles you. It's cliché to talk about the weather, but it is an influence when it is extreme.

**CONFUSED.** You can feel disoriented when you receive shocking news, not enough or mixed information, or when you can't quite catch what someone is telling you.

**SHAKEN-UP.** Big events naturally disturb you, whether it's directly about you or someone close you. These include health matters, moving, changes in work, relationship issues, or an accident. Even small things, such as someone being discourteous, can accumulate.

**PRESSURED.** You can become distressed when people want things from you. Obligations, money matters, or even someone pushing you to agree with them can leave you feeling squeezed.

**TOO MUCH IN THE HEAD.** When your focus is on your mind you can become un-present. This means you're dwelling on issues in your life, or things that happened in the past. Maybe you're fantasizing what could happen in the future or how you can avoid something from happening. You might be worried about someone or worried about yourself.

**TOO MUCH IN FEELING.** Do you get caught in your own emotional energy? Are you a person who fuels anger? Do you worry or take on sorrow and pain? Anything can trigger intense emotion and leave you trembling.

**IN CONSTANT MOTION.** Busyness, rushing, and being late stir up your entire being. How about when

you realise you've arrived at your destination and don't remember driving there?

## OBSERVE YOURSELF

Self-observation is fundamental in grounding. The object is to become more conscious of yourself. This includes your actions as well as your thoughts and feelings. Voice out loud what's going on, such as, 'I can't slow down.' 'I am worrying.' 'I want someone with me all the time.' 'I feel anxious.' 'I am having imaginary conversations.'

This is observing yourself: watching your thoughts and actions as though you are a documentary camera. It's important to not judge yourself when you identify these tendencies. Just watch. Bring your focus away from your mind and on your environment or on your body. Become present. Acknowledge that you'll be able to solve your problem or situation, and that clarity will arise. Ground yourself first.

## TECHNIQUES FOR GROUNDING

**DO SOME YOGA.** If you're not a regular, now's the time to find a yoga class. Yoga postures are designed to help you become mindful of your body and to ground you. The sun salute sequence begins with the mountain pose, designed to plant your feet firmly on the ground. Other grounding postures have names such as warrior, bridge, plank, and plow.

**STICK TO THE TRUTH.** Nothing affects the state of being grounded more than focusing on what-ifs or what-could-have-beens. When you receive information that jars you, first ask, 'Is it true?' Then confirm that it actually is true, not yours or someone else's impression. Notice if you are in an automatic reaction rather than responding to what is true. When making decisions, rely on facts.

**REPEAT A MANTRA.** Mantra repetition generates a sense of calm steadiness. You may already have a favourite mantra, you can try a

Sanskrit mantra, or use an English mantra, such as 'I let go'. You might want to invoke a quality you'd like right now, such as "I invoke strength," or "I'm open to courage." If your mind is too flighty to focus on a mantra, that's okay. Try it anyway. When you repeat a mantra out loud, it's easier to stick with it than when you say it in your mind. Even 108 repetitions or a few minutes of mantra is grounding.

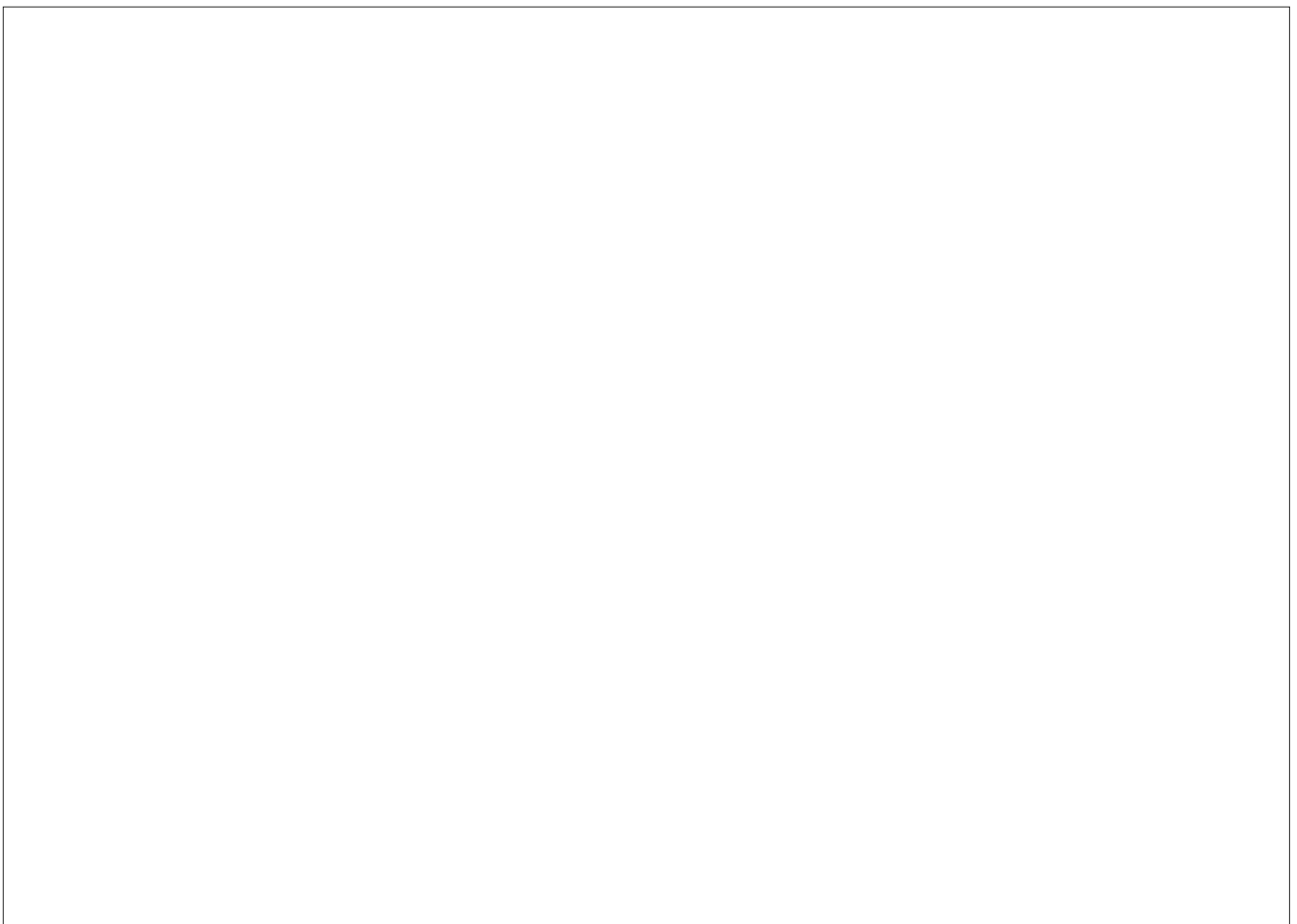
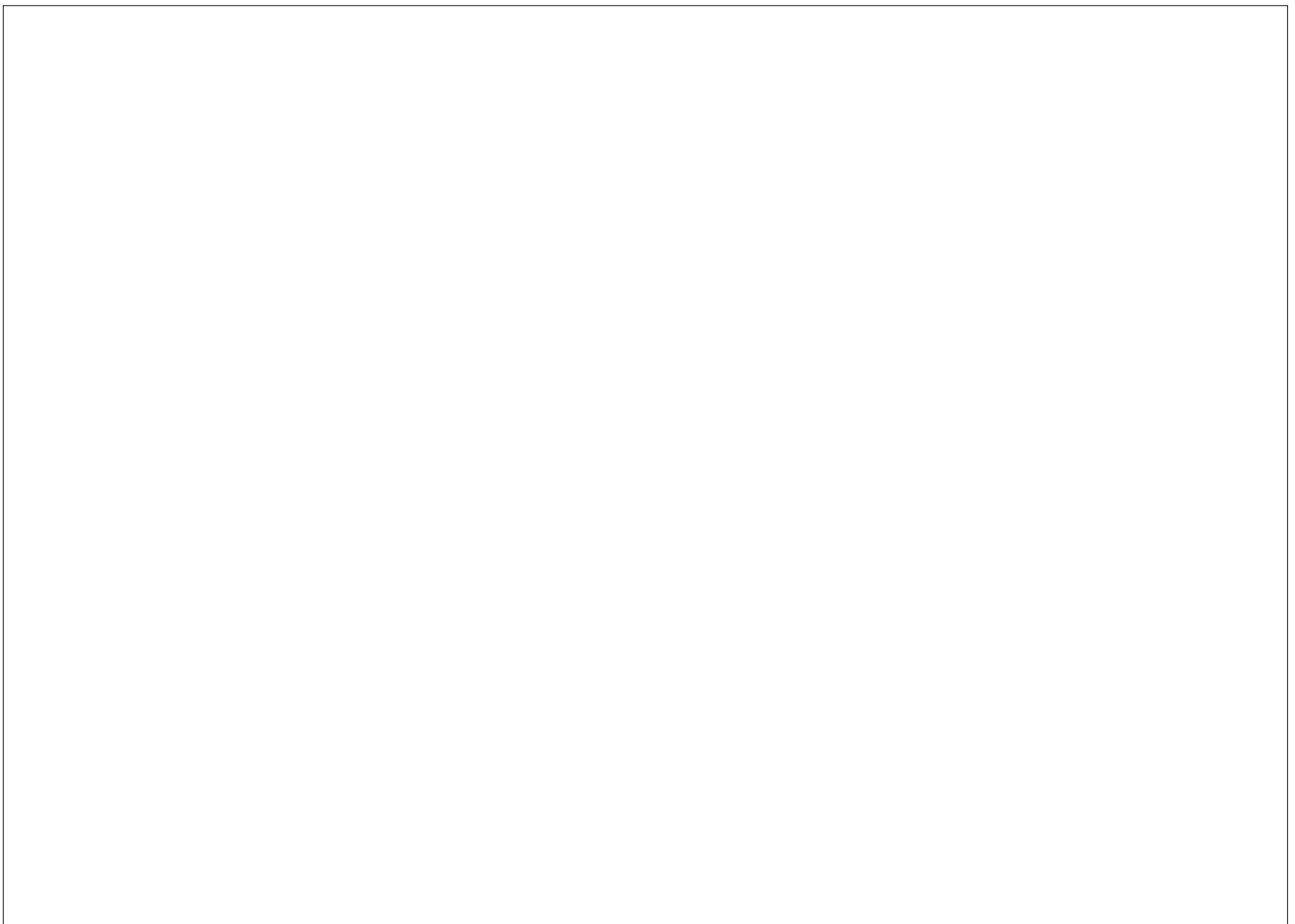
**MEDITATE.** Meditation Is a well-accepted grounding technique. But it can be hard to sit for meditation when your mind is aggravated or you are battling the tendency to get up and do things. If you take the time to simply sit, you will find that the aggravations settle down. Try letting go of whatever it is you are struggling with. Release yourself into the stream of the breath.

**USE THE BREATH.** You ground yourself simply by focusing on the breath. Watch the body automatically respond to breathing itself. When your mind drifts, bring your attention back to the breath.

**FOCUS ON AN OBJECT.** Pick up something you can handle. It can be a stone or leaf, or a ceramic, wood or brass figure. Look at the object and find its colours. Feel its textures.

## GROUNDING IN THE HERE AND NOW

Most likely you already have techniques of grounding that you have developed over time. It's always helpful to develop more. The practice of grounding and holding your asana is to place yourself in a physical and emotional state that generates steadiness and ease. The key is to notice when you have been thrown off-balance. Then, with mindfulness, relax and refocus your mind on simply being in the here and now. This moment has the most energy and is the place to feel connected to your body and your spirit. This moment is the most grounding and the most alive.



## Quick grounding for distress

Virtually any experience can give you a shock, for example, someone exhibiting intense anger, a falling object, accidents and near accidents, or information that distresses you. You may need to decide to do or say something. You can feel shaky or short-tempered. Your mind tends to replay the event or conversation and draw your attention to thinking itself. You might chastise yourself that you could have done something differently, or you might want to blame. Perhaps you become fretful about the immediate or long-term future. It's as though the outside world doesn't exist and you are consumed in thought and feeling. This disconnection is ungrounding; your head is 'in the clouds.' As soon as you can, take time out to ground yourself.

If you are breathing rapidly, slow the breath. Inhale three full deep breaths through the nostrils, releasing each one slowly and gently through the nostrils.

If you can, find a place where you can be alone or a bit separated from activities. Focus entirely on your body and its connection to the earth. Whether you are seated or standing, place your feet about a half a meter apart. You might even want to stamp your feet a few times so you feel the support of the ground. Swing your arms, roll your shoulders, and straighten up.

If you are very distressed, sit in a chair or directly on the floor. If you can't sit, stand against a wall with your back and legs touching its surface. If you are physically unwell, rub your arms and legs.

When you are ready to resume what you were doing, ask yourself if you need more time. You don't want to move too quickly or when you could be dizzy or spacey. That's when you could trip over something, drop whatever you are holding, or bump into things. Would you like a hot or cold drink? Do you need to go home or find a friend? What would make you feel better? Take the best care of yourself that you can.



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## Body awareness grounding

Focusing on your body is the quickest way to ground yourself. You can do this grounding anywhere – while seated, reclined, lying in bed. But you'll get the most grounding if you lie on the floor or outside on the grass or on a towel or mat placed directly on the ground.

- Become aware of sensory input. What do you see as you look around the room or your environment. Notice the shapes, colours, whether there are people or movements. What do you hear, such as sounds of music, traffic or people talking. What can you feel, such as your clothing, how you are seated, the temperature of the air or air movement. Are there particular smells you can detect, such as cooking odours or the more subtle fragrances of plants.
- Notice which parts of your body connect directly with the ground. Let these anchor you and allow yourself to feel supported.
- Watch the breath as it rises and falls at its own rhythm. If you want, you can take slower, longer breaths. As you become more aware of the body, let yourself feel connected with the earth while experiencing the continual flow of your breath.
- Place your hands on the ground. Without looking, move each of your fingers.

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## 10 Tips for Grounding Yourself

- Go outdoors. Get out of your home or office. You can begin by just sitting or standing outside. Or visit a park or botanical garden if there is one nearby. Give yourself a break and take a getaway weekend to a nature reserve.
- Get your body moving. Physical activities keep you in the body and in the moment. Try anything you fancy: stretch, jog, swim, bicycle, garden, or play tennis or bowls. Do yoga!
- Do less. If you're a busy person, some days it's important to ask yourself, "What's the least I need to do today?" Think about cutting back on scheduling commitments, do one thing at a time (rather than multitasking) and when you can, put the phone, tablet, and computer away.
- Create a routine or shake up your routine. Get up the same time every day and go to bed at the same time. Add meditation, yoga, or reading to your routine to help ground you. If you feel stuck, then make changes. Eat different foods. Contact old friends. Stop watching the same tedious TV shows.
- Be more mindful. Slow down.
- Take care of yourself. Meet a friend, take a bath, play music, or settle with a book. Withdraw if you need to replenish your energy. Get yourself comfortable. Have your back and neck supported, your legs up. Adjust so you're warm or cool. Have something to drink. Feel safe.
- Place your hands on the ground, sit on the ground, or nestle your feet into beach sand.
- Get a hobby. Do something different. If you work indoors, engage in an outdoors sport. If you like to concentrate, develop an activity that uses your hands. If you are too isolated, join a team.
- Watch your diet. Be sure to eat proper meals at appropriate times and snack on nutritious foods. Eat slowly and try to eat at the same time each day. As you ground yourself, you'll be better able to listen to what your body needs.
- Accept what's happening. Free yourself from your own judgments about people or situations. Release the past and start from now.



## Walking meditation

A fifteen-minute walking meditation can help you feel grounded. Just getting out can change your state of mind. Begin with deliberately dressing for your walk. Comfortable shoes? Hat to protect yourself from the sun, or scarf if it's a cool? You can go as quickly or slowly as you want. Most important is to develop awareness. What is the environment? Urban or suburban? What kind of trees or foliage can you see. Which gardens are the most attractive? What are the sounds of the birds? Notice your mind. Are you still caught up in your thinking? Bring your attention to the present moment. You don't necessarily have to watch your feet, but certainly feel the connection of your feet to the ground. Draw the stable energy of the earth into your body.

Notice how your body moves, and at the same time take in everything around you. If you are distracted you will immediately know as you'll have walked awhile without noticing! Ground yourself again by looking, smelling, enjoying.

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