

## Designing & Teaching a Back Care Class

The wide majority of people attend back care classes because they are either currently struggling with a back issue or have had one in the past. It's important to discern what class members are able to do.

### First Considerations:

1. First, assess if it is okay for a class member to do any yoga at all with their condition, and if so, when if the condition is current or recent (find out how recent).
  - Screen for Red Flags & If Needed, Get Students' Doctor's Permission
  - Assess student's ability to enter the class: "Let me see a position in which you are free of pain." If none exist, refer to their MD to be admitted to class.
2. It is good to establish a baseline rest position they can use any time in class as an alternative pose. Baseline Backcare Relaxation Poses: Constructive Rest Position, Side Lying (propped or unpropped), "*Shavasana Deluxe*", design an individualized most comfortable propped or unpropped resting position.
3. The next step is to discern what needs to be avoided by each class member. What are the counter-indications?
4. Then assess what would be most helpful for the condition or conditions?
5. Figure out one practice or position that would be central to alleviate, support, strengthen, balance, align, etc. for each individual's main condition. These can be woven in as possible.
6. See what elements of each category of practice of the classical practice outline below can be used with appropriate modifications, such as using props, limiting range of motion, limiting reach space, length of time in poses and positions, limiting repetitions, and so forth.

### Spanda® Yoga Classical Practice Outline

#### Categories:

1. Joint & General Limbering
2. Heating Movements & Vinyasa
3. Pelvic Centering/Abdominal Work
4. Standing
5. Balance
6. Side Bends
7. Backward Bends & Shoulder Mobility
8. Twists
9. Forward Bends & Hip Mobility
10. Inversions
11. Relaxation
12. \*Pranayama: At beginning, between standing and sitting, before meditation
13. \*\*Meditation if deemed a part of the class

## **Now Let's look at each common back issue and discern**

- **what is to be avoided**
- **what would be of benefit**

### **Incorrect Use and Misaligned Posture**

Avoid: using improper alignment, too much stretch for super tight areas

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work, balanced joint work, strengthening on weak side of joint, gently loosen what is tight, ball work, timed propping, etc.

#### **A. Strain**

A muscular tear caused by a muscle/body part being over extended beyond its range of motion.

Avoid: yoga involving the area while in acute state. Any actions that would put force through the body area, or quick movements.

Benefit: Movement in unaffected areas, Alexander Technique (correct use with ease), and if not painful: gentle alignment work, balanced joint work, gently loosen what is tight after resolution of injury, small RoM, light effort, visualization, cellular breathing, etc.

#### **B. Sprain**

An injury caused by a joint ligament being stretched beyond its capacity.

Avoid: yoga involving the area while in acute state. Any actions that would put force through the body area, or quick movements.

Benefit: Movement in unaffected areas, Alexander Technique (correct use with ease), and if not painful: gentle alignment work, balanced joint work, gently loosen what is tight after resolution of injury, small RoM, light effort, visualization, cellular breathing, etc.

#### **C. Muscle Spasm**

A muscle spasm is an intense prolonged involuntary contraction of a muscle or muscle units.

Avoid: Any actions that would put force through the body area, or quick movements.

Benefit: Circulation and gentle stretching is paramount. RoM movements that are not too fast, percussive, or big! Movement in unaffected areas, Alexander Technique (correct use with ease), gently loosening what is tight in short spurts (small time amounts) in small RoM, and light effort, systematic and other relaxation methods, diaphragmatic breathing, 2:1 breathing. Also more specifically:

- Slow easy movement and short holding 15 seconds at a time at first, does the job in helping fibers to release.
- Some activating yoga poses do the work of the muscles in spasm in its line of pull. Then the muscle releases to some degree on the way back.
- Activating antagonists if possible can produce release from spasms.
- Vinyasa movements that contract and gently lengthen 20 percent or less of capacity in smooth, sustained rhythmic actions are also very useful.

#### **D. Subluxation & Dislocation**

When bones are out of place, or out of their joint spaces this is called subluxation. Small amount = subluxation (partial dislocation)

When bone surfaces in a joint are entirely separated = dislocation

Avoid: doing yoga when either of these conditions have been diagnosed, have student get physician's permission to join class. With subluxation only, avoid weight bearing (if not a typical weight bearing structure), or do not add weight to the area, if in the spinal area, avoid all bends and twists.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and breath and alignment work with a straight back, visualization of balanced joint work, non-forceful breathing and relaxation in comfortable position, gentle supported floor propped stretches in small RoM for short spurts as possible.

### **E. Stress, Emotions & Psychological Factors**

Avoid: depending on the physical manifestation.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease), relaxation and breathing, 2:1 breathing, Alternate Nostril Breathing, autogenic training, walking meditation, Nature, Loving Kindness, So Hum, dance, art, music, humor, safe haven visualization

### **F. Herniated Vertebral Disc (Pinched Nerve Root)**

Herniated discs are when the contained nucleus pulposus escapes its fibrous covering (annulus fibrosis).

Avoid: yoga without MDs permission. Ask MD what yoga positions are okay! All movements of spine, bends and twists. Weight bearing inversions.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work with flat back, upright postures with back straight, balanced joint work, A & P if no pain during, gentle ball work, timed propping for relaxation and visualization, diaphragmatic breathing, 2:1, ANB.

### **G. Arthritis**

Osteoarthritis = degenerative joint disease occurring when cartilage cushioning the ends of bones in a joint deteriorates over time.

Avoid: using improper alignment, lack of awareness, forces through misaligned or cold joints, extreme joint flexion or extension, hyper-extension at joints.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work, elongation, eccentric muscle contraction, balanced joint work, joint limbering movements, Spanda Pawanmuktansana, gently loosen what is tight, vinyasas that is not too fast or percussive, light, gentle repetitive movement: all if no pain.

### **H. Spinal Stenosis**

A narrowing of spaces in the spine that result in pressure on the spinal cord and/or nerve roots.

Avoid: yoga without their MDs permission, and advice on what they can and cannot do. No practice in acute state.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work, 2:1, and diaphragmatic breathing, ANB, and various relaxation practices, visualization.

### **I. Piriformis Syndrome**

When the piriformis muscle causes pain, tingling and/or numbness in the buttocks and/or along the leg.

Avoid: yoga if caused by a fall or trauma. Check with MD, get permission, ask what can do.

Benefit: Alexander Technique especially correct use with ease and alignment work, gently loosen what is tight, ball work on deep 6, ball work with strap, timed propping with focus on affected area, half forward pigeon, figure four, Marichiasana, seated crescent vinyasa, chair supporting revolved twist, abdominal twist pose, etc.

And, developing strength in core, especially using agni sara.

### **J. Pregnancy**

The extra weight in the front lower body may cause back pain.

Avoid: deep arches to the low back, inversion, breath retention, arms above head backward bends, extreme twists with pelvis asymmetrical, force through pelvic in asymmetrical positions, pressure on abdomen. A lot of internal heating. Back lying past the 4<sup>th</sup> (some say 3<sup>rd</sup> month).

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work, symmetrical stretches, supported forward bends, pelvic tilts, and side lying, timed propping, etc.

### **K. Sacroiliac Joint Derangement/ Dysfunction**

Sacroiliac joint dysfunction is improper movement of the joints between the sacrum and the ilia. Pain occurs in these joints when there is either too much or too little movement.

Avoid: forces of any kind through the pelvic area, asymmetrical positions, all pain.

Benefit: Alexander Technique (correct use with ease) and alignment work, symmetrical positions, propped relaxation poses, diaphragmatic breathing, gradual strengthening and stretching for balanced use of pelvic musculature only *if no pain*.

**If you would like certification in Spanda® Yoga for Back Care please complete this assignment:**

1. Choose your population: general back care, back care for a specific issue such as back care during pregnancy, or back care for osteoarthritis, etc. from the list above.
2. Follow "First Considerations" 1-6 above. (for no. 1 just write out what you will say/do.)
3. Using the **Spanda® Yoga Classical Practice Outline**, design a 1 hour to 1 ½ hour long class for your population. If you skip any category or switch the order, give your reason. Otherwise follow the outline! Use stick figures and write in directions as needed.
4. Of the practices included in or possible to be included in this class, be prepared to teach one practice (10 min. max!) that you feel is central in benefitting your main concern, and be prepared to state why.
5. Using the course design outline of Goals, Objectives, Methods, outline a 6-week course with at least three goals in play. (You can add on more later when you teach it! ☺).
6. Include a statement concerning how you will assess success in meeting each of the three goals.