

# About Menstruation

**By Geeta S. Iyengar**

Q.1.: Which are the asanas and pranayama one should do safely during the menstruation? From DAY ONE of the menstruation begins until the menstruation ends, which may take four to seven days, one should stick to the practice of those asanas that help women keep herself healthy and that do not create an obstruction to the menstrual flow. Those asanas have to be selected which do not make her run out of energy or bring any hormonal disturbance.

The standing forward extensions - ( uttistha paschima pratana sthiti ), such as Uttanasana , Adho Mukha Svanasana , Prasarita Padottanasana , Parsvottanasana - preferably with the head supported - help during menstruation. In order to soften the abdomen one has to first do the concave back movement before going to the final posture. But those who suffer with body-ache, low blood pressure, low energy, sudden fall of their sugar level should avoid these postures. Ardha Chandrasana and Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana II help to check the heavy bleeding, back-ache and abdominal cramps. Those who suffer with lower back-pain, sciatica, slipped disc have to add these two asanas in their list. The supine asanas (supta sthiti) - such as Supta Virasana, Supta Baddhakonasana, Supta Svastikasana, Matseyasana, Supta Pagangushtasana II, (done with support of belts, bolsters and blankets), relax the muscles and nerves which are under constant stress, strain and irritation. These asanas help to relax and slow down the constantly throbbing vibrating organ so that minimum vital energy is consumed. Those who suffer from breathlessness, heaviness in the breasts, water retention, heavy bleeding, abdominal cramps, mental irritation and impulsion find these asanas very effective to reduce and get rid of those problems. The simple forward extensions (pashima pratana sthitti) - such as Adho Mukha Virasana, Adho Mukha Svastikasana, Janu Sirsasana, Triang Mukhaikapada in Paschimottatanasana, Ardha Baddha Padma in Paschimottanasana, Marichyasana, Parsva Upavisthakonasana, Adho Mukha Upavisthakonasana done restfully checks the over bleeding, soothes the abdomen and makes the throbbing brain-cells rest. These asanas help those who suffer from head-ache, backache, heavy bleeding, abdominal cramps and fatigue. The sitting asanas (upavistha sthitti) - such as Svastikasana, Virasana, Padmasana, Baddhakonasana, Upavisthakonasana, Gomukasana, Mulabandhasana etc., help to remove tension and stress. It is also a time where one can deal with knees, hamstrings, groins, ankles, toes in order to lubricate, extend and flex, so that the joints are loosened, and the swelling and pain are eradicated. When the legs are soothed by these asanas the brain too gets calmed. During the menstruation, it is time for women having arthritic pain to work on

their shoulders, elbows and wrists by practicing Parsva Baddha Hastasana, Paschim Namaskarasana, Gomukasana (arm position), and rope 1 for shoulders etc. So, those who suffer with arthritis, rheumatoid pains, swelling in the joints can give sufficient time to work in those areas, by slowly and gradually releasing and relieving the joints without being aggressive. Those who cannot do Virasana, Padmasana can put in (non-aggressive) energy here to work on the knees as there would be sufficient time, one would not be in a hurry to finish the daily schedule of practice. In order to have good organic and nervine rest one has to do Viparita Dandasana and Setubandha Sarvangasana (purva pratana sthitti) which help to energize and stimulate the brain, chest, lungs, heart and maintain hormonal balance in the glandular system. One can do Savasana , Ujjayi and Viloma pranayama in Savasana . If the menstruation is normal without giving any pain, headache, irritation, anxiety, suffocation, depression one can do Ujjayi and Viloma pranayamas in a sitting position. Among all these asanas, just to maintain health during the menstruation one should as a routine practice Supine, Forward extensions and Viparita Dandasana and Setubandha Sarvangasana and pranayama in Savasana as a short course though it normally takes one and a half to two hours.

Q.2.: Which are the asanas and pranayamas to be avoided? One should avoid Inversions (viparita sthitti) , such as Adho Mukha Vriksasana , arm-balancings like Bakasana (bhujatalan sthitti) , backward extensions (purva pratana sthitti) such as Urdhva Dhanurasana, Kapotasana and the body knottings (grantha sthitti) , such as Yoganidrasana, Ek Pada Sirsasana and abdominal contraction (udara akunchana sthitti) such as Navasana and Jathara Parivatasana . One should avoid pranayama in sitting asana. Even if done it should not be for longer than fifteen minutes. Avoid Antara and Bahaya Kumbhakas, Uddiyana and Mula Bandhas, Bhastrika, Kapalabhati and Mahamudra.

Q.3.: Which asanas are permissible for patients when they have their own programs of remedial asanas? This answer has a vast scope yet I will give some clues here. If they have spinal problems they can go for the standing asana and do for a less time in order to avoid fatigue. They have to watch how they take a proper support for their back, chest, legs and so on to work on their affected area specifically. If they have to do rope movements for their shoulder neck, back, they have to do with support. The lateral twists (parivrtta sthitti) such as Bharadvajasana, Marichyasana can be done since the abdomen is not compressed. In the rest of the twistings undue pressure may be invited which may cause pressure on their ovaries, uterus, and vagina. Therefore, one should avoid such asanas. Other asanas enlisted for menses can be practiced provided they are not contra-indicating for their problems.

Q.4.: Why shouldn't we do inversions (viparita sthitti) during the

period? During menstruation if one does inversions the blood flow will be arrested. Those who tried to do out of enthusiasm or callousness will have noticed that the flow stops abruptly. This is certainly not good for health since it may lead to fibroids, cysts, endometriosis and cancer, damaging the system. According to ayurveda, what ever has to be thrown out should be thrown out and not retained or held in. You cannot hold urine, feces, phlegm, mucus etc, inside as they are substances that have to be thrown out. These are called as mala - the waste, which need to be excreted. If they are retained within they invite all diseases. During menstruation one has to lessen physical exertion including walking, dancing or heavy house-hold work. The body demands rest and relaxation and one needs to provide that. The inversions have their own characteristics. This category of asana arrest the menstrual flow and when done during pregnancy they hold the foetus safely and healthily. For those who have frequent miscarriage these asanas prove to be a boon. Those who prolong their periods for more than fifteen days, it is permissible for them to begin to do the inversions after twelve days though they have continuous flow. The inversions will arrest the bleeding. Obviously one has to know the cause behind such prolonged and heavy flows and treat that disease with other asanas during the days of non-period. Yet, that the flow can be checked is a fact. If a woman gets periods during ovulation, the inversions are administered like medicine. After the menstrual cycle gets over begin the practice of asanas with inversions, as they are great healers as far as the reproductive system is concerned. They quickly bring a hormonal balance. If this background, as far as the effects of inversions are concerned are known, one need not doubt about their omission during the periods. Still, due to obstinacy and rigidity, if one forces oneself to do one may have to pay heavily later if not immediately.

Q.5.: Is it safe to do inversions after the third day, during ones own practice and on organized "yoga days"? The flow has to stop completely. The question is not of three days or four days. The flow has to come to a cessation. Whether it is a yoga day or an intensive course with any teacher or convention, you have to protect your health. As soon as the flow stops, begin with the practice of inversions. Do not go suddenly for standing poses, back-bendings, balancings etc,. Remember that you have just delivered the unborn baby, since the menstruation is called as the funeral of the unborn baby.

The problem is not of the third day or the fourth day. Do not count the days! If the flow is continuing it is harmful to attempt and therefore to stay as well. But if the flow has stopped, it's a blessing since one has to practice the same after the menstruation. Whether it is the beginning or end of menses, one should not do inversions is the fact. Some women do not get discharge from the very

beginning. They get spotting for a couple of days, then the real flow begins. Here it will be wrong to do inversions since this scanty flow will be further prolonged before beginning with the main flow days. If the flow has already begun it will be arrested because of the attempted inversion. If it is towards the end it may not be very harmful if one has to just go up to the final posture and to come back down, for the sake of the assessment, as I said here earlier. But if it is done regularly during every menses it will prove harmful as I said earlier. This is a very subjective question.

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