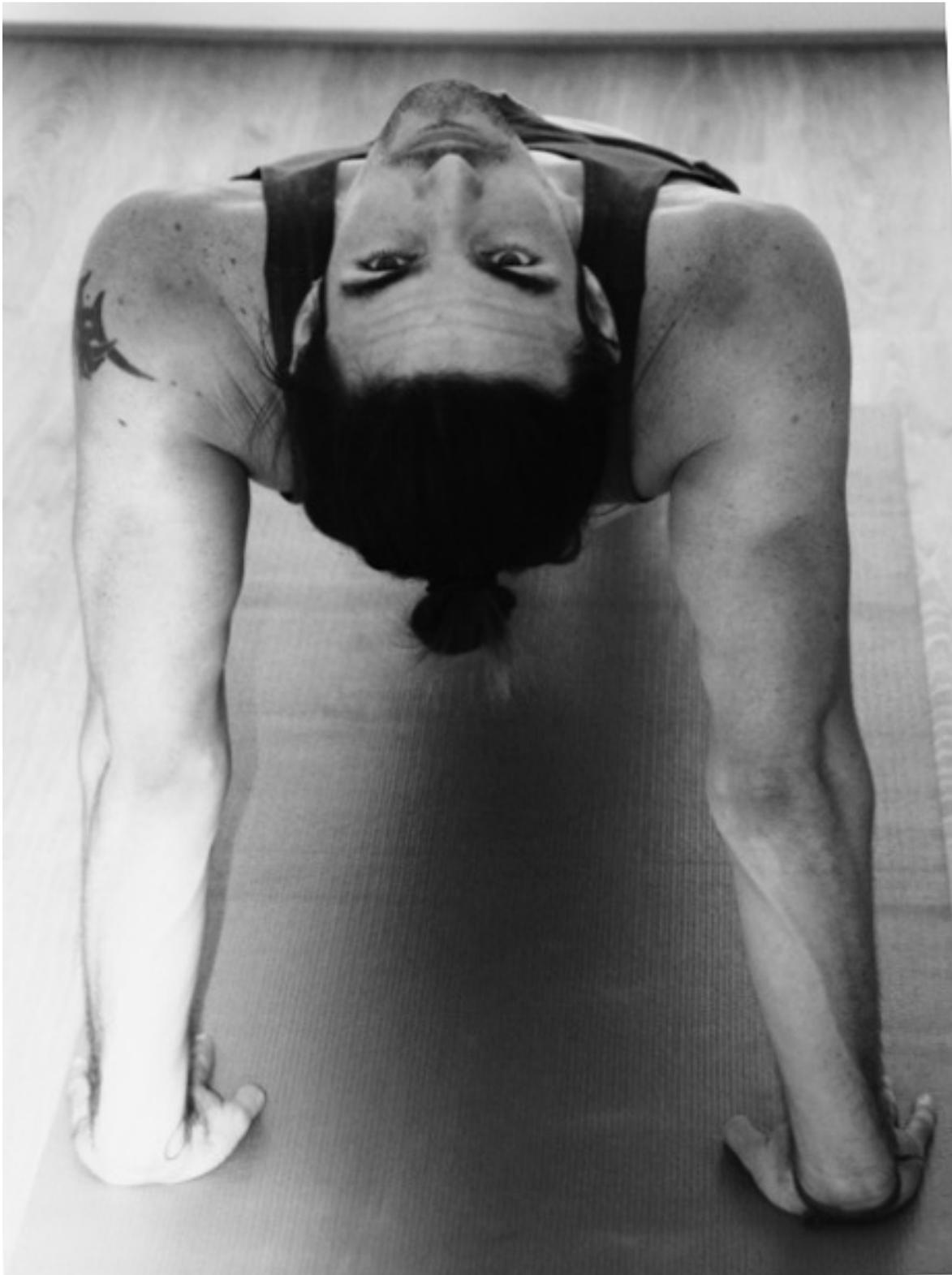


Hi James.

I wondered whether you might be able to help me with something. I've had a couple of students having problems with Purvottanasana - Western Stretch. One says it's very painful for her wrists and that she has Osteoarthritis in her wrists. Another lady tells me it's very painful in the top of her leg in her leg bone & in the hip joint. Could you give me some advice to assist those who are struggling with this posture?



Dear L,

Regarding Purvottanasana: To help your student develop strength and flexibility in her wrists, start with kneeling (hands under the shoulders and knees under the hips) and applying Hasta Bandha, so she learns to use this technique to activate the muscles in the wrist and forearm in order to support the wrists. Make sure she actually understands Hasta Bandha by looking to see if she activates the muscles. No muscles, no support. Once she can activate Hasta Bandha in a kneeling position, then check out her shoulder girdle flexibility. If she is tight across the shoulders, it will be challenging for her to keep open when leaning back on the hands. Open shoulders are essential in Purvottanasana in order to activate Hasta Bandha. If her shoulders are collapsing then most likely her hands will be too, and vice versa. Add Reverse Prayer position (hands in prayer position behind her back) to her homework.

We never work in pain, but there will be discomfort when opening tight areas of the body. There is also going to be discomfort with osteoarthritis. My hip replacement surgeon, Dr Paul Muscio, says that people must move their joints in osteoarthritis, otherwise they seize up and with this lack of mobility, their muscles atrophy and there is a downwards spiral to even less functionality. A temporary modification in Purvottanasana is to have her place the heel of her hands on purple blocks. This will lessen the pressure on her wrists and allow her to work the hip part of the pose. Make sure she is steady and doesn't slip off the blocks. Make sure you also teach Co-Activation and Spiralic Action in the arms. If she does not activate the buttocks when lifting her hips, then there will be more weight and pressure on the wrists.

Regarding the second student with leg and hip joint pain in Purvottanasana, she probably needs to be assessed by a doctor as it makes me think she could be up for a hip replacement. To open her hip flexors, get her to do Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose), but focus on the lunge, in order to stretch out the hip flexors. Remember to teach Reciprocal Inhibition - buttock muscles contracted in order to release the hip flexors. Don't worry about the twisting aspect of this pose, until she can get into the lunge. Purvottanasana requires strong and flexible wrists, support through the arms, an open chest and hip flexors, plus toned and functioning buttocks. Students have to be carefully eased into this posture with clear guidelines on the techniques. In Knoff Yoga we educate.

I recommend you speak to these students and book them into at least one private class with you, preferably more. Make sure they bring a camera and take photos of everything, so they can see what they are doing (and not doing) and to encourage home practice. For all of your other students, use Surya Namaskar as the vehicle to bring the above techniques into play. Sun Salutations look very simple and basic, but they contain the essence of many of the techniques required to progress in the other postures as well. My best wishes to you and your yoga business.