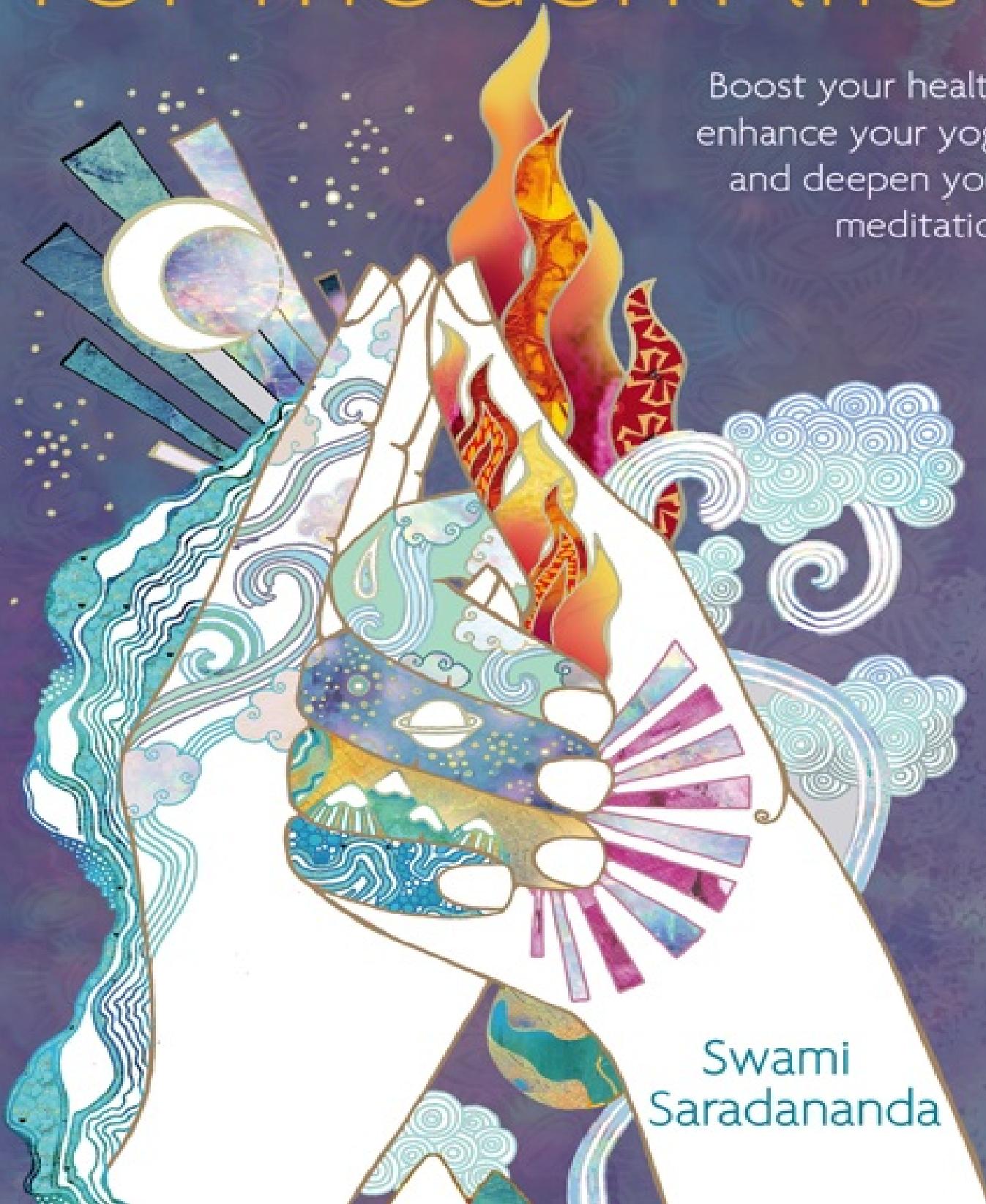


MUDRAS

for modern life

Boost your health,
enhance your yoga
and deepen your
meditation



Swami
Saradananda

Swami Saradananda

MUDRAS for modern life

BOOST YOUR HEALTH, ENHANCE YOUR YOGA
AND DEEPEN YOUR MEDITATION



WATKINS
Sharing Wisdom Since
1893

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the many students who have inspired and goaded me to look more deeply and to go further in both my own personal practice and in my teaching.

**‘OM *sa-ha naa-va-va-too*
Sa-ha nau bhun-ak-too
Sa-ha veer-yam ka-ra-vaa-va-hai
Tay-jas-ve-naa-va-dhee-tamas-too
Maa vid-vi shaa-va-ha’i
*OM shanti shanti shanti’***
Shanti Mantra, Katha Upanishad

‘OM. May the Divine Consciousness protect us as we play our parts as teacher and students.

May we be nourished with knowledge as we work together with vigour to understand the true meaning of the teachings.

May our learning be brilliant as we walk the path together harmoniously.

May we find new ways of communication and not quarrel with each other OM, peace, peace, peace.’



CONTENTS

Introduction

What mudras can do for you

Accessing your energy

Mudras and chakras

Mudras and the elements

Mudras and doshas

Integrating mudras into your life

1. Hand Health and Wellbeing:

Increasing flexibility and reducing stress

Power in your hands

Simple hand massage

Finger exercises

Hand exercises

Shoulder exercises

2. Fire Mudras:

Boosting inner strength and self-esteem

THUMB (SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA)

Introducing the fire mudras

Agni Mudra: Fire Gesture

Guru Mudra: Jupiter Gesture

Manipura Mudra: Solar Plexus Chakra Gesture

Linga Mudra: Mark of Siva
Surya Mudra: Sun Seal
Pushan Mudra: Giver of Good Health
Kamajayi Mudra: Victory over Excessive Desires Gesture
Ashva-ratna Mudra: Jewelled Horse Gesture
Adho-mukha Mudra: Downward-facing Gesture
Shankha Mudra: Conch Shell Gesture
Pitta-pacifying Mudra: Excess Heat-reducing Gesture
Pitta-energizing Mudra: Blues-banishing Gesture
Dhyana Mudra: Meditation Gesture

3. Air Mudras:

Encouraging freedom, joy and stress relief

INDEX FINGER (HEART CHAKRA)

Introducing the air mudras

Vayu Mudra: Air Gesture

Anahata Mudra: Heart Chakra Gesture

Padma Mudra: Lotus Gesture

Hridaya Mudra: Compassionate Heart Gesture

Chin Mudra: Unrestricted Consciousness Gesture

Vyana Mudra: Expansive Prana Gesture

Garuda Mudra: Eagle Gesture

Granthita Mudra: Knot Gesture

Pranāpana Mudra: Taking In and Throwing Out Gesture

Kshepana Mudra: Letting Go Gesture

4. Ether Mudras:

Enhancing inner peace, self-expression and creativity

MIDDLE FINGER (THROAT CHAKRA)

Introducing the ether mudras

Akasha Mudra: Touching the Void Gesture
Shunya Mudra: Silence of the Void Gesture
Vishuddha Mudra: Throat Chakra Gesture
Udana Mudra: Upward-flying Energy Gesture
Bhramara Mudra: Humming Bee Gesture
Shanmukhi Mudra: Tuning into Silence Gesture
Bhuchari Mudra: Gazing into the Void Gesture
Nivedana Mudra: Deep Listening Gesture
Kaleshwara Mudra: Lord of Time Gesture
Sankalpa Mudra: Practice Intention Gesture
Matangi Mudra: Guardian of Wisdom Gesture
Kubera Mudra: Guardian of Wealth Gesture
Surabhi Mudra: Wish-fulfilment Gesture
Nadānasudhana: Four Mudras in a Chanting Practice

5. Earth Mudras: Encouraging stability and grounding

RING FINGER (ROOT CHAKRA)

Introducing the earth mudras

Prithivi Mudra: Earth Gesture
Bhumi-sparsha Mudra: Earth Witness Gesture
Muladhara Mudra: Root Chakra Gesture
Jnana Mudra: Wisdom Gesture
Bhu Mudra: Touching the Earth Gesture
Prana Mudra: Life-force Gesture
Apāna Mudra: Cleansing-energy Gesture
Sthira Mudra: Steady and Stable Gesture
Sukham Mudra: Stress-relief Gesture
Vishnu Mudra: Universal Balance Gesture
Kali Mudra: Black Goddess Gesture

6. Water Mudras:

Enhancing health and equipping you to move forward

LITTLE FINGER (SACRAL CHAKRA)

Introducing the water mudras

Varuna Mudra: Water-balancing Gesture

Jalodar-nāshak Mudra: Water-reducing Gesture

Swadhisthana Mudra: Sacral Chakra Gesture

Mahatrika Mudra: Great Triangle Gesture

Shakti Mudra: Essence of Power Gesture

Kilaka Mudra: Key to Good Health Gesture

Karana Mudra: instrument Gesture

Kurma Mudra: Tortoise Gesture

Yoni Mudra: Seal of the Goddess

Māsiki Mudra: Monthly-relief Gesture

Matsya Mudra: Fish Gesture

Makara Mudra: Crocodile Gesture

7. Mind Mudras:

Increasing concentration and clarity

PALM OF THE HAND (THIRD EYE)

Introducing the mind mudras

Activating the Palm Chakras: Sensitizing the Hands

Ajna Mudra: Brow Chakra Gesture

Nirvana Mudra: Liberation Gesture

Bhairava Mudra: Fierce Determination Gesture

Ganesha Mudra: Remover of Obstacles

Namaskar Mudra: My Essence Meets Your Essence Gesture

Anjali Mudra: Gesture of Offering

Abhaya Mudra: Have No Fear Gesture

Varada Mudra: Forgiveness Gesture

Handshake as Mudra: Shared Gesture

Hakini Mudra: Problem-solving Gesture

Samasti Mudra: Integrating Brain Hemispheres Gesture

Maha-shirsha Mudra: Overactive Mind Relief Gesture

Mandala Mudra: Circle Universe Gesture

Mushti Mudra: Closed-fist Gesture

8. Mudra Routines:

Building optimal wellbeing

Daily routine for wellbeing

Headaches and migraines

Digestive problems

Menstrual problems

Asthma and skin disorders

Hay fever and allergies

Arthritis and stiff joints

Stress

Anger

Jet lag

Insomnia

Chronic fatigue

Glossary

Resources

Acknowledgments

INTRODUCTION



I welcome you to this book with a hand gesture of greeting, known in the Indian tradition as ‘Namaste’ – this translates as ‘my essence greets your essence’. This book is all about such mudras: hand gestures used to strengthen and purify mind, body and psyche by ensuring the free flow of natural healing energy, or *prana*, around your body to bring about radiant health and inner peace.

Hand gestures are used in many meditation traditions and are instruments of healing in a number of therapeutic systems. These include reflexology (massage using reflex points on the hands and feet), kinesiology (muscle-testing and natural healing techniques) as well as India’s traditional system of healing, Ayurveda. This book is based mainly on the Indian use of mudras: these simple yet powerful gestures are also an essential practice in hatha yoga and Indian dance, art and ritual. However, people have been depicted making similar hand gestures across the globe and throughout history: on Egyptian pyramids, Sumerian tablets and Mayan statues, in Hebrew inscriptions and Classical art.

Unlike yoga postures and breathing exercises, which are best learned from a teacher, mudras are easy to pick up and totally safe to practise by yourself. Absolutely anyone can benefit, from children with learning disabilities to older people with limited movement. If you have little spare time, mudras make the perfect form of exercise: you can practise while waiting for a bus, taking a break

from the computer or watching TV.

Mudras are so valuable because they enhance overall wellbeing and allow you to tap into hidden energy reserves. Practice brings physical benefits, such as increased mobility and balance, and mental benefits, such as improved concentration. Emotionally, mudras encourage forgiveness and compassion. As yoga and meditation tools, they develop deep calm and inner peace. This book offers practical techniques to achieve all this – and all you need is your hands.

HOW I DISCOVERED MUDRAS

Through my experimentation, observation and extensive teaching of yoga, I've found that the body is a powerful antenna that is continually receiving and transmitting the subtle energy known as prana.

Most people think of hatha yoga as physical exercises: *asanas*. But it has developed many other techniques for channelling prana efficiently and effectively. There are breathing exercises (*pranayama*), cleansing exercises (*kriyas*), energy ‘locks’ (*bandhas*) and ‘seals’ (mudras), as well as meditation and ethical teachings. Hatha yoga begins with the physical body, but with practice you become aware of a more subtle movement of energy that is not physical in nature.

As I got more deeply into my asana practice, I became aware that I was doing something more than just moving my body. Often I felt as though my movement was just a flow of energy. As I became aware of the prana, I started to find ways to direct and seal it into specific channels. This was the start of my work with mudras, which enabled me to fine-tune and intensify many of the benefits of my asana practice.

I started practising yoga in 1967, long before it was fashionable, and became a yoga teacher in 1975. I found I have an aptitude for observation and research, and the ability to communicate ancient teachings in everyday language. Over the years, I've taught many classes and trained many teachers. Much of what I observed, including my findings on mudras, has gone into this book.

In 2003, when I began training yoga instructors in the teaching of meditation, started experimenting with mudras on a wider scale. Each week, I asked the student teachers to practise a different mudra and report back on its energetic values. Many of their findings are contained in this book. I hope it will inspire you, too, to try using mudras and experience for yourself how this ancient practice can help you to live a more peaceful and happy life right now.

OM shanti – with wishes for peace,

Swami Saradananda

Swami Saradananda

WHAT MUDRAS CAN DO FOR YOU

After your face, no part of your body is quite as expressive as your hands. With the flexibility to make a wide range of gestures and subtle movements, your hands can convey complicated thoughts and profound feelings, helping you to communicate and connect with other people.

Modern scientific research has established that moving different parts of your hands activates different areas of your brain. Since ancient times, Indian philosophy has taught that how the fingers move and touch each other influences the flow of prana, the life-giving energy within the body (see [pages 12–13](#)), and yogis have used precise hand and finger gestures – mudras – to channel prana for physical and mental healing and spiritual enlightenment.

This book draws on this ancient Indian science, offering more than 70 mudras suited to modern life. There are mudras to boost mental acuity and calm you down; mudras for letting off steam and connecting to others; mudras to energize or relax; and mudras to ease symptoms of common ailments. All are effective, easy to perform, and safe and simple to incorporate into your everyday routine.

THE BENEFITS OF MUDRAS

Regular practice of mudras can help to:

- ensure prana (subtle energy) moves freely to keep your body and mind well balanced and healthy
- increase flexibility and mobility of your hands, wrists, arms and shoulders
- improve technique if you play an instrument or hand-intensive sport
- boost mental acuity and concentration
- ease symptoms of common ailments
- overcome emotional difficulties, from anger to grief

- purge your sub-conscious mind of negativity
- develop a regular meditation practice
- encourage inner peace and a sense of oneness with the universe.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Whether you are a complete beginner or already have a yoga or meditation practice, you will find it easy to practise the mudras in this book.

[Chapter 1](#) offers flexibility exercises for your fingers and wrists, arms and shoulders, which can be used to build strength and suppleness or as a warm-up for mudra practice. They are especially useful if you work at a computer or your hands are a bit stiff.

The six chapters ([Chapters 2–7](#)) at the heart of this book focus on mudras connected to each of the five fingers and the palm. Each finger connects to the energy of one of the five elements of Indian philosophy (see [pages 16–17](#)) while the palm relates to the mind, so the chapters in turn focus on fire, air, ether, earth, water and mind mudras. Each group of mudras has a particular life benefit, from greater self-esteem and stress-relief to increased creativity, stability, health and concentration.

In each mudra profile there is an introduction to help you choose why and when to practise, plus simple instructions for finger placement and notes on the effects of the gesture and how it works. Each mudra has an extra practical feature: an idea for incorporating the mudra into a yoga, meditation or breathing practice, for example, or an accompanying chant or visualization to enhance its effects.

Start with any mudras that appeal to you or feel easy. You might choose one for its effect on body and mind, or because of its link to a certain time of day or recommended practice position. On [pages 151–4](#) you will find a basic daily routine of seven mudras, plus suggested sequences to ease common health complaints, from allergies to headaches.

As with anything, to reap the most benefit from mudras, you need to practise regularly (daily is best). Some mudras show immediate effects – Bhairava Mudra ([page 136](#)) instantly calms the mind – but most work best over a period of time.

ACCESSING YOUR ENERGY

The Sanskrit word prana is often translated as ‘life-force’, ‘vital energy’ or ‘vital air’. Yoga philosophy teaches that this subtle energy animates and moves through your *pranamaya kosha*, or aura – an ‘etheric double’ of your physical body. Prana is not a physical energy, and is quite different from the electrical current that moves through your nervous system. This form of bio-energy is much more subtle.

Prana flows through the pranamaya kosha or bio-energy field in subtle channels known to yogis as *nadis*. Acupuncturists and shiatsu practitioners refer to these channels as ‘meridians’. In Sanskrit, the word nadi means a riverbed containing water or the channel through which a river flows. Yoga texts claim that the subtle wiring system in your pranamaya kosha is made up of 72,000 nadis. As prana flows through these nadis it reaches every part of your body: this is the force that ensures your body stays well balanced and healthy.

It’s perhaps easiest to understand the concepts of nadis and prana by visualizing the nadis as the roads within a highway system that enable traffic (prana) to move smoothly and freely. When prana is free-flowing, the body stays vibrantly healthy. However, at times the nadis become blocked and the flow of prana is interrupted. A whole region maybe cut off by a blockage. As a result, that part of the body is weakened, and may become susceptible to ailments – or it may even atrophy or become paralysed.

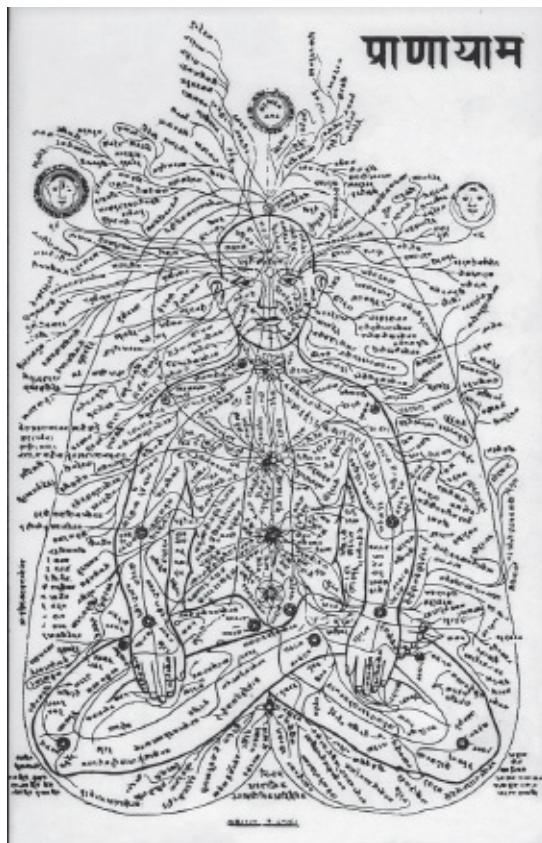
For your body to be exceptionally healthy, it is important to break up these ‘traffic jams’ and stimulate the prana to flow freely through your nadis again, bringing natural healing energy to every area. You can do this by practising yoga postures, breathing exercises and mudras.

Why are mudras so effective at clearing energetic blockages? Most of the major nadis either start or finish in your hands or feet. So working with your hands is a particularly effective way of cleansing the subtle channels of impurities, removing obstructions and directing the prana in healthier directions. When you position the fingers in particular ways, you affect the flow of prana by working with the chakras and elements linked with each finger (see [pages 14–19](#)), redirecting its healing force wherever it is needed to re-establish balance, which eases symptoms.

Sometimes traffic needs to be temporarily diverted on the pranic highway

so repairs can be made to the nadi network. Mudras help here, too, acting like switches that can create or cut the flow of prana to various parts of your body; as you position your fingers in different ways you can seal off certain nadis and instead channel prana to weaker regions of your body to strengthen and stimulate them. The Sanskrit word mudra can be translated as ‘seal’. Alternatively, you might wish to direct prana away from areas where there is an excessive concentration of it. The instructions for practising the individual mudras in [chapters 2–7](#) explain how to do this and why it works.

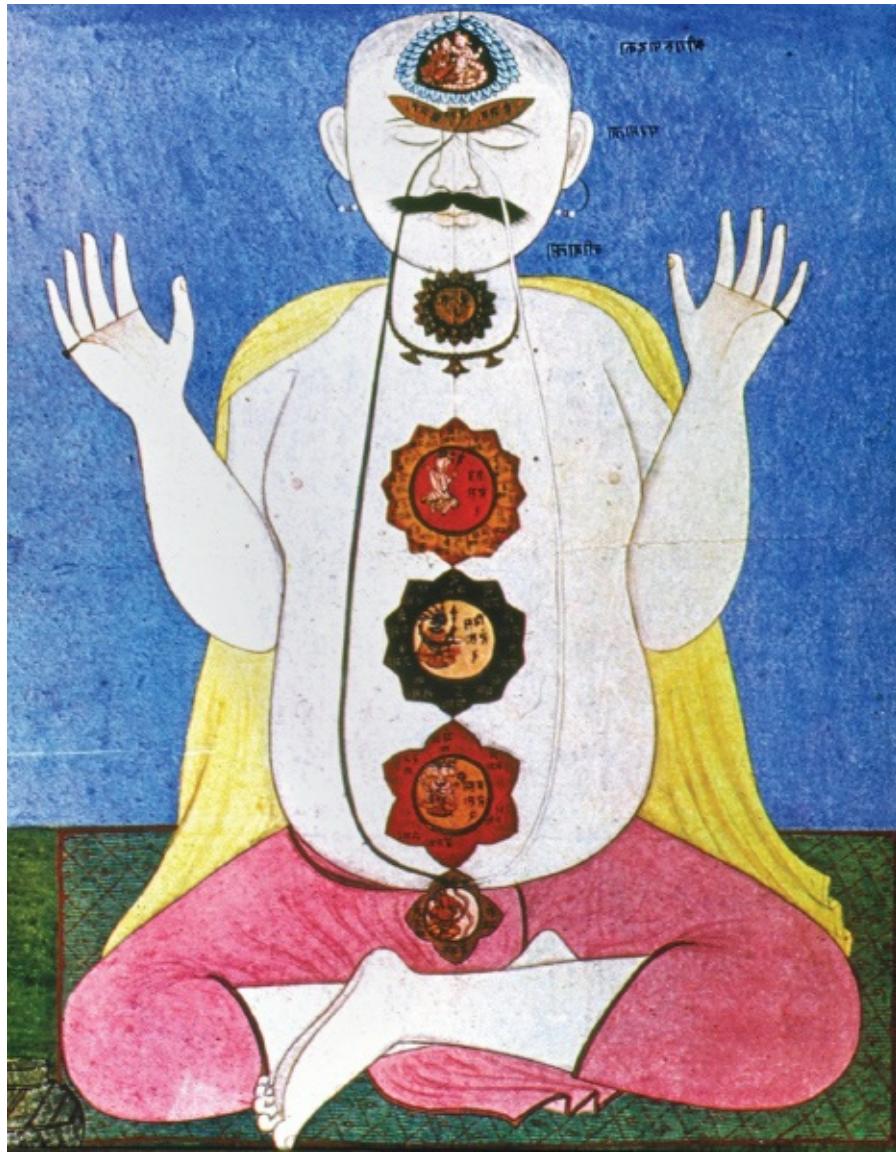
But above all, by practising the mudras in this book, you allow yourself to become a clear channel for prana to flow through, enhancing wellbeing and ensuring peace of mind.



Prana is vital subtle energy, which flows through the physical body although it is not visible. It travels through channels that yogis call ‘nadis’.

MUDRAS AND CHAKRAS

If we liken the nadis in the energetic body to the roads in a highway system, we can imagine what happens at a junction, where two or more roads meet or cross. A junction is more likely to become congested or blocked than a straight, uninterrupted stretch of highway. The more roads that come together, the more likelihood there is of a traffic jam developing. And the larger the roads, the larger the traffic jam at busy times. There are seven important crossing points for nadis in the energetic body, where the major nadis come together. These large energy hubs are referred to as chakras in the Indian tradition – the Sanskrit word translates as ‘wheel’. These vibrant centres of energy work as antennae, receiving, storing, transforming and transmitting prana. Each chakra governs the energy of the region of your body in which it is located; they are also strongly related to the senses, governing the way you take in information from the world and process it, as well as the mode and quality of the energy you give out.



Seven major chakras are aligned with the body's spine: the root, sacral, solar plexus, heart, throat, brow and crown chakras.

The seven main chakras are located in the region of your spine, moving up from the base of your body to your lower abdomen, solar plexus, heart, throat, forehead and finally the crown of your head. There are less busy energy junctions, too, where fewer roads meet, known as 'marma points' in the Indian tradition, and as acupressure or acupuncture points in Traditional Chinese Medicine. And there are a number of minor chakras, including those in the palms of your hands.

Although considered minor chakras, the hand chakras are essential energetic antennae. Linked to the heart chakra, they transmit a flow of healing

energy out from the heart centre. Without your hand chakras you would have difficulty in receiving information from the world and sending energy outward, for example in extending feelings of compassion or reaching out to others. By stimulating these chakras (see [pages 132–3](#)) you can better feel the connection between your hands and your heart and become more sensitive to the healing energy of your heart chakra.

As with any junction, traffic flow is more free and easy when there are no jams or breakdowns. The same is true with the chakras: when they are open, clean and operating smoothly, physical health and mental wellbeing are assured in the areas of the body and senses governed by those particular chakras.

There are various ways to keep your chakras clean, balanced and fully functional, including yoga and meditation practice. But one of the easiest and most effective ways to rid these energy junctions of blockages and ensure free-flowing prana is to practise mudras. By doing this you awaken and start directing the natural healing energies in your hands.

MUDRAS AND THE ELEMENTS

In the Indian tradition, each finger relates to the energy of one of the five ‘great elements’ (*maha-bhootas*): the thumb to fire (matter in radiant form), the index finger to air (matter in gaseous form), the middle finger to ether (space), the ring finger to earth (solid matter) and the little finger to water (liquids). The palm of the hand relates to the mind. Mudras that predominantly use certain parts of the hands therefore have different sets of physical, emotional and spiritual benefits, depending on which elemental energies and chakras are most affected in that hand position.

Some mudras involve only one hand, others engage both hands in symmetrical gestures, and others still have each hand in a different position, but most mudras are formed by using your thumb (fire element) to lightly stimulate one or more of the other elements as you touch the tip, nail, knuckle or base of a finger. These general rules detail how each element is affected by finger positioning.

THE FIVE BASIC FINGER POSITIONS



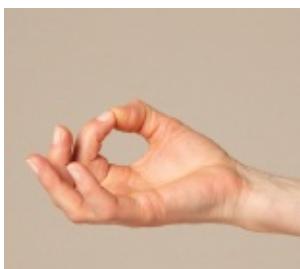
Joining your thumb tip to a finger tip encourages stability in the linked element.



Touching the back of a finger (nail or knuckle) decreases the linked element's influence.



Bringing your thumb to the base of any finger stimulates the linked element.



When your palm faces upward, you open to receive inspiration and energy.



When your palm faces downward, you become more grounded.

HOW THE FINGERS RELATE TO THE ELEMENTS AND THE CHAKRAS

This chart details the connections between the parts of the hand, the elements and the chakras. When the elements are in balance, it is easier to maintain health and wellbeing.

PART OF THE HAND	ELEMENT	CHAKRA	PHYSICAL ASSOCIATIONS	EMOTIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
Thumb	Fire: matter in radiant form that gives heat, light – the energy that drives all other matter	Manipura or solar plexus chakra	Digestion, muscles, sense of sight	Inner strength, willpower, self-esteem, self-confidence, charisma, courage, ambition, integrity
Index finger	Air: wind, matter in gaseous form	Anahata or heart chakra	Breathing, lungs, heart and circulatory system, arms and hands, sense of touch	Freedom, joy, stress-relief, love, self-acceptance, forgiveness, compassion, gratitude
Middle finger	Ether: space, sky, akasha	Vishuddha or throat chakra	Throat, mouth, ears, hunger and thirst, weight issues, sense of hearing	Inner peace, self-expression, artistic creativity, communication
Ring finger	Earth: matter in solid form	Muladhara or root chakra	Skeletal and immune system, feet and legs, sense of smell	Stability, groundedness, security, being rooted in the present moment
Little finger	Water: matter in liquid form	Swadhisthana or sacral chakra	General wellbeing, body fluids, urinary and reproductive systems, sense of taste	Overall health, ability to move forward, letting go of what you no longer need or love, ability to be adaptive and to go with the flow
Palm	Mind	Ajna, third eye or brow centre	Overall control of senses and body	Concentration, clarity, intuition, intelligence, imagination, insight

MUDRAS AND DOSHAS

In order to better understand how mudras affect your body and mind, it is helpful to have a basic knowledge of the three Ayurvedic constitutions, or types of physical and mental make-up, known as the *doshas*. These are made up of three energetic types: *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, and Ayurveda places great emphasis on keeping them in balance.

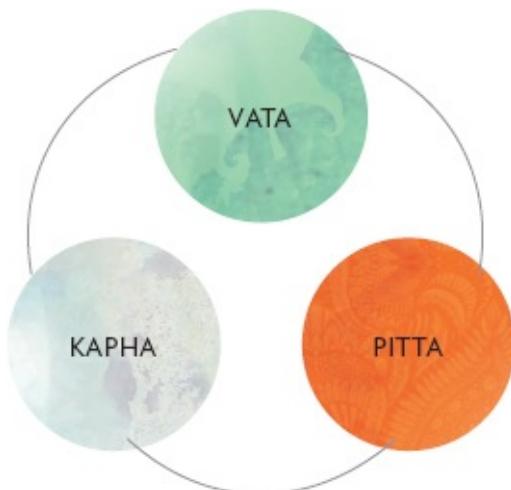
Many factors, both internal and external, disturb the balance of one or more of the doshas, including emotional and physical stress, not eating for your body type, the seasons and the weather, physical trauma, and problems with work, family and relationships. Mudras gently but powerfully counteract negative influences that cause these energies to fall out of balance and play an important part in maintaining a healthy balance of the three doshas within your body, mind and consciousness.

Vata: air and ether elements; cold and dry; this is the energy of movement.

Pitta: fire element; hot, dry qualities; this is the energy of digestion, assimilation and metabolism.

Kapha: earth and water elements; cold, wet qualities; this is the energy forming the body's structure.

THE THREE ENERGIES IN BALANCE



For optimal physical and emotional health, you need a balance within your body of the three energies – vata (air and ether), pitta (fire) and kapha (earth and water).

VATA

This is the energy of movement; it is made up of air (matter in gaseous form) and ether (space). It is constantly moving, expansive in nature, easily changeable, irregular and cold. When vata is excessive, your body tends to suffer from dryness, roughness, stiffness, joint pain, and brittle bones and teeth. You may have trouble focusing or committing to anything. Joint problems and symptoms relating to the nervous system are said to indicate an imbalance of vata.

Mudras can offer relief from symptoms in body or mind, particularly those involving the index and middle fingers. If you have a vata imbalance it's more effective to practise mudras while sitting or standing still rather than while engaged in other activities.

PITTA

The energy of digestion, assimilation and metabolism is known as pitta. It is mainly composed of the fire element and is hot and dry. Pitta generates heat in your body and regulates your temperature. When pitta is excessive, you may tend to get angry, suffer from high blood pressure, or burning sensations, sweat too much and crave spicy food. You may develop eczema, irritability, blotchy red skin, rashes and hives.

Pitta and the fire element relate to your thumb. Most mudras involve the thumbs, so other factors often become important when you use mudras to treat pitta imbalances, such as the way your thumb presses the other fingers or palm.

KAPHA

The basic energy that forms your body's structure, kapha provides the foundation for the other doshas. Kapha is made up of the water and earth elements and is cold and moist and white in nature. It is stable and tends to move very little.

When kapha is excessive, you may feel stuck in life, crave too many sweets, feel heavy, and suffer from swelling and congestion. Accompanying physical symptoms may include depression, lethargy, passivity, weight gain,

asthma, water retention and congestion.

Mudras can be very helpful for kapha imbalances, particularly those involving the ring and little fingers. Practise them alongside some gentle movement, such as yoga postures or walking.

INTEGRATING MUDRAS INTO YOUR LIFE

You can practise many of the mudras in this book anywhere at any time – walking to work, sitting at your desk, on a train (though not while driving). They are equally helpful during stressful situations and while relaxing. Each mudra entry suggests appropriate ways to add it into your daily routine.

Alternatively, you can practise mudras in a more focused way by sitting or kneeling in a meditation posture. Many benefits of mudra practice are enhanced if you build them into contemplative activities such as yoga or meditation.

PRACTISING WHILE SITTING

If you sit or kneel to practise, it is easy to drop into deep relaxation and you may feel an urge to sing with joy. There are stories of mudra practitioners experiencing involuntary, but not unpleasant, movements of their arms and bodies during a meditation session.

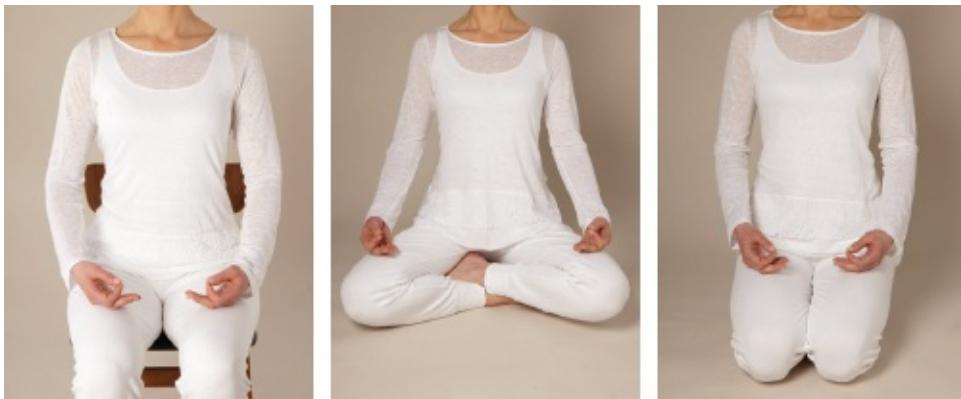
While sitting you can place your hands on your thighs or knees. This stimulates the subtle energy channels in your legs and helps balance the root (muladhara) chakra, providing a firm foundation for practice. For joined-hand mudras you may rest your hands on a small cushion or blanket in your lap.

Sitting on a chair: Use a straight-backed chair; do not sit on an upholstered chair or a bed, which tend to discourage a straight back. Keep your feet flat on the ground or on a folded blanket or mat. Relax your shoulders and lift your breastbone. Imagine that a string attached to the top of your head is supporting your weight. Without losing your connection to the seat, feel your body reaching upward, tall and steady, without effort.

Sitting with legs crossed: Sitting ‘tailor fashion’ gives your body a firm base and encourages your mind to stay centred. With regular practice, tightness in your hips lessens and the muscles of the lower back strengthen. If your knees are higher than your hips, sit on a cushion or folded blanket to lift your buttocks and relieve tension in the lower back and hips. Sit up straight, spine perpendicular to the ground. Check your head is erect, chin parallel to the floor

and shoulders unchunched.

Kneeling on your heels: Place a mat or folded blanket on the ground. Kneel on the mat with feet and knees together or slightly apart. Lower your buttocks to rest firmly on your heels. If your ankles or feet are uncomfortable, cushion them with a rolled up washcloth. Some people prefer a low meditation bench. Rest your buttocks on the bench with feet and knees together or slightly apart.



PRACTISING WHILE STANDING

Stand firmly with feet slightly apart, in line with your hips, and knees straight. Feel your bodyweight spreading evenly between both feet. If you practise while walking, you may feel lighter and notice that your step is more vigorous or bouncy.

PRACTISING WHILE LYING DOWN

Feel free to practise mudras lying down when you feel in need of deeper relaxation; where this isn't advised there is a note in the text.

FINGER CONTACT

When performing a mudra, make a light contact between thumb and fingers. Unless otherwise specified, practise with both hands simultaneously to concentrate the elemental energies.

BREATHING

Try to keep your lips gently sealed and breathe through your nose. Try placing the top of your tongue flat against the roof of your mouth. Slide your tongue back so the tip is just behind the hard ridge at the rear of your upper teeth (it can help to swallow). This position calms your mind, balances and increases your sensitivity to prana energy and connects two major nadi energy pathways (*ida* and *pingala*).



1

HAND HEALTH AND WELLBEING

INCREASING FLEXIBILITY AND REDUCING STRESS

'The final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands.'

Anne Frank

POWER IN YOUR HANDS

You use your hands constantly, but probably overlook their wellbeing. Even if you progress no further in the book than this chapter, the following pages will bring new life to your fingers, hands, arms and shoulders. And the exercises are invaluable if you sit at a desk, work at a computer, play a musical instrument or enjoy a hand-intensive sport, such as tennis, badminton, golf, cricket or baseball.

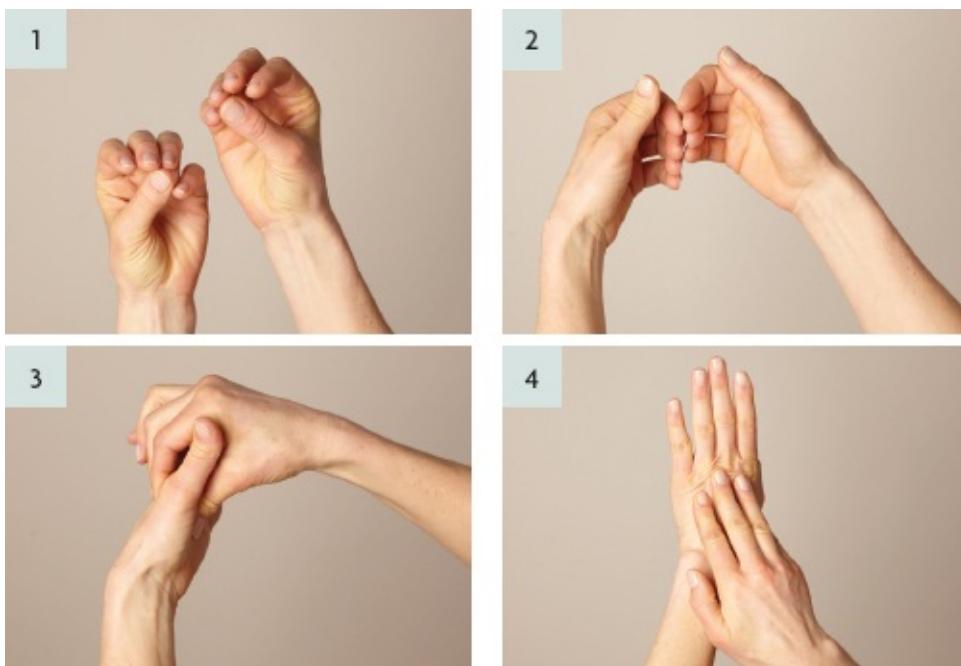
Improved hand mobility allows you to perform everyday activities with more ease, reducing the strain on your muscles and the impact on your joints. As the physical condition, range of motion and general flexibility of your fingers and hands improve, you will become more aware of their potential, and your ability to perform mudras will be enhanced. You will also be less prone to injury.

The simple exercises in this chapter warm up and increase flexibility in your fingers, hands, arms and shoulders. They are designed to enhance suppleness, dexterity and coordination and to increase the circulation of prana (see [pages 12–13](#)). You can practise them anywhere and at any point in the day, even while watching television or standing in a queue. They make especially good stress-release tools if you do repetitive work with your hands, such as at a keyboard; it is a great idea to stop every hour to move around, rest your eyes and stretch your hands. Perform the exercises in this chapter on their own, picking those you find useful, or work through them in sequence.

Begin simply, performing the exercises slowly – a relaxed, stretched muscle performs better than a tensed one. As you practise each movement, allow your mind to send energy into your hands, and become aware of each finger and every part of your hands, wrists, arms and shoulders. This makes a great preparation for mudra practice.

SIMPLE HAND MASSAGE

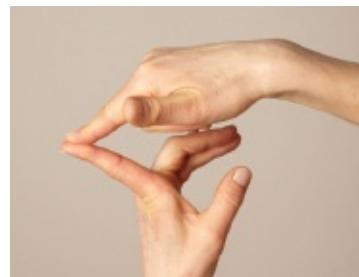
These movements help to release tension in your hands, regulate blood pressure and refresh your brain and eyes. They make a useful mini-break from keyboard work and can be used any time you would like to boost alertness.



- 1** Close your eyes and gently rub each of your thumbs against the tips of the fingers of the same hand for 1 minute. This refreshes your brain and eyes.
- 2** Loosely bend all your fingers and rub the fingernails of the two hands against each other (for up to 10 minutes daily) to stimulate mental activity and alertness.
- 3** Use the thumb and index finger of one hand to massage the webs between the fingers of your other hand. Make sure your thumb is on the palm side of your hand. Repeat on the other hand to release stress. Much of the tension in the hands is held between the fingers.
- 4** Using the tips of the index, middle and ring fingers of one hand, massage the grooves between the small bones on the back of your opposite hand for 1–2 minutes. Change hands and repeat. This helps to release tension in your hands and regulate blood pressure.

FINGER EXERCISES

Everyday movements and mudra practice become much easier if your fingers are flexible, and these exercises are devised to increase flexibility. The mudra here is the basis for all others in the book because it prepares you mentally and physically for practice. It is especially useful if you are older, tend to be a bit stiff or work at a computer.



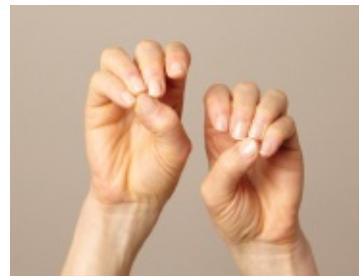
Finger Push: Using one index finger, exhale as you gently push the index finger of the opposite hand back; inhale as you release the finger. Repeat with all the fingers in turn. Then change hands and repeat the movement.



Finger Bend: Bend your fingers (not your thumbs) until each finger touches its own base. If necessary, gently assist with your opposite hand. Then bring the tip of each finger in turn to the base of your thumb, using the other hand to assist, if required.



Rhythmic Fingers: Touch the tips of the thumbs of each hand to the other hand's fingertips in turn: T-T-2 T-3 T-4. To make the exercise more effective, practise it repeating the mantra '*so-ham ham-sa*' at the same time. Then try changing the rhythm to T-1 T-3 T-1 T-2 T-1 T-4 or any other variation.



Mudra for Increased Finger Flexibility: Using both hands, bring the middle, ring and little fingers of each hand around the thumb nail of the same hand. Keep the index fingers outstretched but relaxed. Hold for 4 minutes and repeat five times daily, leaving at least 20 minutes between sessions.

HAND EXERCISES

The power of your hands is an indication of the strength of your life-force, and keeping your hands strong and flexible enhances your enjoyment of life. The clenching exercise here is useful for tennis, cricket and badminton players, golfers and people who work at keyboards – the gentle contraction and release action helps to loosen tight fingers. The Wrist Rotation relieves the tension caused by prolonged writing or keyboard work, and also suits people who have arthritis in the hands. Peacock Hands ([page 28](#)) not only maintains the flexibility of the hands, wrists and fingers, it also stimulates the solar plexus chakra and tones the digestive system.



Namaskar Bend: Bring both palms together, flat against each other with all your fingers pointing upward as in Namaskar Mudra (see [page 138](#)). Trying to drop the elbows as little as possible, push the hands and fingers to the right; hold for 2–3 seconds and then repeat to the left.



Wrist Rotation: Raise one hand and make a loose fist with your thumb on the outside. Support your forearm with your other hand. Rotate your fist clockwise 10–15 times and then anti-clockwise. Repeat on the other hand.



Interlocked-finger Stretch: Bring both hands together and interlock your fingers. Rotate your hands so the palms face away. Straighten your elbows to extend your arms and stretch. Hold for as long as feels comfortable.



Hand Clench: Bend and rest both elbows on a table or desk. Inhale as you stretch your fingers wide apart. Exhale as you loosely clench your fingers into a fist. Repeat ten times, working both hands at the same time.

PEACOCK HANDS



- 1 Sit on your heels with your knees wide apart. Bring your elbows, forearms and wrists together in front of your chest with your palms facing upward.
- 2 Place your palms flat on the ground between your legs. Lean forward a little and try to bend your elbows in toward your body while keeping them together. Hold for 3–5 seconds, gradually building up to 15 seconds.

Caution: Avoid if you are pregnant, menstruating or experiencing abdominal cramps, or if you have carpal tunnel syndrome or repetitive strain injury (RSI).

REVERSED HAND STRETCH



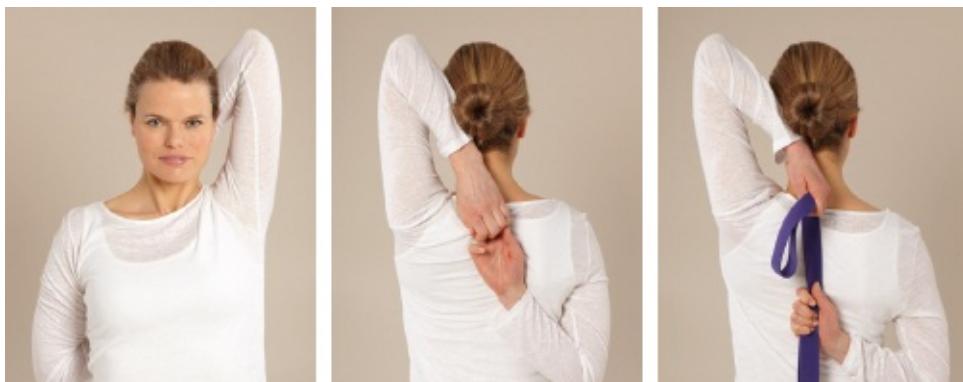
- 1 Start on hands and knees with your knees hip-width apart and hands directly beneath your shoulders. Reverse the position of your hands so your fingers face toward your knees.
- 2 Slowly sit back on your heels, keeping your hands as flat on the ground as possible. Keep your elbows straight and let your head drop between your arms. After 3–5 seconds, come forward again to hands and knees. Release, shaking out one hand, then the other. Repeat 2–3 times.

Caution: Avoid if you have carpal tunnel syndrome or repetitive strain injury (RSI).

SHOULDER EXERCISES

Tight or frozen shoulders can decrease the range of motion of your hands, as well as being very painful. These exercises focus on mobilizing your shoulders, but the Cow's Head stretch also releases tightness in your wrists, armpits, triceps and chest, while the Bear Hug ([page 30](#)) relaxes the muscles of the upper back, such as the rhomboids that move the scapulas. You can perform some of these stretches, such as the Shoulder Roll, while sitting at a desk, and others, like the Opposite-elbow Hold ([page 31](#)), when standing in a queue.

COW'S HEAD



- 1 Sitting or standing, bring your right hand behind your back and slide it up toward your neck. Place your left hand on your right elbow or forearm, if necessary, to gently coax the right hand higher up your back.
- 2 Raise your left arm over your head, bend the elbow and drop your left hand behind your left shoulder. Join hands if you can. If your hands don't meet, hold a strap or a thin folded towel in your upper hand and catch it with your lower hand to bring your hands as close together as possible. Hold for 10–30 seconds. Release, shake out your shoulders and repeat on the opposite side.

SHOULDER ROLL

Standing, kneeling or sitting with your arms relaxed, roll your shoulders forward

5–10 times. Reverse the direction of the rolls and repeat 5–10 times.

BEAR HUG



- 1** Sitting or standing, raise your right arm in front of your chest; bend the elbow so your fingers are pointing upward. Bring your left hand to your right elbow and gently draw the upper arm across your chest, as close to your body as possible. Hold for 3–5 seconds, then change arms and repeat.
- 2** Bring your right arm across your body to hold your left shoulder. Bring your left arm under the right so you can grasp your right shoulder with your left hand. Your elbows should be stacked one on top of the other. Try to raise both elbows together.

Hold for several breaths, then change arms and repeat the exercise with the right elbow on the bottom this time. Shake out your shoulders

CLOCK AGAINST THE WALL



1 Stand with one side of your body against a wall; make sure your foot, hip and shoulder all touch the wall. Raise your arm as high as you can and place your hand flat on the wall.

2 Without letting your body shift, slowly move your hand back in a large arc – like a clock hand moving from 12 to 6 o'clock. Release your arm, turn and repeat the exercise on the opposite side.

OPPOSITE-ELBOW HOLD



1 Bring both arms behind your back with the elbows straight and your hands toward the ground. Bend your right elbow and try to hold your left elbow with your right hand. Hold for a few breaths.

2 Without letting go of your left elbow, bend your left elbow and try to hold

your right elbow with your left hand. Hold for a few breaths, then release both elbows. Rotate your shoulders forward 3–4 times and then back. Repeat on the other side by bending the left elbow first.

HAND CLASP BEHIND BACK

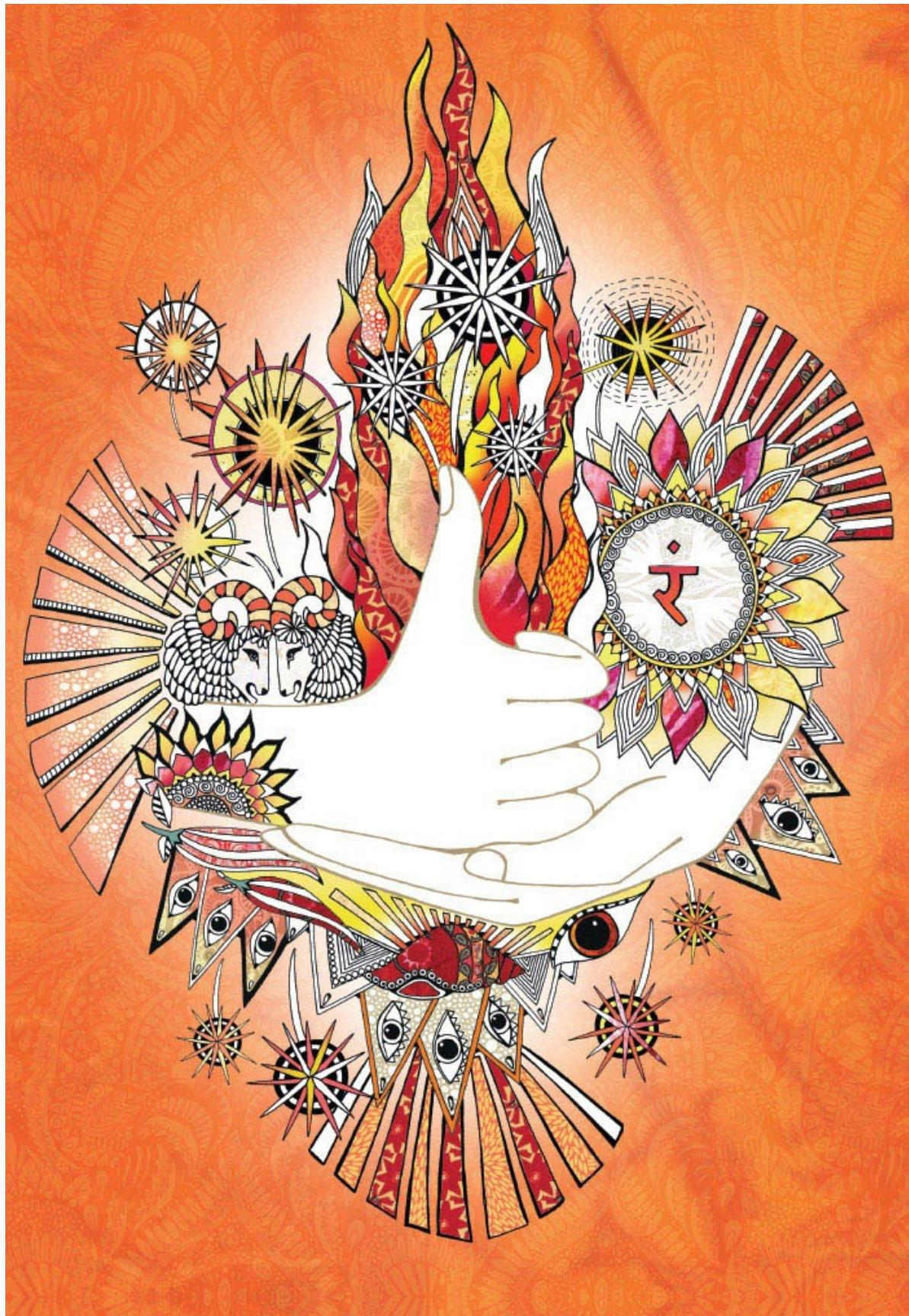


Bring your hands behind your back and interlock your fingers. Raise your arms as much as possible without leaning forward. Hold for a few breaths, then release your hands. Change your grip so the thumb of the opposite hand is on top, and repeat.

STRAP STRETCH



- 1 Sit or stand holding a strap or belt taut between both hands with your elbows straight.
- 2 Extend your arms straight up over your head, then down behind your back until the strap is in line with your shoulders. As you do this, keep your elbows straight and allow your hands to slide far enough apart that you feel a pull on your shoulders (but not pain). Hold it there for 5–10 breaths, then lift your arms, taking the strap back over your head.



2

FIRE MUDRAS

BOOSTING INNER STRENGTH AND SELF-ESTEEM

Part of hand: thumb

Element: fire

Related chakra: solar plexus

Physical associations: digestion, muscles, sense of sight
Emotional associations: inner strength, willpower, self-esteem, courage, ambition

'O Agni [Fire], light the path so that we may gather the good we have planted. Help us to remove whatever negativity is within us.

You know all our actions. We offer our salutations to you.'

Isha Upanishad

INTRODUCING THE FIRE MUDRAS

The mudras in this chapter focus attention on the thumb. They relate to the element fire and to the solar plexus chakra, which controls the energy that ‘fires up’ all the other chakras (see [pages 14–15](#)). In Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, the thumb is said to stimulate the pitta dosha, the energy that causes things to ripen and mature (see [pages 18–19](#)). Pitta’s energy is responsible for all forms of physical, mental and spiritual transformation. Because of this, the mudras in this chapter can help you to develop inner strength and transform your life into anything you want it to be.

In Sanskrit, fire is called *agni*, a term that encompasses all matter in radiant form, including the sun, light, lightning, heat, magnetism and electricity. The qualities of the fire element are energy, warmth, luminosity, radiance and the power of transformation. Fire has the quality of what is known in yogic terms as *rajas*, or activity and passion; this is what gives form and colour to life.

A healthy fire element is key to maintaining physical wellbeing. All your body processes – from cellular metabolism onward – involve burning nutrients to create energy and generate heat. For example, if you keep your digestive fire burning at a steady pace, food will be properly digested and you’ll be better nourished and hence better able to ward off disease.

Emotionally, having a well-balanced fire element empowers you to develop the courage to face life’s challenges and not be afraid of taking responsibility for their outcome. It assists you in developing such positive qualities as honour, integrity, courage, charisma, willpower, self-esteem and decisiveness. The fire element also gives your mind the strength to ponder and deliberate. When your mind is ‘fired up’, you are better able to grasp ideas, understand what you have heard, nourish yourself with thoughts and be more in touch with your feelings.

Energetically, the thumb is a very important part of the hand because special pranic currents pass through it that connect you to the ‘seat’ of your fire element, the manipura or solar plexus chakra (see [page 17](#)). This chakra governs your digestive system as well as your muscles and eyes. Poor eyesight, digestive complaints, food intolerances, high or low blood sugar, diabetes, eating disorders and a tendency to muscle spasms can all respond well to regular practice of the fire mudras and associated exercises in this chapter.

Without ‘fire’ in the form of light, you would not be able to see. On a less

literal level, being ‘seen’ can be understood as the need to be acknowledged as a unique individual. When this need is not met – for example, when someone ignores you, fails to recognize your capabilities and talents or demeans you – anger often follows. Anger – whether expressed or not – as well as burning hatred, vanity and pride are the negative emotions associated with an imbalance in the energy of the solar plexus chakra. By practising the pitta-related mudras in this chapter, you can help to counter such difficult feelings and find more emotional balance.

Above all, as you work with the fire mudras, notice your willpower becoming stronger, and your self-image and self-confidence starting to improve. You will probably find yourself becoming a person with ‘fire in the belly’ – with the energy to put your thoughts and dreams into action.

Fire mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Agni	Increases willpower and self-confidence; balances heat	36
Guru	Aids physical and emotional balance	37
Manipura	Increases willpower and courage; boosts digestion	38
Linga	Generates heat and invigorates the body	39
Surya	Gives inspiration; counters lethargy; cleanses the body	40
Pushan	Aids absorption of nutrients, prana and new ideas	42
Kamajayi	Encourages moderation; directs energy into healthy channels	43
Ashva-ratna	Counters negative behaviour patterns; helps in exploring new possibilities	44
Adho-mukha	Stimulates wisdom and prepares your mind for meditation	45
Shankha	Alleviates problems caused by too much ‘heat’ in body and mind	46
Pitta-pacifying	Decreases excess heat, physically and emotionally	48
Pitta-energizing	Boosts self-esteem and encourages positive perception	49
Dhyana Mudra	Aids in meditation and in accessing your full potential	50

AGNI MUDRA

Fire Gesture



Agni Mudra helps to balance the heat within your body, and enhances your willpower and self-confidence. In the yoga tradition, it is valued for meditation, centring your energy while filling you with enthusiasm and vitality.

You may recognize this as the thumbs-up gesture used in the West as a sign that something is a good idea, or much liked. Its origins are said to lie in the Roman era, when crowds at gladiator battles voted with their thumbs on whether the winning gladiator should kill his opponent: thumbs-up signified continued life.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Each hand does something different: Right hand – make a fist with the thumb pointing straight up.

Left hand – open your hand, with the palm facing up.

Place your right fist on your left palm and, maintaining this position, rest both hands in your lap. Hold as you sit quietly or meditate. Repeat daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By freeing your thumbs from the other fingers, you free the fire element from the influence of the four other elements. This strengthens the nourishing fiery energy yogis call *samana vayu*. Holding Agni Mudra can increase your sensations of vitality and energy.



ACCOMPANYING AFFIRMATION: THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF THE MUDRA BECOME STRONGER WHEN YOU MENTALLY REPEAT THE FOLLOWING AFFIRMATION WHILE HOLDING IT: 'I OFFER MY NEGATIVE QUALITIES TO THE FIRE OF TRANSFORMATION.'

GURU MUDRA

Jupiter Gesture



Recommended for cultivating physical and emotional equilibrium, this is a two-thumbed variation of Agni Mudra (see opposite). *Guru* is the Sanskrit name for Jupiter, and the gesture is used in Indian dance to refer to the planet or a teacher.

Yogis may know this mudra by its alternative name Merudanda Mudra. *Meru* is the name of the mountain at the centre of the universe in the Indian tradition; *danda* a stick or staff. When the terms are used together, they relate to your spine, the central point of balance and steadiness in your body.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Make fists with both hands, with your thumbs pointing straight up. Rest the fists on their respective knees. Hold for as long as you can sit quietly or meditate.

HOW IT WORKS

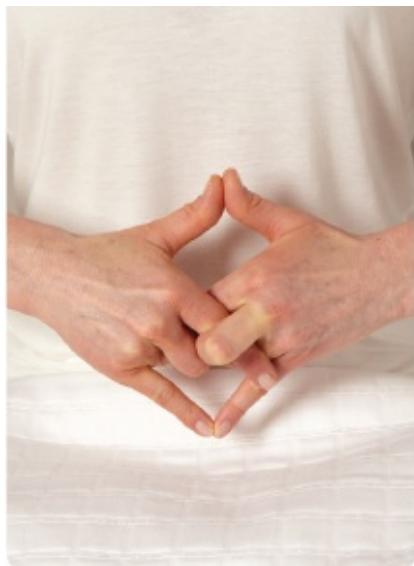
Placing your thumbs in this position promotes the steadiness of the manipura chakra at the horizontal centre of your body, leading to increased emotional and energetic balance. If you meditate, practising with your hands in this mudra helps align the spine, creating vertical balance in your body, too.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: GURU MUDRA MAKES EYE EXERCISES MORE EFFECTIVE. WITH BOTH HANDS IN THE MUDRA, LIFT YOUR RIGHT ARM TO EYE LEVEL AND SLOWLY MOVE IT AS FAR RIGHT AS YOU CAN SEE IT; DO NOT MOVE YOUR HEAD. SLOWLY BRING YOUR ARM BACK TO CENTRE. CHANGE ARMS AND REPEAT TO THE LEFT. REPEAT 2–3 TIMES EACH WAY.

MANIPURA MUDRA

Solar Plexus Chakra Gesture



This gesture strengthens digestion, boosts willpower and gives you the courage to ‘turn over a new leaf’ and transform your life. This is the key mudra of manipura, the solar plexus chakra, which houses your most prized possession: your sense of self, personality and charisma. How well it functions determines how the world sees you.

Regular practice of this mudra can enhance self-esteem, self-discipline and self-reliance, and help you to develop a healthier self-image and ability to take ‘safe’ risks.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Have both palms facing down, with all the fingers extended. Slightly lower your left index finger and lift the middle finger next to it. Place your right index finger on top of your left index finger; slide it under the left middle finger, and rest the tip on top of the left ring finger. Bend the left middle finger down and curl the right middle finger over the

top of the left index finger, so the two middle fingers touch. Bring the tip of the left index finger on top of the right ring finger. Join the tips of the two little fingers, and the ends of the thumbs. Hold for 5–10 minutes; it gets easier with practice.

HOW IT WORKS

Since each finger relates to the energy of a different element in Indian philosophy, interconnecting the fingers connects all your energetic circuits.

 **ACCOMPANYING CHANT:** TO OPTIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF THIS MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE MANIPURA CHAKRA, ‘RAM’.

LINGA MUDRA

Mark of Siva



This mudra represents the Hindu god Siva, who developed techniques to unleash the potential dormant within us, which he named ‘yoga’. He is considered to be the first yoga teacher. A *linga* is a form that represents the infinite, which has no form. It is the mark of Siva, who in yoga philosophy represents consciousness.

Linga Mudra generates heat and generally invigorates the body. With its pittastimulating qualities, it is also valued for its ability to stop the production of excess mucus, give strength to the lungs, and cure colds, bronchial infections and other imbalances of kapha (see [pages 18–19](#)).

Caution: Avoid during menopause; with a thyroid condition, ulcers, hypertension or migraines; and after a stroke. Also in summer, as this mudra generates heat.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Interlock the fingers of both hands with your right thumb on top. Lift your left thumb and extend it vertically;

encircle your left thumb with the thumb and index finger of your right hand. Maintaining this hand position, rest your hands in your lap or against your solar plexus, the site of your manipura chakra. Hold for 12–20 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

Because the fire element of your thumb comes into close contact with all the other elements in your other fingers, it stimulates all of them. This has an invigorating effect.



ACCOMPANYING AFFIRMATION: SIT WITH YOUR HANDS IN LINGA MUDRA AND JUST WATCH YOUR MIND. IF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS START TO COME UP, MENTALLY REPEAT THIS AFFIRMATION: ‘I OFFER ALL NEGATIVE QUALITIES INTO THE FIRE OF TRANSFORMATION.’

SURYA MUDRA

Sun Seal



You will find Surya Mudra helpful any time you feel in need of inspiration or would like to counter lethargy of the body or mind. In Sanskrit, *Surya* is one of the names of the sun, our most visible form of the element fire. Inspired by the light of the sun, darkness (in the form of depression) disappears and heaviness lifts from the heart.

Regular practice of this mudra generally improves digestion and elimination. It stimulates your body to burn excess fat and reduces cholesterol, helping you to cleanse yourself and lose weight.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). You can use either or both hands. Bring your ring finger down to touch the root of the thumb of the same hand; press down on your ring finger with your thumb. Extend the other fingers, allowing them to relax. Hold for up to 45 minutes daily, or for 3 sessions of 15 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

The ring finger (the finger of the earth element) is depressed by the thumb (the fire element), symbolically bowing to the light of the sun. The root of your thumb – representing your drive in life and creative power – is stimulated by the ring finger. As your thumb presses down on the ring finger, the fire element of the thumb decreases the negative aspects of earth energy, such as inertia. This helps burn off ‘stagnant’ impurities and fires you with new inspiration in life.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: SIT WITH EACH OF YOUR HANDS IN SURYA MUDRA. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE THE LIGHTNESS OF THE EARLY MORNING SUN. PRACTISE THIS FOR 3–5 MINUTES WHENEVER YOU FEEL HEAVY AND LETHARGIC.

SURYA MUDRA IN A BREATHING PRACTICE

Surya Bheda Pranayama: Sun Breathing

In yoga, the left side of the body is considered moon-related and cool. By bringing your left hand into Surya Mudra and resting it on your left leg, you counteract the chilling aspect and enhance the warming effects of this breathing exercise. Perform in the morning on an empty stomach or as a 3pm pick-me-up. Avoid in the evening.

- 1 Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring your left hand into Surya Mudra and rest the back of the hand on your left knee or thigh.
- 2 Fold down the index and middle fingers of your right hand, bringing it into Vishnu Mudra (see [page 104](#)). Lift this hand and position the palm in front of your face. Use the little and ring fingers of your right hand to close your left nostril.
- 3 Silently, inhale deeply through your right nostril. Pinch both nostrils shut by closing your right nostril with your right thumb. Hold your breath for as long as feels comfortable.
- 4 When ready to exhale, release your little and ring fingers to open the left nostril (keep the right one closed). Exhale slowly and silently through the left nostril. This is one round of Surya Bheda. Work up to 5–10 rounds daily.
- 5 When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



CAUTION: AVOID IF YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, FEVER, SKIN RASH, ANOREXIA, ADHD, INSOMNIA, RESTLESSNESS OR NERVOUS AGITATION, ALSO DURING MENOPAUSE, MENSTRUATION AND ON HOT DAYS.

PUSHAN MUDRA

Giver of Good Health



In Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, proper nourishment and balanced digestive fire are considered the foundation of good health. This nourishing mudra helps to maintain the equilibrium of the fire element in your solar plexus region for better absorption of nutrients from food, prana from the air you breathe and new ideas from around you: *Pushan* is the Sanskrit name of the sun as nourisher of the earth.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Each hand does something different: Right hand – join the thumb tip to the tips of the index and middle fingers.

Left hand – join the thumb tip to the tips of the ring and middle fingers.

Maintaining these hand positions, rest the backs of your hands on their respective knees, palms up. Take a few slow deep breaths, as you sit quietly with your awareness on your solar plexus region for up to 20–30 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

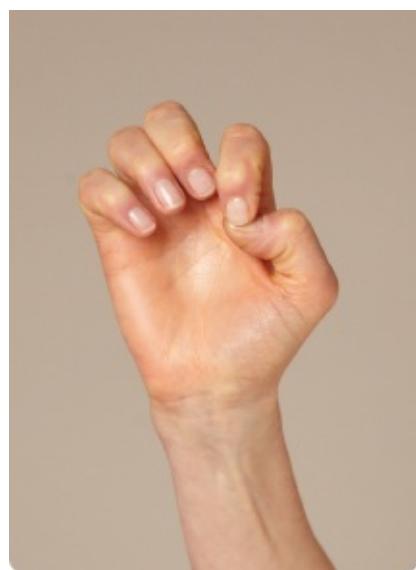
Your right hand stimulates the air and ether elements (represented by the index and middle fingers) with the fire energy in its thumb. Your left hand enhances the ether and earth elements (represented by the middle and ring fingers), again firing them up with the thumb. Working together, the increased air, ether and earth elements in both hands stimulate energy, immunity, stamina and endurance.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: TO CONNECT WITH THE NOURISHING ENERGY OF THE SUN, SIT QUIETLY HOLDING PUSHAN MUDRA AND REPEAT THE MANTRA ‘*OM PUSHNE NAMAH*’ OR ‘THE SUN AS THE NOURISHER, WHO CAUSES ALL TO THRIVE.’

KAMAJAYI MUDRA

Victory over Excessive Desires Gesture



Kamajayi Mudra works to instil moderation and can be a great practice if you have difficulty refraining from self-indulgences such as over-eating and drinking. Also practise this mudra if you would like to stop smoking. It helps to direct your energy into healthier channels while stimulating the absorption of nutrients.

This simple yet powerful mudra can also help you to transform your physical energy (known as *ojas* in Ayurveda) into creative and spiritual brilliance (*tejas*). And by balancing the energy of your solar plexus chakra, it aids your attempts to set clear personal boundaries and equips you to get in touch with the power within.

HOW TO PRACTISE

You can practise this mudra in any position with either or both hands. Press down on the root of your thumb nail with the tip of the index finger of the same hand. Allow the other fingers to remain relaxed and slightly curled. Hold for 10

minutes at a time, several times a day.

HOW IT WORKS

By pushing on the thumb nail, you reduce any excesses of the fire element – such as too much heat in the body, which can cause anger and rage – and instead focus your energy in healthier and more creative directions.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: WHEN YOU KNOW YOU WILL BE FACED WITH A TEMPTATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO OVERCOME, BRING YOUR HANDS INTO KAMAJAYI MUDRA AND VISUALIZE YOURSELF IN THE DIFFICULT SITUATION, OVERCOMING IT.

ASHVA-RATNA MUDRA

Jewelled Horse Gesture



In Indian mythology, one of the *nava-ratnas* (nine jewels) is a seven-headed, flying, white horse that transports angelic beings. In Tibetan tradition, this wind horse carries a wish-fulfilling jewel and brings peace, wealth and harmony, while reducing suffering and unhappiness. In the shamanic tradition of eastern and central Asia, the wind horse is a symbol of the human soul. This transformational gesture, found in Indian dance, meditation and Buddhist rituals, helps to cut through narrow-mindedness and strengthens your resolve to overcome negative patterns of behaviour that may be holding you back. After practising this mudra regularly, notice whether new possibilities and perspectives present themselves to you.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Keep your fingers straight and press palms and fingers flat against each other. Fold down and interlock your index and middle fingers; extend your thumbs, ring and little fingers, pressing

them against the respective finger of the other hand. Rest your hands in your lap or in front of your solar plexus, the site of your manipura chakra. Hold for 5–10 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By balancing the earth (ring fingers), water (little fingers) and fire elements (thumbs), this mudra aligns your three lowest chakras (see [page 17](#)). This enhances your digestion and circulation while sharpening and stimulating your powers of observation.

 **ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION:** WHEN FACED WITH A DIFFICULT TASK, SIT QUIETLY WITH YOUR HANDS IN ASHVA-RATNA MUDRA AND VISUALIZE YOURSELF SUCCEEDING.

ADHO-MUKHA MUDRA

Downward-facing Gesture



Stimulating digestive fire, reducing mental inertia and helping to eliminate toxins from the body, Adho-mukha is a powerful mudra from the Ayurvedic tradition. It is also used to prepare the mind for meditation. This mudra is part of a group of 24 gestures known as the ‘Gayatri Mudras’, often used when chanting the well-known Gayatri mantra (see below). Gayatri represents the light of the sun and the inner fire that gives your mind its powers of deliberation and inspiration. Adho-mukha Mudra activates the flame of wisdom within and enables you to better access your inner resources.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). With both palms facing downward, bend your fingers and bring the backs of your fingers together as you extend and join the tips of your thumbs. Hold for 3–5 minutes daily or whenever you feel the need for inspiration.

HOW IT WORKS

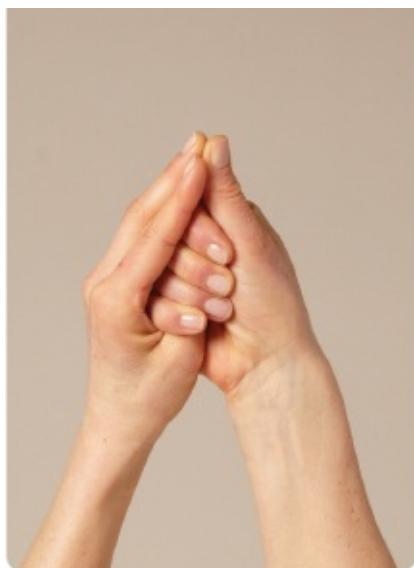
The joined thumbs accentuate all the manifestations of the fire element within your body and mind, and accelerate their effects, improving eyesight and digestion, among other things (see [pages 34–35](#)). At the same time, the pressure applied to the backs of the fingers serves to decrease the effects of the air and space elements.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: PLACE YOUR HANDS IN ADHO-MUKHA MUDRA IN FRONT OF YOUR BREASTBONE. SLOWLY CHANT THE GAYATRI MANTRA MENTALLY TO YOURSELF. INHALE SAYING, ‘OM BHUUR BHU-VAH SWA-HA’; EXHALE ‘TAT SA-VI-TUR VA-REN-YAM’; INHALE ‘BHAR-GO DEV-AS-YA DHII-MA-HE’; AND EXHALE ‘DHI-YO YO NAH PRACH-CHO-DA-YAAT’.

SHANKHA MUDRA

Conch Shell Gesture



In both yoga and Ayurveda the inner spirals of the conch shell symbolize the coils of the human digestive tract. The Sanskrit word *shankha* means ‘conch’. Shankha Mudra decreases excess digestive fire and alleviates problems caused by too much ‘heat’ in the body generally, from stomach ulcers to feverishness and skin rashes. On an emotional level, this mudra reduces heated tossing of the mind and cools anger.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) with your hands in front of your solar plexus. Wrap all four fingers of your right hand around your left thumb. Keep the fingers of your left hand together and pointing upward. Rotate your right hand until the thumb points upward and join the tips of your right thumb and left middle finger. Bring your hands, now in the form of a conch shell, in front of your breastbone, and hold for 5–10 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

Encircling the thumb with the other fingers subdues its fire element. At the same time, uniting the left middle finger and right thumb results in an increase of the ether element, creating more space in your life for digesting and assimilating nourishing things, including foods, ideas and energy.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO CHANT AUDIBLY OR SILENTLY, RECITING THE MANTRA ‘OM’ WHILE HOLDING SHANKHA MUDRA INCREASES ITS BENEFITS.

SAHAJA-SHANKHA MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Simplified Conch Shell Gesture

This simplified version of Shankha Mudra is especially helpful with speech problems and lack of alertness, even giving your face a powerful aura that positively affects other people. The flexed position of your feet counters lack of confidence and helps you present your point of view more cogently.

The power of this mudra comes from the way in which it activates the nadi energy channels (see [pages 12–13](#)) ending in the hands, which bring prana into the middle of each palm and radiate it out to the fingers, particularly the thumbs. By joining your hands, interlocking your fingers and pressing down with your thumbs, you remove blockages to this flow of energy.

- 1 Kneel on the floor with knees and feet together. Lift your buttocks slightly, tuck your toes under and sit back on your heels. If this feels too painful, keep the tops of your feet on the ground. In both positions make sure your back and head are aligned and straight.
- 2 Holding your hands in front of your solar plexus, interlock all eight fingers excluding your thumbs. Press your palms together. Bring your thumbs parallel to each other, pointing away from your body; and use the thumbs to gently apply pressure to the outer index finger.
- 3 Holding the position, rest your hands on your thighs. As the pose becomes more comfortable, hold for 5–10 minutes.
- 4 When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



PITTA-PACIFYING MUDRA

Excess Heat-reducing Gesture



The Ayurvedic energy known as pitta (see [pages 18–19](#)) governs all the processes of digestion, assimilation and transformation within your body and mind. When pitta is in balance, you digest food properly and are nourished by it; you are also endowed with qualities that demonstrate emotional balance, including intelligence, courage, vitality, decisiveness and self-motivation.

Too much pitta, however, can cause ‘burning’ problems, such as stomach ulcers, skin rashes, fever, a short temper and anxiety. This mudra is used in kinesiology to help to eliminate such excessive heat, physically and emotionally. It is especially effective as a relief for skin rashes and summer allergies such as prickly heat and hay fever.

HOW TO PRACTISE

You can practise this mudra in any position: sitting, standing or even while walking. Bring the tip of each thumb to the web between the ring and little fingers of the same hand. Hold for 5 minutes five times daily, pausing for at least

3 minutes between practice sessions.

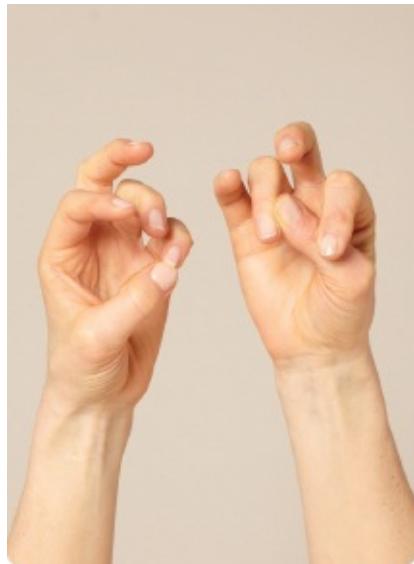
HOW IT WORKS

The fire element represented by the thumb is pacified by the earth and water elements of the ring and little fingers respectively as it ‘bows’ to these elements.

 **ACCOMPANYING DIETARY ADVICE:** AT TIMES WHEN YOU FEEL THE NEED TO BOOST THE HEAT-REDUCING BENEFITS OF THIS MUDRA, TRY TO AVOID COFFEE, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO. INSTEAD, HAVE THE OCCASIONAL CUP OF BLACK TEA WITH MILK AND ADD A PINCH OF GROUND CARDAMOM.

PITTA-ENERGIZING MUDRA

Blues-banishing Gesture



In kinesiology, this pitta-energizing mudra is used to help people to perceive the world in a more positive light. It is especially effective when something limits your ability to function effectively day to day, whether this is losing someone or something you love or missing an opportunity. When you feel sad or let down, rebalancing your pitta energy helps to rekindle your inner flame.

Practise this mudra when sadness leaves you unmotivated or impacts negatively on your self-esteem. It can be profoundly beneficial for bouts of temporary depression, but if symptoms persist seek the help of a health professional.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Each hand does something different: Right hand: place your thumb on the side of your ring finger nail and place your index finger on the first joint of your thumb.

Left hand: join the tips of your thumb and little finger.

Hold for 3 minutes twice daily, waiting at least 25 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

Your right hand balances earth energy while your left hand reduces the water element. The earth and water elements keep you immobile and dampen your spirits. Reducing them allows the drive and inspiration of your fire element to return.

 **ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION:** WHILE HOLDING THE MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND PICTURE LIGHT RADIATING FROM WITHIN AND ALL AROUND YOU, FROM THE BASE OF YOUR BODY TO THE TOP OF YOUR HEAD. SEE YOURSELF SITTING IN A RADIANT CIRCLE WITH LIGHT ENERGIZING YOUR ENTIRE BEING AND FILLING YOU WITH POSITIVITY.

DHYANA MUDRA

Meditation Gesture



When someone is depicted using this gesture in Eastern or Western art, it is usually an indication that they are experiencing deep meditation. Dhyana Mudra is used in a variety of Eastern meditative traditions for tuning into inner silence, accessing limitless potential and finding inner strength. Dhyana Mudra is a signal to the mind that now is the time to enter a meditative state. It helps you to create a calm and nurturing centre within yourself, even in stressful or chaotic situations – try it at your next meeting or job interview. The gesture also facilitates diaphragmatic breathing and promotes the efficient assimilation of all that nourishes you: silence, food, ideas and energies. After regular practice, notice whether your mental powers and concentration increase and your mind wanders less frequently.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Place both hands in your lap with your right hand on top and your palms facing upward. Bring the tips of your

thumbs together so they gently touch each other. With practice, hold this gesture for at least 20–30 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By joining both thumbs, you create an unbroken flow of fire energy and inspiration. Bringing your hands together in your lap encourages better communication between the two hemispheres of your brain, leading to a more holistic approach to life.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘USING DHYANA MUDRA WITH THUMBS TOUCHING HELPED ME BECAUSE I FELT THE ENERGY IN AND AROUND THE BODY WAS CONTAINED; THIS AIDED MY INWARD FOCUS.’

DHYANA MUDRA IN A MEDITATION

Meditation to Transform Anger

Holding your hands in Dhyana Mudra as you practise this meditation helps to release anger in a healthy way. Anger indicates an imbalance of the fire element.

- 1 Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or a favourite meditation position if you have one. Do not lie down; you may fall asleep. Bring your hands together in your lap in Dhyana Mudra. If you find it more comfortable, rest your hands on a small cushion in your lap. Make sure your shoulders are back and relaxed.
- 2 Close your eyes, seal your lips and breathe gently through both nostrils.
- 3 Begin by remembering an incident in which you became angry or irritated. Perhaps you were late for an appointment and spotted a parking place only to see someone else grab it. Picture the incident very clearly; go over it in detail. Be particularly aware of how angry you felt. Allow yourself to relive the incident once or twice until you have created a firm mental picture.
- 4 Keeping your hands in the mudra, change the image. See yourself in the same situation, but remaining calm and breathing deeply. Consciously let go of your anger. Hold onto the positive image, bringing it to mind several times.
- 5 When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.
- 6 Repeat regularly, until you notice your behaviour beginning to change in a positive way.





3

AIR MUDRAS

ENCOURAGING FREEDOM, JOY AND STRESS
RELIEF

Part of hand: index finger

Element: air

Related chakra: heart

Physical associations: breathing, circulatory system, arms and hands, sense of touch Emotional associations: freedom, joy, stress-relief, love, forgiveness, compassion '***I am the well-known Vayu [Air]; I am the one who moves freely in the sky. I can lift all that is upon the earth.***'

Kena Upanishad

INTRODUCING THE AIR MUDRAS

The mudras in this chapter focus attention on the index finger. They relate to the element air and to the heart chakra, which governs the relationship you have with yourself. Your index finger is the one you use to make points. In yoga philosophy, it represents your ego – that principle that causes you to experience yourself as separate from everything else in the world. Practising the mudras in this chapter helps to ensure that your heart chakra and air energy are healthy and balanced. In this way they help you to develop greater personal freedom, enhanced compassion and a more joyous way of life; they also reduce your stress levels.

You cannot see the air element, but you can experience it through the senses of touch and hearing. In Sanskrit, air is called *vayu*, a term that includes all matter in gaseous form including (but not limited to) the air we breathe, steam and wind. The attributes of the air element are restless movement, the ability to expand and dryness.

Air has the quality of what is known in yogic terms as *rajas*, meaning that one of its defining traits is to want to move constantly. In Ayurveda, the elements of air and ether make up the *vata dosha* (see [pages 18–19](#)), the motivating force behind the other two doshas, *pitta* and *kapha*. *Vata* moves; it achieves goals. Without *vata*, the other doshas would become stuck and stagnant. However, too little as well as too much movement can cause problems. An imbalance of *vata* can contribute to a variety of mental and nervous disorders, such as insomnia, mental and physical paralysis, dizziness and feelings of grief. You can bring your *vata* energy back into balance by practising the mudras and exercises in this chapter.

Your index finger is connected with your *anahata* or heart chakra (see [page 17](#)), the energetic centre of your body and the ‘seat’ of the air element. This is also the base of your *prana* (see [pages 12–13](#)), the non-physical energy often referred to as vital ‘air’. In the physical body, this chakra governs respiration and circulation, and if you have respiratory or circulatory complaints, you may want to begin working with some of the air mudras and associated exercises in this chapter.

The heart chakra also transmutes the higher vibrations from the upper three chakras into grosser forms so that they can manifest on the physical plane; in

other words, it transforms consciousness into matter or thoughts into deeds. For example, you may have a great idea, but before you can act on it, you must ‘take it to heart’.

Emotionally, if you are feeling stifled or suffocated by life or lacking in joy, perhaps it is a time for a ‘change of air’. Working with air mudras can help you to feel more confident, while they simultaneously make your mind and body feel lighter and more carefree. Freeing your energy in this way is like taking a ‘breath of fresh air’ and helps you to experience life with fewer mental limitations.

As the seat of your love and compassion, your heart is probably the most complex of the chakras. Above all, as you work with these air mudras, you will probably begin to feel its effects as you notice yourself becoming more empathetic.

Air mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Vayu	Helps with joint problems, bloating, sleeplessness and any other issues relating to excessive air	56
Anahata	Enhances loving relationships; aids forgiveness; improves health of the heart, lung and breasts	58
Padma	Stimulates emotional cleansing, love, goodwill and communication; counters loneliness, grief and feelings of being drained or exploited	59
Hridaya	Enhances compassion, empathy and unconditional love	60
Chin	Generates calmness, inner peace and harmony; aids concentration and meditation	62
Vyana	Reduces mental tension and enhances feelings of personal freedom	63
Garuda	Helps control fluctuations in mind and mood, especially during stressful situations	64
Granthita	Unties emotional knots in times of sadness	65
Pranāpana	Balances subtle energy; counters motion sickness and dizziness	66
Kshepana	Helps release of stress and negativity; stimulates feelings of joy and freedom	68

VAYU MUDRA

Air Gesture



This is the go-to mudra for physical, mental or emotional issues related to an imbalance of vata energy (see [pages 18–19](#)). Ayurveda attributes a range of symptoms to vata imbalance, from joint problems to flatulence and bloating, sleeplessness and dizziness. Vayu Mudra helps restore energy to your joints while reducing pain and aiding mobility. It also supports the healing of tired ligaments, tendons and muscles around the joints. If you spend a large portion of your day in front of a computer, try this mudra to relieve stiff or sore arms, wrists and fingers. It also counters a stiff neck.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring the tips of both index fingers to the base of their respective thumbs, then press your thumbs down onto the top knuckles of the index fingers. Hold for 15 minutes twice daily. For chronic joint pain, practise for up to 30 minutes three times a day.

HOW IT WORKS

By pressing down on the index finger, you reduce and control the element this finger is associated with – air. This removes excess wind and dryness in the body and restores balance to your vata energy.



ACCOMPANYING FOCUSING EXERCISE: HOLD YOUR HAND BENEATH ONE NOSTRIL AND EXHALE. REPEAT WITH THE OTHER NOSTRIL. YOUR BREATH IS PROBABLY STRONGER ON ONE SIDE. THIS CHANGES EVERY TWO HOURS OR SO, SHOWING THE NATURAL RHYTHM OF VAYU (AIR) IN YOUR BODY. REPEAT AT OTHER TIMES OF THE DAY TO NOTICE YOUR CHANGING VAYU.

VAYU MUDRA IN A BREATHING PRACTICE

Kapalabhati: Shining-skull Cleansing Breath

When you hold Vayu Mudra, the invigorating effects of this exercise become more pronounced. With regular practice, it purifies your system so thoroughly that your face shines with health, hence the name of the exercise: the Sanskrit word *kapala* means ‘skull’ and *bhati* ‘shining’. The rhythmic abdominal pumping pushes your diaphragm up into your thoracic cavity, emptying air from your lungs through your nostrils, to be replaced with a blast of fresh air, perfect for increasing alertness.

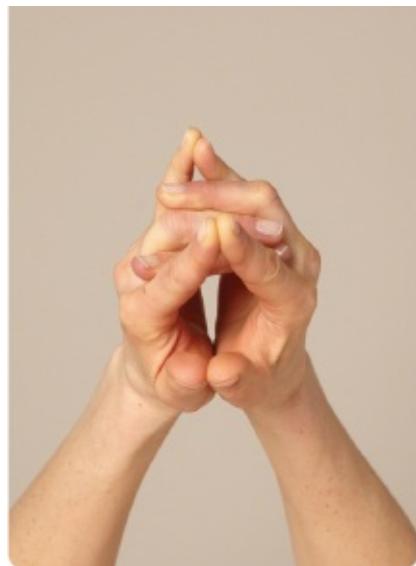
- 1 Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) with your back straight. Bring both hands into Vayu Mudra and rest them on your thighs with palms facing upward.
- 2 Take 2–3 deep breaths, then inhale and begin the breathing exercise by contracting your abdominal muscles quickly. Imagine you are trying to blow out a candle by forcing air through your nose. Make the movement short and active.
- 3 Relax your abdominal muscles so that passive inhalation takes place. Do not forcefully inhale: let your lungs automatically inflate with air.
- 4 Repeat this rapid abdominal pumping 20–25 times. End on an exhalation, then take 2–3 deep breaths to bring your breathing back to normal. This is one round of Kapalabhati; try to do three rounds daily, preferably in the morning before eating.
- 5 When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists before standing up.



 **CAUTION: AVOID** DURING PREGNANCY, MENSTRUATION OR AN ASTHMA ATTACK, OR IF YOU HAVE A HERNIA, ABDOMINAL PAIN OR CRAMPING, OR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.

ANAHATA MUDRA

Heart Chakra Gesture



This is the key mudra of anahata, your heart chakra which, when open and balanced, enables you to give of yourself, express unselfish love and be more compassionate.

Practising this mudra improves the health of your heart, lungs and breasts. Emotionally, it can assist you in forming and maintaining a loving partnership and other ‘heart-centred’ relationships. It also helps you to forgive. Forgiving is not forgetting or ignoring a wrong, but the ability to observe and process your experience without getting caught up in emotional reactions. Regular practice of this mudra helps to free you from emotional suffering while increasing your capacity for self-healing.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. Bring your right ring finger into the web between the index and middle fingers on your left hand. Place the left ring finger into the web between the index and middle

fingers on your right hand. Curl both middle fingers down over their opposite ring fingers. Extend your thumbs and your index and little fingers; bring their respective ends together. Hold for 3–5 minutes or longer. This gets easier with practice.

HOW IT WORKS

As your ring fingers (associated with the earth element) push down, excess air and ether elements are eliminated, and the fire, air and water elements come into balance, which supports the heart chakra.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: TO OPTIMIZE ITS BENEFITS, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE ANAHATA CHAKRA, 'YAM'.

PADMA MUDRA

Lotus Gesture



When you practise this gesture your hands mimic the blossoming of the lotus flower – and the opening of your heart chakra. As the lotus grows out of mud, but is unsullied by it, so you should live in the world, but not be affected by negativity.

Padma Mudra stimulates emotional cleansing and can help you to find unconditional love, goodwill and heart-felt communication. It is useful for loneliness and grief, and whenever you feel drained, exploited or misunderstood. It opens you up to inspiration and rebalances the energy of your heart chakra.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Place your palms and

fingers flat against each other in front of your energetic heart centre (against your breastbone). Slowly bend your knuckles and allow your fingers to bow outward, keeping the lower portion of your palms together as well as the tips of your fingers. Now bring the edges of your little fingers and thumbs together as you slowly stretch your other fingers wide. Take 4–5 deep breaths as you hold the mudra.

HOW IT WORKS

By placing your finger and thumb sides together you intensify prana flow. This mudra directs back into your heart centre the prana that might otherwise be dispersed.



ACCOMPANYING AFFIRMATION: AS YOU HOLD THE OUTSTRETCHED FORM OF THE MUDRA, MENTALLY REPEAT THIS AFFIRMATION TO YOURSELF, ‘I OPEN MY HEART TO RECEIVE WHATEVER INSPIRATION I NEED.’

HRIDAYA MUDRA

Compassionate Heart Gesture



Practise this mudra if you are looking for unconditional love, genuine affection and compassionate communication, for its ability to channel and balance the flow of prana to your heart chakra, freeing up any blockages. *Hri* in Sanskrit means ‘heart’ and *daya* is translated as ‘compassion’. As the heart chakra governs your respiratory and circulatory systems, physical ailments such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, and lung and breast disease may be energetically connected with a heart chakra imbalance. Practising this mudra can be a support, gently bringing things back into balance. Hridaya Mudra can also help you to release pent-up emotions and unburden your heart. Try it during a disagreement to give you greater empathy and compassion.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Sit, stand or lie down. Using both hands, bend the index fingers until the tips touch their own bases. Then keep rolling the fingers down until the first knuckles touch the base of each thumb. Join the tips of the thumbs with the tips of their

respective ring and middle fingers. Allow the little fingers to remain extended, but keep them relaxed. Hold as you sit quietly or meditate, or whenever you feel the need.

HOW IT WORKS

The air element of the index finger bows deeply to the fire energy of the thumb in this mudra. Your thumb closes a circuit of energy by joining its fire with both the stability of the ring (earth) finger and the freedom of the middle (ether) finger.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘THIS MUDRA HAS SUCH A LOVING FEEL TO IT! A HEALING WARMTH RADIATED OUT FROM MY HEART CENTRE, CREATING A SENSE OF GENERAL WELLBEING IN EVERY PART OF MY BODY.’

HRIDAYA MUDRA IN A MEDITATION

Metta: Compassionate Heart Meditation

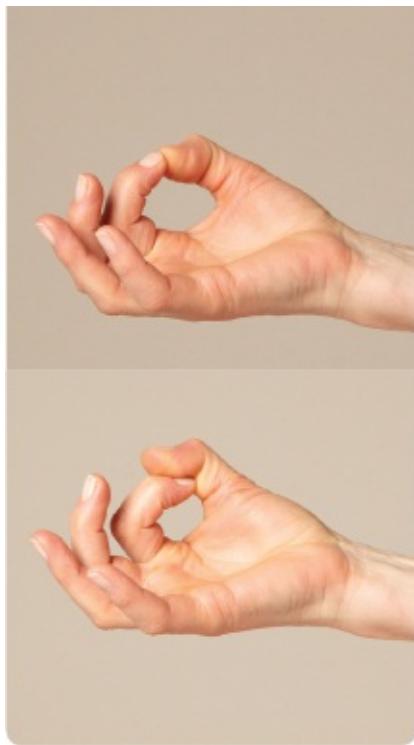
Adding Hridaya Mudra to this meditation helps untie ‘knots’ in your heart as you forgive people. Don’t move onto the final step until you feel fully comfortable with the meditation.

- 1 Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or other meditation position. Bring both hands into Hridaya Mudra and rest the backs of your hands on your knees.
- 2 Close your eyes, making sure your body is upright, but relaxed. Will yourself to remain motionless for up to 20–30 minutes. Take 3–4 deep breaths. Then stop controlling your breath; allow it to find its natural rhythm.
- 3 Bring your awareness to the centre of your chest. Visualize a rosebud slowly opening. Imagine your heart opening with it. Notice healing warmth radiating from your heart, creating a feeling of wellbeing throughout your body.
- 4 Mentally repeat this phrase: ‘May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I live with ease, free of disease.’ Finish here for the first few sessions. It is important to be compassionate with yourself before progressing.
- 5 Continue by thinking of someone you care about. Repeat the phrases to that person, using his or her name. Finish here until you feel comfortable with the practice.
- 6 Finally, continue by thinking of someone who has injured you. Feel your heart communicating compassion to that person. Mentally repeat the same phrases, using the person’s name. End with the Sanskrit mantra *Lokah samasta sukhino bhavantu*’ or ‘May all beings everywhere be happy and free.’
- 7 Open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



CHIN MUDRA

Unrestricted Consciousness Gesture



Practised with palms facing upward, this is the most commonly used mudra for meditation in the yoga tradition: *chin* is a Sanskrit word for ‘unrestricted consciousness’. With palms down, the gesture is known as Jnana Mudra (see [page 97](#)). Chin Mudra invites calmness and helps you to tune in to yourself and your environment, generating feelings of harmony, peace and communion. The effect is subtle, but with practice your mind recognizes a signal to enter a meditative state as your hands come into position. Chin Mudra also increases bloodflow to the brain, strengthening mental capacity and memory.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Form each hand into a circle by

touching the thumb tip to the tip of your index finger. Keep the other fingers unbent and relaxed. If you prefer, bring your index finger tips to the first joints of your thumb. Rest your hand backs on your thighs or knees. Hold as you sit quietly or meditate.

HOW IT WORKS

Joining the thumb's fire element with the index finger's airiness generates a desire for inner peace. The joining of thumb (symbolizing supreme consciousness) with index finger (individual consciousness) represents the individual ego merging with the universal. In the variation, the individual ego bows to the supreme consciousness.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: 'I FELT A STRONG CONNECTION WHEN THE FINGERTIPS WERE TOUCHING, LIKE A COMPLETED ELECTRIC CIRCUIT, AND I DIDN'T WANT TO MOVE THEM APART.'

VYANA MUDRA

Expansive Prana Gesture



In yoga philosophy, *vyana* is the subtle energy that governs your circulatory system and enables your muscles to move. It has its seat in your heart chakra and causes energy to radiate outward. On a physical level, stimulating *vyana* can relieve cold hands and feet. Emotionally, *Vyana* Mudra arouses a desire for personal freedom and stimulates your heart to open. It cultivates the energy you need to live harmoniously with others – to be charitable and share what you have – and reduces mental tension by encouraging a calm environment. During meditation, it aids concentration.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. Using both hands, join the tips of your thumbs and index fingers, as in Chin Mudra (see opposite). Then bring the tips of your middle fingers to the central part of your thumbs. Your ring and little fingers are extended, but relaxed. Hold as you sit quietly or meditate.

HOW IT WORKS

When the fire element of your thumb joins the airiness of the index finger, it generates a burning desire for peace. By adding pressure from your middle finger (associated with the expansive nature of the element ether, or space), your aspiration radiates into the environment.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: SIT HOLDING VYANA MUDRA AND RECALL A TIME WHEN YOU FELT CONTENTED. BREATHE DEEPLY AND REMEMBER EXACTLY WHERE YOU WERE AND WITH WHOM. NOW LET GO OF THE DETAILS BUT CONTINUE TO SENSE THE FEELINGS OF WELLBEING. YOU MAY EXPERIENCE A WARM, GLOWING FEELING IN YOUR CHEST.

GARUDA MUDRA

Eagle Gesture



This wonderful double-handed mudra, frequently used in Indian dance, is connected to the energy of freedom and your ability to explore new situations and take responsibility for life. It activates blood circulation, balances your energy levels, alleviates exhaustion and reduces mood swings.

Practise Garuda Mudra three times a day for 40 days and you'll feel better able to control the fluctuations of your mind and moods. It is also useful in stressful situations if your breathing becomes restricted. Garuda Mudra is especially powerful in the autumn, when vata energy (see [pages 18–19](#)) is more likely to go out of balance.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand. Raise both hands to chest level and cross your wrists so your palms face your body. Interlock your thumbs and bring your hands flat onto your chest with fingers stretched wide apart, but relaxed. Hold for ten deep breaths. As a variation, start with your

hands on your chest, then exhale and bend your fingers in toward your palms, making loose fists. Inhale as you fan your fingers out again, spreading them as wide as possible. Repeat ten times. Feel the two sides of your body becoming more balanced with each breath.

HOW IT WORKS

Joining your thumbs, representing the fire element, produces a burst of energy. All the other fingers remain unbound, leaving their elements free of restraint.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: IN THE MOVING VARIATION, VISUALIZE BLOOD PUMPING RHYTHMICALLY THROUGH YOUR BODY AS YOU OPEN AND CLOSE YOUR HANDS.

GRANTHITA MUDRA

Knot Gesture



In shape Granthita Mudra resembles a knot, and it helps to untie emotional knots at times of sadness. Grief is the ‘airy’ emotion of the heart – when you lose someone, life feels empty. And if you do not let go of grief and inner wounds, your energy becomes ‘tied up in knots’. In the yoga tradition, your heart chakra is the seat of *vishnu granthi*, an energetic knot of grief, pain and spiritual limitations. Energetic knots are not blockages but protective mechanisms that shield you from too much energy. Once you become strong enough to handle that energy, those knots gradually open and inner healing takes place.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Clasp both hands together by interlocking your fingers; make sure the left index finger is on top of the right. Bring the tip of each thumb to the index finger of the same hand, forming two interlocking circles. Rest your hands in your lap or hold them in front of your heart for 3–5 minutes whenever you feel the need.

HOW IT WORKS

By joining thumb and index fingers, you accentuate the air element of the index fingers by adding fire; making two circles doubles the potency. Interlocking the other fingers adds the support of the other elements.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: HOLDING THE MUDRA, PICTURE YOUR HEART AS A TANGLE OF THREADS. UNTIE THE KNOTS ONE BY ONE. AS YOU LOOSEN THE THREADS, LET GO OF PAINFUL MEMORIES AND FEEL YOURSELF BECOMING MORE RELAXED.

PRĀNĀPANA MUDRA

Taking In and Throwing Out Gesture



Yoga philosophy describes two important aspects of subtle energy, prana and apana: the ability to take in positive energy and to expel what you no longer need. This mudra enhances both aspects simultaneously and is used in kinesiology to boost efficient breathing. It is also a great boon if you suffer from seasickness, airsickness or dizziness. Next time you travel, sit with your hands in this mudra.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand or lie down. Each hand does something different: Right hand – bring the tips of the thumb, index and middle fingers together.

Left hand – join the thumb to the tips of the ring and middle fingers.

Hold for 5 minutes four times daily, leaving at least 15 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

On your right hand, by bringing the fire element of your thumb to the index and middle fingers, you accentuate the air (index) and ether (middle finger) elements that relate to prana, the subtle energy that causes you to breathe in. On your left hand, by joining the thumb to the ring and middle fingers you accentuate the earth (ring finger) and ether elements that relate to apana, the subtle energy that enables you to breathe out.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, PICTURE YOUR LUNGS AS LONG, SKINNY BALLOONS. TAKE A DEEP BREATH THAT FILLS FIRST THE BOTTOM OF THESE BALLOONS, THEN EXPANDS THE MIDDLE AND FINALLY FILLS THE TOP PART WITH AIR. AS YOU EXHALE, VISUALIZE THIS PROCESS REVERSING.

PRANĀPANA MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Matsyasana: Supported Fish Pose

Pranāpana Mudra works best in a pose that permits your lungs to expand to the full, like this supported chest-opening posture. Use it to practise breathing more fully or for relief when your breathing is less easy than usual. You will need a bolster and a firm cushion.

- 1 Place a rug or yoga mat on the ground and position a bolster or rolled-up blanket on top, so it lies horizontally across the mat. You can practise on a bed or sofa, but a rigid support is best. Sit on the mat and shake out your shoulders to make sure they are fully relaxed. Then lower yourself back so that when you lie down, the bolster comes beneath your upper back, arching your chest up and supporting your upper body. Place a cushion beneath your head for support.
- 2 Place your legs slightly apart with feet relaxed. Rest your arms on the ground, approximately 45 degrees from your body. Allow them to relax with your hands in Pranāpana Mudra, palms up.
- 3 Take long, slow, deep breaths for up to 5 minutes. Feel your abdomen rise with each inhalation and fall with each exhalation. Try to draw the air into the lowest portion of your lungs, causing your abdomen and ribcage to expand to the maximum.
- 4 When you have finished, release the mudra and roll to one side. Take 2–3 deep breaths before pushing yourself to a sitting position and gently shaking out your hands from the wrists.



KSHEPANA MUDRA

Letting Go Gesture



This mudra, also known as *Uttara-bodhi*, the Buddhist seal of spiritual enlightenment, assists you in letting go of any feelings of stress and negativity, helping you toward a state of pure joy. Its name is sometimes translated as the gesture of the ‘sprinkling of nectar’. If you hold the mudra for 3–5 minutes daily, you will begin to sense a subtle energy shift similar to the joyful freedom you experience when you spend time in nature. It also inspires you to share experiences with others.

On a physical level, Kshepana Mudra improves your breathing by enhancing exhalation, increasing your ability to shed anything you and your body no longer need. It can be a useful means of releasing stress before a daunting or difficult task.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand. Using both hands, interlock your fingers, then release your index fingers so they are joined

and pointing upward. Hold this position in front of your heart, or with your arms raised straight over your head, as in the asana opposite.

HOW IT WORKS

By joining the energies of both index fingers (representing air), you stimulate the air element, creating a gentle internal ‘breeze’ that blows away the pollution of life and stale ideas.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘AS A STUDENT I’VE FOUND THAT KSHEPANA MUDRA HELPS ME TO LET GO OF EXAMINATION NERVES. I WOULD ALSO RECOMMEND IT TO PERFORMERS – OR ANYONE WHO HAS TO STAND UP AND MAKE A PRESENTATION – TO RID THEMSELVES OF STAGE FRIGHT.’

KSHEPANA MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Ardha-chandrasana: Standing Half-Moon Pose

This classic yoga pose stretches your spine, hips and back muscles laterally, as well as improving circulation. Holding the hands in Kshepana Mudra stimulates the air element, so you feel lifted upward while your feet remain firmly on the ground. It helps to bring a strong, rooted freedom to your practice – and to life.

- 1** Stand with your feet 5–10cm (2–4in) apart; distribute your weight evenly between both feet. Relax your arms beside your body. Take a few deep breaths.
- 2** Inhale as you raise your arms straight out to the sides, then overhead. When your hands meet above your head, interlock your fingers, then release your index fingers so they point upward in Kshepana Mudra. Stretch your entire body upward, while keeping both feet firmly on the ground.
- 3** Retain this upward extension and exhale as you bend to the right in a lateral stretch resembling a ‘half-moon’ shape. Make sure your elbows are straight and your weight is still evenly balanced between both feet. Hold for as long as you feel comfortable, breathing normally. Inhale as you return back to centre.
- 4** Exhale as you ‘half-moon’ to the left, keeping your hands in Kshepana Mudra. Inhale as you come back to centre.
- 5** Exhale as you release your hands and sweep them out to the sides and back down by your sides. Repeat the sequence 3–6 times.
- 6** When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists.





4

ETHER MUDRAS

ENHANCING INNER PEACE, SELF-EXPRESSION
AND CREATIVITY

Part of hand: middle finger

Element: ether

Related chakra: throat

Physical associations: throat, mouth, ears, sense of hearing Emotional
associations: inner peace, self-expression, creativity, communication

'The wise person looks into space [ether] and knows there are no limited dimensions.'

Lao Tzu

INTRODUCING THE ETHER MUDRAS

These mudras focus on your middle finger, which enhances your connection to the quality of ether, or space – matter in its most subtle form. *Akasha* is the Sanskrit word meaning ‘ether’ in all its manifestations, whether that is an enclosed area, the sky, limitless space or the void. Space is the vessel in which all of the other elements exist.

The mudras in this chapter influence the throat chakra. This is the communication centre of your subtle body and your energetic centre of expression and creativity, and it has a strong connection to the currents passing through your middle finger. When this chakra is open and balanced, your communication skills improve and you gain a better appreciation of silence; you become more artistic and innovative, and feel better equipped to express yourself in positive ways and to understand others.

Together with the element of air, ether makes up the vata dosha, the motivating energy that keeps you moving and achieving goals (see [pages 18–19](#)). Ether mudras generate mental firmness and inner strength; they also enhance your ability to become absorbed in deep meditation. They help you to understand knowledge beyond written words, and can give you the power to explain difficult concepts.

In yoga philosophy, *udana* is the form of subtle energy that has its seat in your throat chakra and enables you to express yourself. Udana, your expressive breath, begins at your solar plexus and gains strength as it rises to your throat: the Sanskrit word *udana* means the ‘air that flies upward’.

A key characteristic of this element is sound, and practising the mudras will help you to speak with more conviction. As well as physical speech, your inner voice springs from your throat chakra, as does your ability to listen deeply. Reflection on the throat chakra brings a realization of the importance and power of words, their correct use and the possible negative effects of their corruption and manipulation. As you practise these mudras, you will notice that your ability to find your own truth increases, as does the ease with which you are able to express your creative impulses.

These mudras relieve throat chakra obstructions that block communication between your heart and mind. When the feelings that arise in your heart are

hindered, you may not think them through properly and may act too impulsively or irrationally. Mudras that help to keep your throat chakra open also enable the ideas, hopes and dreams that come from your ajna (brow) chakra to be ‘taken to heart’.

Most of these mudras are best practised alongside periods of *mouna* (voluntary silence). This powerful practice can help you to conserve, purify and strengthen your energy and inner peace. As you tune into silence and decrease the external ‘noise’ you begin to notice how busy your own internal environment really is. And by watching your thoughts with detachment, as though they were bubbles that will ‘pop’, you find that many of your worries are about things that really don’t exist. By holding these mudras while engaging in silent introspection and self-analysis, you will become better able to ensure that your words coincide with your actions – and that both your words and your actions are in tune with your thoughts.

Ether mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Akasha	Relieves congestion; assists in letting go of what you no longer need or love	74
Shunya	Decreases spaced-out feelings, dizziness and fear of solitude	75
Vishuddha	Boosts positive communication and listening skills	76
Udana	Enables self-expression; boosts joy, lightness and laughter	77
Bhramara	Improves concentration, memory and confidence. Aids deep listening and communicating.	78
Shanmukhi	Aids meditation; enhances sensitivity to sound	79
Bhuchari	Promotes intense concentration and feelings of peace	80
Nivedana	Promotes profound listening and communication	81
Kaleshwara	Calms the mind; helps in abandoning preconceived ideas and negative patterns of behaviour	82
Sankalpa	Promotes a more positive vision of life purpose; enhances intuition and symbolic thinking; aids communication	83
Matangi	Enhances powers of oratory; creates harmony in life	84
Kubera	Concentrates energy toward a purpose; strengthens resolves; lends confidence and calmness of mind	86
Surabhi	Gives greater understanding of your own talents and goals in life	87

AKASHA MUDRA

Touching the Void Gesture



The word akasha in Sanskrit means space and also the limitless emptiness of the void. Practising this mudra allows you to tap into this, freeing up ‘space’ within your body and mind by getting rid of physical and emotional waste. It assists you in gaining the virtue that yogis call *aparigraha*, or non-greediness. This means living simply, reducing your clutter, letting go of what you no longer need or love, sharing what you have, not judging others by their material possessions, and not believing that what you own is tantamount to who you are. Some people consider this to be the most subtle and difficult to master of yoga’s ten ethical guidelines, known as *yamas* and *niyamas*.

Physically, Akasha Mudra relieves congestion, and helps to overcome feelings of heaviness. Holding the mudra also stimulates your capacity to absorb calcium.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Kneel on your heels (see [pages 20–21](#)). Using both hands, join the tip of each

thumb with the pad of the middle finger of the same hand. Allow your other fingers to relax as you rest the backs of your hands on their respective knees or thighs with palms facing upward. Practise for 3–5 minutes daily, especially after meals or before starting a major clear-out.

HOW IT WORKS

By joining the thumb (fire element) to the middle finger, you stimulate the ether or space element, creating more space in your life.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘I FOUND THE EXPERIENCE VERY SIMILAR TO THAT OF CHIN MUDRA [SEE PAGE 62] BUT WITH AN ENHANCED FEELING OF OPENNESS AND VULNERABILITY.’

SHUNYA MUDRA

Silence of the Void Gesture



The word *shunya* is used in yoga and Buddhist traditions to mean zero, nothingness and the silence of infinite space. If you tend to feel ‘spaced-out’ or dizzy, Shunya Mudra can help to reduce excesses of ether, which has a grounding effect. The gesture may also increase your desire to be alone and peaceful. The ether element is a component of the vata dosha (see [pages 18–19](#)), and this mudra is especially helpful for people with a vata constitution or anyone with a vata imbalance.

Physically, Shunya Mudra alleviates hearing difficulties, vertigo, ear and throat infections, and thyroid problems. It helps to remove unwanted sounds from your ears, such as those experienced with tinnitus. Practice Shunya Mudra on a plane if your ears tend to hurt while ascending and descending.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand or lie down. Do not practise while walking or eating. Using both hands, bend your middle fingers

until the tips touch the base of your thumbs; then bend your thumbs and use them to press down lightly on your middle fingers. Keep your other fingers extended and relaxed. Hold for 4–5 minutes, repeating up to three times daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By pressing down on the middle finger (which represents ether), you decrease the ether element in your body, neutralizing excess vata dosha.



ACCOMPANYING MEDITATION: TO MAKE SHUNYA MUDRA MORE EFFECTIVE, OBSERVE A DAILY PERIOD OF SILENCE, BUILDING UP TO AT LEAST AN HOUR, WITHOUT SPEAKING, READING, WATCHING TV OR LISTENING TO MUSIC.

VISHUDDHA MUDRA

Throat Chakra Gesture



This is the key mudra of vishuddha, the throat chakra – your body's communication centre – and it strengthens and balances both the physical and the subtle energy of your throat. With practice, you can express yourself in more positive ways and will be more able to listen and understand what people are trying to convey through words and action.

If your throat chakra is blocked, your communication may be so distorted that you lie without even realizing it. For instance, you might be in the habit of putting on a 'brave face' and not complaining. When your throat chakra is open and balanced, you become capable of authentic communication. You can express your creativity and emotional needs honestly without fear of what others think. This makes Vishuddha Mudra especially beneficial if you have to instruct or direct others.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or lie down. Start with both palms

facing down. Bend all your fingers down and loosely interlock them. Join the tip of each index finger with the tip of its respective thumb to form two interlocked circles. Hold for between 5 and 45 minutes daily, when you are quiet and not distracted by TV, music or other entertainment.

HOW IT WORKS

Joining, then interlocking your thumbs and index fingers balances the fire (thumb) and air (index finger) elements, while stimulating ether. This balances your throat chakra.

 **ACCOMPANYING CHANT:** TO OPTIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF THIS MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE VISHUDDHA CHAKRA, 'HAM'.

UDANA MUDRA

Upward-flying Energy Gesture



In yoga philosophy, it is udana energy that gives your neck the strength to hold your head up and your vocal cords the ability to vibrate. It reveals itself through your enthusiasm and supports your voice, giving you the ability to express yourself through your own unique sound. It is an excellent mudra for writers, artists, actors and singers.

Practising Udana Mudra develops your sense of joy and lightness in the body and the ability to laugh freely. Physically, it strengthens your vocal cords, and brings prana to your thyroid and parathyroid glands. Your speech becomes clearer, and you are better able to overcome artistic blockages, such as writer's block.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or practise while walking. Using both hands, join the tips of your thumbs and index fingers. Place the tips of your middle fingers on the nails of the index fingers and apply gentle pressure. Allow

your ring and little fingers to remain slightly curled, but relaxed. Hold for between 5 and 45 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

The air element in your index finger is stimulated by the fire of the thumb as you join their tips, and then freed of all limitations by the ether element when you apply pressure with the middle finger. The air and ether activate the throat chakra when positioned one upon the other.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: IF YOU TEND TO SUFFER FROM WRITER'S BLOCK, SIT QUIETLY WITH YOUR HANDS IN UDANA MUDRA FOR A FEW MINUTES BEFORE BEGINNING WORK. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE INSPIRATION FLOWING FREELY.

BHRAMARA MUDRA

Humming Bee Gesture



Practise this wonderful mudra to improve concentration, memory and confidence. It connects you to the inner spaces of your mind and body and with practice you'll find yourself listening and communicating on a more profound level.

When combined with the breathing practice below, this mudra sweetens your voice and prepares you to express yourself. If you suffer from insomnia or stress, use it to calm your nervous system. The vibrations – the Sanskrit word *bhramari* means ‘humming bee’ – open the sinus and nasal passages, introducing more ‘space’ into the head, useful if you are prone to congestion.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Using both hands, bring the ends of your index fingers to the base of your thumbs; then bring the tips of your thumbs against the side of fingernails of the middle fingers. Rest the backs of your hands on your thighs. Hold as you complete the breathing exercise below.

HOW IT WORKS

As you place your index fingers (air) on your thumbs (fire), you decrease the fire element. Pressing the nail of the middle fingers (ether) with the thumb increases ether and stimulates your throat chakra and communication skills.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: HOLDING THE MUDRA, LIGHTLY TIGHTEN YOUR THROAT AS YOU INHALE STRONGLY THROUGH BOTH NOSTRILS; FEEL YOUR SOFT PALATE MAKE A SNORING SOUND LIKE A BUMBLE BEE'S BUZZING. HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR 1-2 SECONDS, NOTICING ANY SENSE OF SPACE. AS YOU EXHALE, MAKE THE HIGH-PITCHED HUMMING OF A HONEY BEE.

SHANMUKHI MUDRA

Tuning into Silence Gesture



Practise this mudra to enhance your sensitivity to sound. It is especially helpful for people with over-active minds who would like to develop a meditation practice. To deepen your experience of inner silence, practise a breathing exercise while holding Shanmukhi Mudra (see below). This encourages *pratyahara*, the ability to draw the energies of your senses inward. The combined technique is especially beneficial when you are pregnant, helping you to tune into and forge a strong connection with your unborn child.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Remove glasses or contact lenses. Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) and close your eyes. Using both hands, insert the tips of each thumb into their respective ears. Lightly touch each of your closed eyelids with one index finger. Use your middle fingers to apply gentle pressure to either side of your nose. Rest your ring fingers on your upper lip. Press your little fingers just below your lower lip; gently squeeze your lips closed. Hold for as long as is comfortable,

tuning into inner silence. Repeat as often as you like.

HOW IT WORKS

By inserting your thumbs into your ears, you enhance your connection to inner silence. The pressure of the other fingers closing your sense organs helps to quieten your other senses.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: INHALE SILENTLY AS YOU PLACE YOUR FINGERS OVER YOUR EARS, EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH. AS YOU EXHALE, MAKE THE HIGH-PITCHED HUMMING OF A HONEY BEE. KEEP YOUR FACIAL MUSCLES AND JAW RELAXED AND TEETH SLIGHTLY SEPARATED. THIS IS A VARIATION OF THE BREATHING EXERCISE OPPOSITE.

BHUCHARI MUDRA

Gazing into the Void Gesture



This powerfully cleansing mudra promotes intense concentration. Because it helps free your mind of limitations, Bhuchari Mudra is used as a meditation technique that makes you feel more peaceful and at one with the world.

Physically, the mudra strengthens the nerve centres in your neck and your eyes while cleansing your tear ducts and sinuses. In the yoga tradition, Bhuchari Mudra is valued for lending the vitality and stamina you require to age gracefully.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Remove glasses or contact lenses. Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Place the thumb nail of one hand just above the centre of your upper lip. Curl the index, middle and ring fingers into your palm; stretch your little finger forward. Stare at the tip of your little finger with a steady gaze, trying to blink as little as possible. Relax any tension. After a few moments, your eyes may start to water, a cleansing process. Hold for 3–5 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

Amrita (the nectar of immortality) is produced by a minor centre of subtle energy just above your palate known as the soma chakra, then purified in the vishuddha chakra. Normally, the fluid flows down to the manipura chakra, where it is consumed by the fire element, causing physical degeneration. Bhuchari Mudra reverses the process.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: AFTER HOLDING THE MUDRA, WITHOUT CHANGING YOUR GAZE, DROP YOUR HAND AND CONTINUE STARING AT THE POINT WHERE YOUR LITTLE FINGER WAS. GAZE INTO THIS VOID FOR 15–20 MINUTES DAILY, KEEPING YOUR EYES STEADY AND UNCROSSED.

NIVEDANA MUDRA

Deep Listening Gesture



Many people who say they would like to communicate better mean they want to talk more. But to become a superior communicator, you must be able to listen honestly and with compassion. Nivedana Mudra – the Sanskrit means ‘making known’ – promotes a deep listening that only occurs when your mind is peaceful. This mudra encourages good physical hearing, too. Unbalanced ear-energy does not always result in impaired hearing; often it damages your ability to perceive the world positively.

Since you hold this mudra with your left hand only, it is easy to practise for long periods and in everyday situations: try it during difficult conversations or when following complicated instructions.

To maintain a peaceful mind, it’s useful to reduce anger, so combine this mudra with Pranāpana Mudra (see [page 66](#)). When you feel stressed and have difficulty in listening, alternate it with Pitta-pacifying Mudra (see [page 48](#)).

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise in any position. Bend the middle finger of your left hand into your palm and press down on it gently with your thumb. Hold for 5 minutes four times daily, waiting at least 15 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

By pressing down on the middle finger, you bring the ether element under control. This helps you to focus by stopping any wandering or chattering of the mind.



ACCOMPANYING INTENTION: NEXT TIME YOU HAVING TROUBLE GRASPING WHAT SOMEONE IS TRYING TO TELL YOU, BRING YOUR LEFT HAND INTO NIVEDANA MUDRA AND TRY TO LISTEN MORE DEEPLY – TO WHAT THE PERSON IS SAYING BENEATH THE WORDS.

KALESHWARA MUDRA

Lord of Time Gesture



This mudra calms your mind, helps you to jettison preconceived ideas and prejudice, and can eliminate negative or addictive patterns of behaviour. In yoga philosophy, time (*kala* in Sanskrit) is viewed as an attribute of space, or ether. According to yoga philosophy, both space and time are illusions: the past is over and can never be changed, and the future has yet to take place. The present moment is the brief instant in which the future becomes the past. Kaleshwara Mudra helps to ground you in that moment.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Using both hands, extend your middle fingers and bring the pads together. Bend your index, ring and little fingers halfway into their palms and bring the backs of the respective fingers together. Join the ends of your thumbs and point them toward your chest, spreading your elbows to the sides. Hold for as long as you like, repeating as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Bringing the middle fingers together enhances the ether element, causing greater awareness of time and space (here and now). Depressing the other fingers reduces the effects of the other elements, except fire, the driving force, which is emphasized as you point both thumbs to your centre.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: AS YOU PRACTISE, OBSERVE YOUR BREATH. NOTICE ITS PAUSES: ONE AS YOUR IN-BREATH TURNS AROUND TO BECOME THE OUT-BREATH; THE OTHER AS YOU FINISH YOUR EXHALATION. TRY TO LENGTHEN BOTH PAUSES AS YOU TAKE 10–20 DEEP BREATHS.

SANKALPA MUDRA

Practice Intention Gesture



In yoga philosophy, a *sankalpa* is a true resolve that equips you with a positive mental image of an action before you perform it. Practising Sankalpa Mudra gives you a more positive vision of your purpose in life. This mudra also enhances intuition and helps you to be more efficient and innovative in the way you think symbolically, express yourself creatively and communicate your thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams. You can practise in any situation: while sitting on a bus, at your desk or if you meditate. Make this mudra more effective by alternating it with Samasti Mudra (see [page 145](#)).

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise in any position. Each hand does something different:

Right hand – rest the tip of your thumb on the inside edge of the nail of your ring finger.

Left hand – bring the tips of the thumb and middle finger together. This is Akasha Mudra (see [page 74](#)).

Hold for 4–5 minutes five times daily. Allow at least 10 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

The right hand, with the driving force of the thumb enhancing the earth element of the ring finger, fosters your sense of inner stability and self-assurance. The left hand brings the element of space into balance as the thumb presses on the middle finger.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: HOLD THE MUDRA BEFORE BEGINNING WORK, A YOGA CLASS OR A SPORTS SESSION AND VISUALIZE PERFORMING THE UPCOMING ACTIVITY IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY. THE ACTION WILL SEEM EASIER BECAUSE YOUR MIND HAS ALREADY EXPERIENCED IT.

MATANGI MUDRA

Guardian of Wisdom Gesture



Associated with the throat chakra, the goddess Matangi is a guardian of wisdom, speech, music, writing and the arts. When you practise her mudra, you connect to the sagacity and creativity of the throat chakra, enhancing your powers of oratory, making your voice more sweetly melodic and generally improving your ability to achieve harmony in your life.

This mudra is also used in the Japanese Kuji Kiri system of Ninjutsu by Samarai and Ninja warriors for its ability to boost physical and mental strength and courage, and to encourage a more positive outlook on life.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Standing, bring both hands together and interlace all your fingers. Release both middle fingers and extend them, keeping them pressing against each other and pointing upward. Hold for 1–3 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

When the two middle fingers (representing the ether element) come together, the currents of energy are magnified, amplifying your powers of artistic expression and creativity that stem from the energy of your throat chakra.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: STAND WITH YOUR FEET HIP-WIDTH APART AND SENSE AN ENERGETIC CONNECTION WITH THE EARTH; LIFT YOUR TOES AND SPREAD THEM AS YOU PUT THEM DOWN AGAIN. THIS IS TADASANA, MOUNTAIN POSE. BRING YOUR HANDS INTO MATANGI MUDRA AND HOLD FOR 1–3 MINUTES.

MATANGI MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Ardha-chandrasana: Kneeling Crescent Moon Pose

Practising this pose brings your body into a lovely backward stretch that releases tension from the hips, improves your balance and concentration, enhances your breathing and makes you feel joyful. This elation is enhanced when you practise the asana holding Matangi Mudra. Physically, having the middle fingers extended in this position helps to lengthen the spine and facilitate deeper breathing. Energetically, it gives you a greater feeling of purification, preparing you for the descent of the wisdom of the goddess Matangi.

- 1** Kneel up with your knees hip-width apart. Place your left foot flat on the floor in front of you so your foot is under your knee and your thigh is parallel to the ground.
- 2** Bring your palms together in front of your chest. Interlock your fingers then release your middle fingers so they point upward in Matangi Mudra.
- 3** Try to keep your palms together as you straighten your elbows and stretch your arms upward. Look up and breathe deeply as you arch back, sensing an elation as you lift your heart toward the sky.
- 4** Remain in the pose for 10–30 seconds, breathing deeply and feeling you have the ability to overcome even the greatest of challenges in life.
- 5** Come back to the centre and repeat the pose on the other side.
- 6** When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



KUBERA MUDRA

Guardian of Wealth Gesture



In Vastu, the Indian science of space allocation (similar to feng shui), Kubera is the guardian of the north who gives you the courage to make projects succeed. Kubera Mudra concentrates your energy so you can direct it toward anything you desire. It strengthens your resolve and gives you the confidence and calmness of mind to proceed.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. First formulate a practice intention (see below). Keeping this in mind, using both hands, bring your index and middle fingers together and join their tips to the tip of the thumb of the same hand. Fold the ring and little fingers into the middle of your palms. Hold for up to 30 seconds, visualizing your desire accomplished and feeling thankful. The focus with which you practise is more important than the length of time, but you can gradually increase the hold to 5 minutes. If you have high blood pressure or heart disease, hold for no more than 30 seconds.

HOW IT WORKS

The fire of the thumb stimulates the air and ether elements of the index and middle fingers, bringing them into balance. Closing these three fingers together strengthens the intensity of your thoughts. The ring and little fingers depress pressure points in your palm, boosting good health.



ACCOMPANYING INTENTION: BEFORE PRACTISING, FORMULATE A SHORT STATEMENT TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE GOALS. STATE IT POSITIVELY USING THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR, 'I WILL'. WHILE HOLDING THE MUDRA, SEE YOUR INTENTION AS A REALITY.

SURABHI MUDRA

Wish-fulfilment Gesture



This effective and powerful mudra, named after Surabhi, the miraculous ‘cow of plenty’, can help you to transcend barriers in your life, especially if they are self-imposed. Practising this mudra increases the spacious nature of your mind, giving you a greater understanding of your own talents and latent capacities. Physically, it enhances your sense of hearing.

If you have a yoga or meditation practice, hold this mudra just before you begin, while mentally stating your practice intention (see opposite).

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see pages 20–21). Bring the tip of the little finger of your left hand to touch the right ring finger, and the little finger of your right hand to touch the left ring finger. Then join the middle fingers of each hand with the index fingers of the other hand. Extend your thumbs and bring the ends together. Hold for 30–45 seconds.

HOW IT WORKS

As you join different fingers together, so the elements they represent are combined, which magnifies their potential. Air, represented by the index finger, meets ether, represented by the middle finger, which calms and elevates your consciousness. Simultaneously, earth, represented by your ring finger, meets water, symbolized by the little finger, to ground and balance your mind.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: TO MAKE ANY YOGA, MEDITATION OR PRAYER PRACTICE MORE POWERFUL, BEGIN BY HOLDING SURABHI MUDRA AND VISUALIZE YOURSELF OFFERING THE BENEFITS OF YOUR UPCOMING PRACTICE TO SOMEONE WHO MAY BE NEEDING A BIT OF POSITIVE ENERGY.

FOUR MUDRAS IN A CHANTING PRACTICE

Nadānasudhana: Four-part Mudra Series with OM

In Sanskrit, *nada* means ‘sound’ and *anasudhana* roughly translates as ‘being intent upon’. Hence the practice of Nadānasudhana is defined as fixing your attention upon a mantra in order to bring your mind into a peaceful state. Nadānasudhana is a four-part series of mudras practised alongside the different sounds that make up the mantra OM. First you chant the component parts A, U and M while practising three mudras, and then you chant the full mantra itself while holding the final mudra.

OM represents the ‘soundless sound’ that cannot be heard with your ears. In Indian philosophy, this is the sound of the infinite, of all that was, is and shall be. The A sound represents the past, waking and the physical plane; the OU sound, the present, dreaming and the mental plane; the M stands for the future, deep sleep and everything beyond comprehension by the intellect. The silence after you finish chanting deepens your inner awareness and releases subtle tensions in your mind.

1 Chin Mudra while chanting ‘AAAA’

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring your hands into Chin Mudra by joining the tips of your thumbs and index fingers (see [page 62](#)). Keep the other fingers straight, but relaxed. Rest the backs of your hands on your knees or thighs.

Take a deep breath and open your mouth wide. As you exhale, chant an elongated ‘AAAA’ in a low voice. Repeat nine times, feeling the sound resonating in your abdomen.

2 Chinmaya Mudra while chanting ‘OU’

To make the second mudra, keep your thumbs and index fingers joined. Fold in the middle, ring and little fingers on each hand until they touch

their respective palms. Rest the backs of your hands on your knees and thighs.

Take a deep breath, open your mouth halfway, and round your lips. As you exhale, chant an elongated ‘OU’ in a medium-pitched voice. Repeat nine times, noticing the sound resonating in your chest and throat regions.

3 Adi Mudra while chanting ‘MMMM’

To make the third mudra, release your thumbs and index fingers. Bend your thumbs into their palms. Bend all the other fingers over the thumbs until they, too, touch the palm. This is a variation of Mushti Mudra (see [page 148](#)) with thumbs inside the fists. Rest your hand backs on your knees or thighs.

Keeping your lips gently sealed, breathe in through your nose. As you exhale, chant an elongated ‘MMMM’ in a high-pitched voice. Repeat nine times, feeling the sound vibrating in your head and face, especially in your sinus cavities.

4 Brahma Mudra while chanting ‘AUM’

To make the final mudra, leave your hands in fists with the thumbs tucked inside your fingers. Place your fists on either side of your navel.

Take a deep breath and open your mouth wide. As you exhale, chant ‘A-U-M’. Feel your mouth gradually rounding until your lips are completely together. Repeat nine times, feeling the sound resonating throughout your body.





5

EARTH MUDRAS

ENCOURAGING STABILITY AND GROUNDING

Part of hand: ring finger

Element: earth

Related chakra: root

Physical associations: skeleton, immune system, feet and legs, sense of smell
Emotional associations: stability, groundedness, security

***'Kind, ever gracious is the earth we tread on, the firm Prithivi,
mother of plants and herbs, the producer of all.'***

Atharva Veda

INTRODUCING THE EARTH MUDRAS

The mudras in this chapter focus attention on the ring finger and the element earth. This is the finger on which a wedding ring is traditionally worn – perhaps with the wish that marriage will be stable and endure. Energetically, this is a very important finger as special pranic currents pass through it that enable you to ground yourself.

In Sanskrit, earth is called *prithivi*, a term that includes all matter in solid form, not only the rocks and terrain of our planet. Earth has the quality of being steady, inert and unmoving. In Ayurveda the elements earth and water make up the kapha dosha (see [pages 18–19](#)), the stabilizing force that supports the two other doshas. Without kapha, the other doshas, pitta and vata, would have no foundation on which to function. If you have a kapha imbalance, you may suffer from procrastination, laziness, weight problems and boredom – all of which can be overcome by working with the mudras in this chapter.

The earth is the source of all treasure, including the wealth we need most of all: food. By connecting more strongly with the earth, you become better able to enjoy a healthy diet and utilize its nourishment. Mudras connected with the earth element also tend to be cleansing, and can help you to detoxify your body and mind.

The earth element has its seat in your muladhara or root chakra, which provides your energetic foundation. When this chakra and the earth element are well balanced, you gain more stability and poise in every part of life. On a physical level, practising these mudras can help to improve your posture, especially if you tend to be clumsy or accident-prone.

When its energy is out of balance, you may find that you suffer from frequent problems with your legs, feet or spine, or from sciatica. There are specific mudras for back care in this chapter. Most of the mudras on the following pages become more effective when you practise them alongside some type of grounding exercise, such as yoga, walking, gentle marching, running or jogging. The muladhara chakra also governs your auto-immune system and genetic tendencies – things that ‘run in the family’ – as well as your skeletal system, bowels, teeth and sense of smell.

Emotionally, the mudras associated with the earth element can help to bring

balance if your life is overly busy. They offer stability when you feel ungrounded, out of balance, spaced out or emotionally numb. Consider working with them if you feel insecure, but can't understand why, if you tend to spend lots of time 'in your head' or feel disconnected from those around you. By providing welcome grounding, earth mudras can help to reduce anxiety and stress. They can also be of great benefit if you are experiencing any form of paralysis – either physical or psychological – or feel 'stuck' in a situation, perhaps at work or in a relationship.

Above all, earth signifies security, stability, groundedness and being rooted in the present moment – by practising these mudras you create a firm foundation for life.

Earth mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Prithivi	Helps to alleviate physical weakness, maintain healthy weight and increase energy levels	94
Bhumi-sparsha	Physically and mentally grounding; helps you to get back in touch with life	95
Muladhara	Enables you to access your untapped potential	96
Jnana	Grants wisdom, intuitive knowledge, grounding; used in meditation and for quiet reflection	97
Bhu	Creates a firm foundation for spiritual practice; helps in being steadfast and unshakeable in pursuit of goals	98
Prana	Grounds prana and increases vitality; builds endurance and immune system; strengthens weak muscles and teeth	100
Apana	Expels physical and emotional impurities; regulates menstrual cycle; eases childbirth; strengthens immune system	101
Sthira	Strengthens the spine (especially the lumbar region) and the pelvic area; counters back pain	102
Sukham	Encourages slowing down; counters stress and burnout	103
Vishnu	Balances energy within physical and energetic bodies; purifies body; calms mind; releases stress	104
Kali	Improves energy levels; increases wellbeing, security, courage and inner strength	106

PRITHIVI MUDRA

Earth Gesture



Prithivi is the Sanskrit name for Mother Earth. She is the solid ground we walk upon that provides the foundation for life. In practising Prithivi Mudra, you join the magnetic energy of the earth with the energetic current of fire. This nourishes the ‘solid’ elements of your body – your muscles, bones and hair – helping to alleviate physical weakness and enhance stability and balance. It also helps you to overcome fear.

With regular practice of this mudra, you may notice dynamic changes starting to take place: it becomes easier to maintain a healthy weight, your skin glows and energy levels increase. Overall, you gain a healthier outlook on life and feel more content and enthusiastic.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Using both hands, gently join the tips of your thumbs to the pad of the ring fingers of the same hand. Extend your other fingers, but keep them relaxed. To meditate with this

mudra, rest the inner parts of the wrists on their respective thighs so your fingers point down. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

When you make a circle by joining your thumb (the fire element) and ring finger (earth), you channel prana to move around the circuit. This stimulates the muladhara chakra and creates an energetic ‘spark’, like lightning striking the earth.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘WHEN I MEDITATED USING PRITHIVI MUDRA, I SEEMED TO FORGET ABOUT MY PHYSICAL BODY. I ONLY REALIZED THIS WHEN I CAME OUT OF THE MEDITATION AND MOVED MY HANDS AND FINGERS.’

BHUMI-SPARSHA MUDRA

Earth Witness Gesture



Many Eastern spiritual teachers are depicted holding this mudra – it symbolizes enlightenment and indicates someone meditating or teaching. In Buddhist traditions, this gesture calls to mind the 40 days that Buddha meditated under the bodhi tree before experiencing enlightenment, calling on the earth to witness his triumph over negative forces.

Bhumi-sparsa Mudra grounds you physically and emotionally. Use it if you find it difficult to sit quietly or meditate because your mind jumps around, or whenever you feel out of touch with life.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring your left arm across your body so your left hand rests in your lap, palm facing upward. Rest the inside of your right wrist on your right knee, fingers pointing toward the earth. Keep your hand relaxed with the palm facing your body. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Your left hand faces up, ready to receive energy and inspiration. As your left arm comes across your body it creates an energetic circuit, completed when your right hand touches the earth. Your right hand acts like a lightning rod, grounding the energy running through your left hand.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHMG: HOLDING THE MuDRA, INHALE FOR 1–2 SECONDS, PAUSE AND HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR 1–2 SECONDS. INHALE FOR ANOTHER 1–2 SECONDS AND PAUSE AGAIN. CONTINUE UNTIL YOUR LUNGS FEEL FULL, REPEATING 4–5 TIMES. EXHALE SLOWLY. REPEAT 7–10 TIMES WHEN YOU NEED TO GROUND YOURSELF.

MULADHARA MUDRA

Root Chakra Gesture



The muladhara chakra provides you with the energy to endure life's trials; it acts as an energetic storehouse for your untapped potential. Images of muladhara chakra show a coiled snake, representing all this dormant energy. Practising Muladhara Mudra enhances your awareness of these assets and helps you put them to better use. It helps you to realize that you have the energy to endure and overcome difficulties.

At the same time, this mudra improves your powers of elimination and ability to let go of things you no longer need or want. It's especially useful when you need a major 'clear-out' of some aspect of life.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand with palms facing down. Bend the little and ring fingers of both hands inward and interlock them. Straighten your middle fingers and join their ends so they point upward. Bring together the tips of your index fingers and thumbs on each hand to form

interlocking circles. Hold for 1–3 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

Interlinking your ring and little fingers connects the earth and water elements. By making circles with your index fingers and thumbs you link the air and fire elements. This allows you to draw on the strength of all the elements – your untapped potential – as you make ‘space’ (by bringing your middle fingers together) for new beginnings.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: TO OPTIMIZE THE BENEFITS, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE MULADHARA CHAKRA, ‘LAM’.

JNANA MUDRA

Wisdom Gesture



Jnana (sometimes written Gyana) Mudra is a gesture that grants wisdom, intuitive knowledge and grounding. Though practised mainly during meditation, it can be useful any time you feel the need to contain your energy, making this the mudra of choice for quiet reflection on a bus or train en route home after a hectic day at work.

This mudra is similar in effect to Chin Mudra (see [page 62](#)), but instead of holding your palms upward to receive energy and inspiration, you place them downward, for enhanced grounding. Sometimes you will see people meditating with one hand facing up and the other down. This enables them to receive energy from a higher source without becoming too airy.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Using both hands, join the tip of each index finger with the thumb of the same hand, forming a circle. Gently rest the insides of your wrists on their respective knees so your fingers and palms

face downward. Don't create tension by trying to grab your knees for support. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

As the fire element of the thumb joins the airiness of the index finder it generates a burning desire for inner peace. By resting your inner wrist on your knees with your fingers toward the earth you are helping to ground yourself.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: 'HAVING MY HANDS FACING DOWNWARD MADE ME FEEL GROUNDED, CLOSED, HIDDEN, SECRET, VERY CONNECTED ENERGETICALLY AND MORE RELAXED.'

BHU MUDRA

Touching the Earth Gesture



In Sanskrit, *Bhu* is another name for planet Earth, as well as for the earth element, with its qualities of stability, groundedness, being rooted in the present moment and creating a firm foundation for spiritual practice. Practising Bhu Mudra – especially while meditating – enhances all the positive qualities of the earth element, helping you to be steadfast and unshakable in pursuit of your life goals.

If you hold your hand in Bhu Mudra and reverse its direction so your fingers point upward, you make a gesture that in the 20th century came to mean victory as well as peace.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Let your arms hang straight down from your shoulders toward the ground. Using both hands, fold your ring and little fingers and your thumb into your palm. Keep the middle and index fingers straight so they touch the ground or point toward it, making a relaxed,

inverted ‘V’ shape. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

The air and ether elements within your body and mind are grounded by the connection of your index and middle fingers to the earth.

 **ACCOMPANYING AFFIRMATION:** FOR A SENSE OF STEADFASTNESS, REPEAT AS YOU PRACTISE ONE OF THESE AFFIRMATIONS: ‘ MY LIFE IS FIRM AND GROUNDED.’
‘MY PATIENCE IS UNSHAKABLE.’
‘I AM EXACTLY WHERE I NEED TO BE.’

BHU MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Vajrasana: Thunderbolt Pose

Vajra is a Sanskrit word meaning both ‘thunderbolt’ and ‘diamond’. There is a belief in many cultures that diamonds are created when lightning hits the earth. Sitting in this pose, particularly with your hands in Bhu Mudra, stimulates your earth energy and ability to be fully present in the moment.

If you experience discomfort in your ankles or feet, cushion them by placing a small rolled towel beneath your feet or buttocks, or between your ankles. Alternatively, you may prefer to use a low kneeling bench, as used for Zen meditation.

- 1** Place a mat or folded blanket on the ground. Kneel on the mat with your feet and knees together or slightly apart. Then sit back so your buttocks rest firmly on your heels. Feel as though you are rooting yourself firmly, drawing stability and strength up from the ground.
- 2** Bring your hands into Bhu Mudra. Close your eyes and breathe gently through your nostrils.
- 3** Bring your awareness to the firmness of the ground beneath you, then visualize your spine growing down and taking root in the earth.
- 4** Feel the strength of the earth energize your spine and your whole body as you visualize yourself drawing stability and strength up from it.
- 5** To enhance the sense of stability and presence, repeat one of the affirmations opposite at least three times with full attention.
- 6** When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists.



PRANA MUDRA

Life-force Gesture



The Sanskrit word prana is usually translated as ‘life-force’ or ‘vital energy’ (see [pages 12–13](#)). This mudra harnesses and directs that essential subtle energy, grounding it and increasing your vitality. It’s easy to practise, even while on a bus or walking. Regular practice builds your powers of endurance, your immune system, weak muscles and teeth.

In many Eastern Christian icons, Jesus and the saints are depicted with their right hands in this mudra, or ‘blessing hand’. As the thumb nears the ring and little fingers, the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to mind. The extended index and middle fingers denote the two natures of Christ: divine and human.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise in any position. Using both hands, join the ends of your little and ring fingers to the tips of your thumbs; relax the other fingers. For healthier eyes, hold for at least 5 minutes daily. To revitalize body and mind, practise for up to

45 minutes a day.

HOW IT WORKS

Bringing together the little and ring fingers and thumb creates an invigorating flow of prana that rejuvenates body and mind. As kapha (see [pages 18–19](#)) is made up of the water and earth elements (represented by the little and ring fingers), Prana Mudra is especially beneficial for people with a kapha constitution.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: HOLDING PRANA MUDRA, SLOWLY INHALE THROUGH YOUR NOSE TO A COUNT OF 4. VISUALIZE PRANA STREAMING IN WITH THE AIR. HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR 8, VISUALIZING THE PRANA CIRCULATING THROUGH YOUR BODY. EXHALE THROUGH YOUR NOSE FOR 8, FEELING NEGATIVITY LEAVING YOUR BODY.

APANA MUDRA

Cleansing-energy Gesture



The Sanskrit word *apana* refers to the cleansing form of subtle energy in your body that moves outward and downward. It enables you to eliminate stale air from your lungs and expel impurities in all forms, facilitating not only the release of urine, solid waste, sweat and menses, but emotional ‘baggage’, too.

This mudra can be practised at any time and is especially beneficial to women, helping to regulate the menstrual cycle and easing childbirth as well as strengthening the immune system on all levels.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand or lie down. You may use one or both hands. Bring the tips of your middle and ring fingers to the top of your thumb; keep your other fingers extended and relaxed. Hold for up to 45 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By joining both the middle and ring fingers to the thumb, you are stimulating both the ether (outward-moving) and earth (downward-moving) energies in order to completely cleanse your body.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: HOLD THE MUDRA AS YOU LIE ON YOUR BACK, LEGS SLIGHTLY APART, ARMS AWAY FROM YOUR SIDES, PALMS DOWN. CLOSE YOUR EYES. BREATHING THROUGH YOUR NOSE, LISTEN TO YOUR BREATH. AS YOU INHALE, HEAR IT SAY 'LET'. AS YOU EXHALE, HEAR 'GO'. SEE YOURSELF LETTING GO A LITTLE STRAIN WITH EACH EXHALATION.

STHIRA MUDRA

Steady and Stable Gesture



This mudra from the kinesiology tradition balances the spinal vertebrae. Its greatest influence is in the lumbar region at the lower part of your spine. The five vertebrae here curve inward to support your body weight – a healthy spine has a natural S-shape that distributes weight evenly and ensures maximum flexibility and mobility. Walking and standing safeguard the health of this curve; long periods of sitting are detrimental – many people with desk jobs suffer lower back pain. If you spend time on a computer, take 3-minute breaks to prevent lower back pain by practising Sthira Mudra. Regular practice strengthens the entire pelvic area.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise sitting or standing. Each hand does something different:

Right hand – bring the tip of your thumb to the inside of the nail on your ring finger.

Left hand – join your thumb and ring finger tips in Prithivi Mudra (see [page](#)

94).

Hold for 3 minutes, morning and evening. Practise more often if susceptible to lower back pain, leaving at least 30 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

Your right hand grounds you as the driving force of the thumb balances the earth energy of the ring finger as it presses on the nail. On your left hand, the thumb stimulates the ring finger's earth element.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES FOR 1–3 MINUTES AND BRING YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR LOWER BACK. IMAGINE BREATHING INTO THIS AREA, EACH INHALATION STRENGTHENING IT AND EACH EXHALATION RELEASING TENSION.

SUKHAM MUDRA

Stress-relief Gesture



If you live a fast-paced, action-packed life with long hours of work, you risk burnout. All this activity is stimulating – it helps you meet deadlines and overcome exhaustion – but at some point, you need to stop being so busy and reduce your stress levels. Sukham Mudra is used in the kinesiology tradition to do just that. It is best practised sitting down: try it at your desk or on the bus or train before a stressful working day.

As you slow down, implement some lifestyle changes to safeguard your health: prioritize sleep and a healthy diet and try to reduce stressful stimulants, from caffeine and sugar to raised voices and violent films.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Each hand does something different: Right hand – bring your thumb tip to the ends of your middle and little fingers.

Left hand – use your thumb to press the nail of your little finger.

Hold for 2 minutes morning, noon and evening.

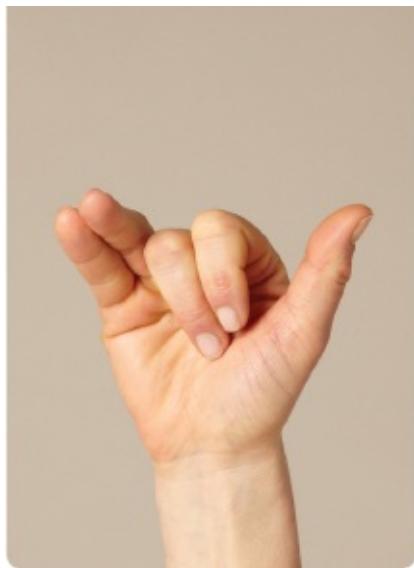
HOW IT WORKS

Your right hand balances your ether (middle) and water (little finger) energies, which has a grounding effect and enhances levels of prana. By resting on the back of the little finger, your left thumb reduces the influence of the water element and enhances the stability of earth.

 **ACCOMPANYING DIETARY ADVICE:** TO SUPPORT THE STRESS-REDUCING EFFECTS OF THIS MUDRA, TAKE A DAILY MULTIVITAMIN SUPPLEMENT CONTAINING VITAMIN B COMPLEX AND VITAMIN C. MAKE SURE YOU ARE ALSO GETTING ENOUGH CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM AND IRON.

VISHNU MUDRA

Universal Balance Gesture



In Indian mythology, Vishnu is the protector of the world. He is the one who keeps the universe in balance. His mudra activates the energies of your three lower chakras – the muladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras (see [page 17](#)) – and practising it helps you to balance the energies within your physical and energetic bodies. If you attend yoga classes you may be familiar with this mudra because it is often used in breathing exercises. These purify your body while calming and balancing your mind, pacifying your emotions and releasing stress.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Always practise with your right hand; never switch hands, even if you are left-handed. Raise your right hand and bend your index and middle fingers into the palm of your hand, allowing your thumb and your ring and little fingers to remain extended. Hold the gesture while you practise pranayama (see opposite).

HOW IT WORKS

Your right thumb represents the fire element and the manipura chakra while your little finger is associated with water and the swadhisthana chakra, and your ring finger with the earth element and the muladhara chakra. Extending these fingers balances your three lower chakras.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: THE EFFECTS OF VISHNU MUDRA AND THE BREATHING EXERCISE OPPOSITE ARE MAGNIFIED IF YOU CHANT THE VISHNU MANTRA ‘*OM NAMO NARAYANAYA*’ BEFORE BEGINNING TO PRACTISE.

VISHNU MUDRA IN A BREATHING PRACTICE

Anuloma Viloma: Alternate Nostril Breathing

Vishnu Mudra positions your fingers perfectly to open and close your nostrils in this breathing exercise. Your right thumb (fire) connects to your right nostril (heating side), while the water element of your little finger and earth of your ring finger press on your left nostril (cooling). So, as you practise, you alternate the heating and cooling elements in your body to purify and balance it.

- 1 Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring your right hand into Vishnu Mudra and lift your palm to your face. Close your right nostril by depressing it with your right thumb. Inhale through your left nostril for a count of 4.
- 2 Gently pinch both nostrils shut by closing your left nostril with your ring and little fingers. Hold your breath for 16 (avoid if you have high blood pressure or are pregnant).
- 3 Release the thumb and exhale through the right nostril for 8 (twice the count of the inhalation), keeping your left nostril closed.
- 4 With your left nostril still closed, inhale through the right side for 4.
- 5 Gently pinch both nostrils shut by closing your right nostril with your thumb. Hold your breath for 16 (avoid if you have high blood pressure or are pregnant).
- 6 Release your left nostril and exhale through the left side for 8, keeping the right nostril closed. This completes one round. Build up to at least 10 rounds daily
- 7 When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



KALI MUDRA

Black Goddess Gesture



Kali represents the energy of intuitive wisdom. The Sanskrit word *kala* means ‘time’ or ‘darkness’ – Kali helps to remove darkness from your mind. Although her form appears fierce, it is filled with symbolism. Her garland of 50 human heads represents the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and infinite knowledge. Her skirt of human arms signifies liberation from karma, the consequences of past actions.

Practising Kali Mudra activates and balances the energy of your muladhara chakra, and regular grounding in this way improves your general energy levels, as well as your wellbeing, security, courage and inner strength.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come to a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. With both hands in front of your chest, interlace your index, middle and little fingers, making sure that the right little finger is on the outside. Extend and join both ring fingers so they point straight up. Cross your left thumb over your right. Raise your elbows

until your forearms are parallel to the ground. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

By interlinking fingers and thumbs, each element supports the strengthening of the earth energy in your upward-directed ring fingers. This leads to an experience of groundedness and security and makes you more open to intuitive wisdom.

 **ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE:** STANDING, BRING YOUR HANDS INTO KAL MUDRA. STEP YOUR FEET WIDE APART AND ROTATE THEM OUTWARD AT A 45-DEGREE ANGLE. BEND YOUR KNEES AND SQUAT DOWN AS FAR AS YOU CAN, KEEPING YOUR BACK STRAIGHT AND TAILBONE TUCKED UNDER. HOLD THE POSE FOR 30 SECONDS. GRADUALLY BUILD UP TO 3 MINUTES.

KALI MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Tadasana: Mountain Pose

The grounding effect of Kali Mudra is complemented by this grounding exercise, which also reconnects you with the energy of the earth element. Practise at the beginning of the day, or whenever you feel in need of some centring and security.

- 1 Stand tall with your feet parallel to each other and hip-width apart. Bring your hands into Kali Mudra and close your eyes.
- 2 Slowly shift your weight between both feet, until you have an equal amount of weight on each foot. Gently rock forward and back until you feel your centre of balance is directly over the mid-point of your arches.
- 3 Lift your toes and stretch them as wide as possible before replacing them on the ground. Feel the ball of each toe firmly pushing into the ground.
- 4 Keep your knees straight, but do not lock them. Feel your thigh bones pushing back, as your tailbone moves forward. Keep your lower ribs tucked under.
- 5 Bring your shoulder blades together slightly, so your breastbone floats upward. Keep your head erect with your chin parallel to the ground, and feel your breath moving rhythmically in and out.
- 6 Stand tall, as though an invisible string is pulling your body skyward for 1–3 minutes. Notice how, when your feet are firmly rooted and your hands joined, your mind feels freer and has more clarity.
- 7 When you have finished, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths.





6

WATER MUDRAS

ENHANCING HEALTH AND EQUIPPING YOU TO
MOVE FORWARD

Part of hand: little finger

Element: water

Related chakra: sacral

Physical associations: wellbeing, body fluids, urinary and reproductive system, sense of taste Emotional associations: moving forward, letting go, adapting, going with the flow '***Nothing in the world is more flexible and yielding than water. Yet when it attacks the firm and the strong, none can withstand it, because they have no way to change it. So the flexible overcome the adamant, the yielding overcome the forceful.***'

Lao Tzu

INTRODUCING THE WATER MUDRAS

This chapter features mudras involving the little finger, which relates to the water element and the sacral chakra. By practising these gestures you help to ensure the wellbeing of this element within your body and mind and its chakra. This enhances your ability to ‘go with the flow’ – to be flexible and adaptive – and to let go of what you no longer need. These mudras also enhance your ability to enjoy yourself without feeling guilty, and encourage an aptitude for tasting and enjoying what life has to offer.

Water, known as *apas* or *jala* in Sanskrit, includes all matter in liquid form, and this element is often referred to as the source of life itself. It is associated with swadhisthana, the sacral chakra, which governs your emotions as well as all the fluids in your body, from blood and lymph to mucus and saliva. This chakra also presides over your kidneys, bladder, urinary tract, reproductive and circulatory systems, homeostasis, and all the water-related needs of your body.

In Ayurveda the water and earth elements make up the kapha dosha (see pages 18–19), which provides the foundation all the other doshas require to function. Water is a universal symbol of cleansing and purification; the urge to ‘wash’ away sins is perhaps connected to a need to rebalance or unblock the energy of the water element. Having a healthy and balanced water element is the key to being flexible and adaptive. The mudras in this chapter will be of special interest to you if you feel stuck in life and in need of change. The water mudras can also help you to let go of guilt, frustration, shame, jealousy or lust as you learn to appreciate the ebb and flow of life.

Water is closely related to the moon, since the gravitational pull of the moon controls the tides. Up to 60 percent of the adult body is made up of water, and some people argue that the moon’s gravitational pull in its different phases also affects our physiology, influencing sleep at a full moon, for example. You may find that using the mudras in this chapter can help you to prepare your body and mind for the powerful pulls of the full and new moons.

Physically, water mudras can help you to establish a liquid balance in your body – whether you suffer from fluid retention, frequent dehydration or experience too much inner heat. You might turn to them if you experience physical problems associated with the urinary or reproductive systems.

Emotionally, you might wish to experiment with these mudras when you feel unable to ‘taste’ the sweetness of life, or when nothing seems to satisfy you or make you feel at peace with yourself. They are effective if you suffer from habitual low energy or chronic fatigue, or frequently get stressed.

Above all, these mudras can help you to create an atmosphere of flexibility and adaptability that extends to all areas of your being. As you practise these mudras, I hope you will find that they enhance your ability to enjoy and to see the benefit of everything life has brought you.

Water mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Varuna	Helps to rehydrate the body and remove impurities from the bloodstream	112
Jalodar-nāshak	Relieves water retention	113
Swadhisthana	Assists in maintaining emotional equilibrium	114
Mahatrika	Brings healing energy to sacral region	116
Shakti	Connects you with a supportive energy	118
Kilaka	Helps you to solve difficult situations	120
Karana	Strong detoxing energy	121
Kurma	Conserves energy through withdrawal from the senses	122
Yoni	Stabilizes body and mind; creates focus during meditation; balances creative and elimination energies in the body	123
Māsiki	Relieve menstrual cramping; eases pain in whole body	124
Matsya	Increases physical and mental flexibility; relaxes muscles; hydrates system; activates self-healing	126
Makara	Helps in accessing inner energy reserves; counters depression, frustration; brings calmness and serenity; strengthens kidneys	127

VARUNA MUDRA

Water-balancing Gesture



In Vedic tradition, Varuna is guardian of the waters and king of aquatic animals. He is said to have hollowed out the channels through which rivers flow, perhaps an allusion to the nadi system through which prana flows (see [pages 12–13](#)). Varuna Mudra purifies and nourishes your body's fluid elements, particularly blood and lymph. It has a rehydrating effect, eliminating dryness from the body while restoring homeostasis. It can also alleviate skin problems and make your skin feel smoother.

As this is a cooling mudra, practise in the summer or when there is too much 'fire' in the body, for example menopausal symptoms, rashes, fever or allergic reactions. You might avoid it in winter, as it decreases body heat. If you suffer from physical stiffness or mental rigidity, try meditating with this mudra for 10–30 minutes daily.

Caution: Avoid if you suffer from water-retention or oedema.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Join the tips of your little fingers and thumbs on each hand. Keep the three other fingers extended, but relaxed. Rest your hands on your thighs. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Bringing the tip of the thumb (fire element) to meet the tip of your little finger (water) intensifies the water element, restoring moisture to the body. This also symbolizes the joining of opposites, countering rigid structures.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘VARUNA MUDRA CONNECTED ME TO MY EMOTIONS; IT STIMULATED THEM IN A POSITIVE WAY. I ENJOYED WORKING WITH THIS MUDRA AND EXPERIENCED A FEELING OF SUBTLE LIGHTNESS.’

JALODAR-NĀSHAK MUDRA

Water-reducing Gesture



Jala means ‘water’ and *jalodar* is a term for oedema, an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body. Standing for long periods or sitting at a desk causes fluid to drain into the feet and legs, sometimes leading to swelling by the end of the day. This mudra can help to overcome such symptoms of water-retention by reducing moisture in the body. It is also an excellent practice if you sweat profusely or suffer from excess mucus, puffy or watery eyes, diarrhoea or excessive urination or menstrual flow.

Jalodar-nāshak Mudra resembles the salute used by scouts and guides around the world, the upward fingers representing the three aspects of their promise.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Lie down or sit with your feet elevated. You can practise with one or both hands. Bring the end of your little finger to the base of your thumb; then use your thumb to gently press down on little finger. The other three fingers remain

straight, but relaxed. Hold for 5–30 minutes once or twice daily.

HOW IT WORKS

By depressing the little finger (representing water) with your thumb, you reduce the water element within your body.



ACCOMPANYING DIETARY ADVICE: THIS MUDRA WORKS BEST IF YOU REDUCE YOUR INTAKE OF SALT AND SODIUM-RICH FOODS. AT THE SAME TIME, DRINK MORE WATER AND EAT POTASSIUM-RICH FRESH FRUITS AND LIGHTLY STEAMED VEGETABLES, SUCH AS BANANAS AND DARK LEAFY GREENS, WHICH ENCOURAGE THE BODY TO RELEASE EXCESS FLUID.

SWADHISTHANA MUDRA

Sacral Chakra Gesture



This mudra helps you to maintain a healthy emotional equilibrium and feel more at ease with yourself and comfortable in your body. Located in the sacral/genital region, the swadhisthana chakra is associated with creative instincts and pleasure impulses. Its energy is about finding your way in life and trusting your unique creativity.

You will need a bit of finger flexibility for this mudra. If your fingers don't bend easily into Swadhisthana Mudra, warm up by practising the exercises in [Chapter 1](#).

Caution: Avoid if you are pregnant.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Hold both palms facing each other. Cross each middle finger over the index finger next to it. Bend the little and ring fingers of both hands and interlace them. Bring the tips of your index fingers together. Join the end of each thumb with the middle finger of the same

hand. Bring the sides of both thumbs as close to each other as possible; try to press them together. Rest your hands in your lap with the thumbs on top for 3 minutes, gradually building up to 30 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

You begin by crossing your middle (ether element) and index (air) fingers in the ‘here’s hoping’ gesture. By interlocking the ring (earth) and little (water) fingers, you add stability to your vision and bring all the elements into play to make dreams a reality.

 **ACCOMPANYING CHANT:** TO OPTIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF THIS MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE SWADHISTHANA CHAKRA, ‘VAM’.

SWADHISTHANA MUDRA IN A MEDITATION PRACTICE

Swadhisthana Meditation: Sacral Chakra Meditation

Whether you are ‘birthing’ a baby, a project or your life’s work, you are working with the energy of the swadhistana chakra. This meditation practice helps to unblock and balance that energy: as you hold Swadhisthana Mudra you become better able to experience fluidity and grace in your creative ventures and accept and adapt to change. Feel free to change the affirmations suggested here to suit your own aims.

- 1** Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Make sure your back is straight. Lift your breastbone slightly so you can breathe freely; slide your shoulder blades together, then draw them down toward your waist. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Seal your lips and breathe quietly through your nostrils.
- 2** Bring your hands into Swadhisthana Mudra and rest them in your lap, thumbs on top. If it is more comfortable, rest your hands on a small cushion on your lap. Keep your arms close to your body and focus your awareness on your pelvic region.
- 3** Close your eyes. Sit for up to 30 minutes, mentally repeating one of these affirmations: ‘I trust myself to follow my dreams,’ ‘I let go of feeling unworthy/unattractive/inadequate,’ ‘I am open to the process of positive change,’ ‘Today I will let things happen without agonizing over consequences,’ ‘I adapt, adjust and accommodate to the situation without letting go of my ideals.’
- 4** When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



MAHATRIKA MUDRA

Great Triangle Gesture



In Sanskrit *maha* means ‘great’ and *trika* means ‘triangle’; this mudra is used in India’s traditional medicine, Ayurveda, to bring a healing energy to the pelvic region. It is especially useful for women, reducing menstrual cramping and helping to regulate the menstrual cycle.

The mudra is helpful for anyone facing impotence or infertility. Regular practice can also assist in releasing blocked emotions, particularly those related to trauma caused by abuse.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). You use both hands in this mudra. Extend both little fingers and bring the tips together. Join the ends of the thumbs and index fingers of each hand, and then connect them. Allow your ring and middle fingers to be straight but relaxed. Rotate your hands slightly so that the ring, middle and little fingers point downward. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

By bringing the ends of both little fingers together, you balance the water element within your body, which governs your sacral area. This encourages the healthy expression of emotions and helps to alleviate menstrual cramps. The triangle formed with the other fingers approximates the shape of the pelvic bowl.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: FOR PAIN RELIEF, SIT WITH YOUR HANDS IN MAHATRIKA MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND BRING YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR BREATH. AS YOU INHALE, MENTALLY DIRECT YOUR ENERGY TO YOUR LOWER BACK. AS YOU EXHALE, BREATHE TENSION OUT OF YOUR BODY.

MAHATRIKA MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Badha-konasana: Bound Angle Pose

Mahatrika Mudra becomes especially effective in releasing blocked energy in the pelvic region when you practise it sitting in this yoga pose. It stimulates the sacral chakra located in the middle of your lower back, which governs the liquid elements of your body and is responsible for the maintenance of correct liquid levels as well as the viscosity of your blood.

- 1 Sit on the ground or on a sofa and remove your shoes. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together. Let your knees drop out to the sides and allow them to descend toward the ground. If your knees are painful or don't reach the ground, you might want to place cushions beneath them.
- 2 Bring your hands into Mahatrika Mudra. Turn your hands so that the ring, middle and little fingers face the ground, then rest your wrists on your inner thighs.
- 3 Close your eyes and breathe gently through your nostrils. With each exhalation, imagine you are releasing blocked energy from the pelvic region.
- 4 Sit in this position for at least 30 seconds and up to 7 minutes. Practise three times daily, or whenever you feel the need.
- 5 When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



SHAKTI MUDRA

Essence of Power Gesture



Shakti is the Indian personification of energy, pictured as a goddess with all the powers of the universe in her hands. Practising her mudra connects you with a supportive energy source that enables you to be flexible and adaptive. It also helps to maintain the health of your urinary and reproductive systems by bringing a wealth of prana to this region. It balances your sacral and root chakra energies, leaving you grounded but with the ability to ‘go with the flow’.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring the ends of both little fingers together, then join the tips of your ring fingers. Fold your thumbs into their respective palms and bend the index and middle fingers over them. Rotate your palms so your ring and little fingers point down slightly. Rest your hands on your abdomen, relaxing your arms and shoulders. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

The joined little fingers (water element) and ring (earth) fingers balance your water and earth elements. Water and earth form kapha dosha (see [pages 18–19](#)), making this mudra excellent if you have a kapha imbalance. Pointing your fingers down enables the flow of aparna downward, releasing what you no longer need.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, IMAGINE BREATHING THROUGH EACH PORE, YOUR SKIN A DYNAMIC ORGAN DRAWING IN AIR. INHALING, FEEL A GENTLE EXPANSION, AS IF YOU ARE BEING ENHANCED BY THE AIR YOU BREATHE. EXHALING, FEEL YOUR MILLIONS OF PORES EXPELLING TOXINS AND NEGATIVITY.

SHAKTI MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Gomukasana: Cow's Head Pose

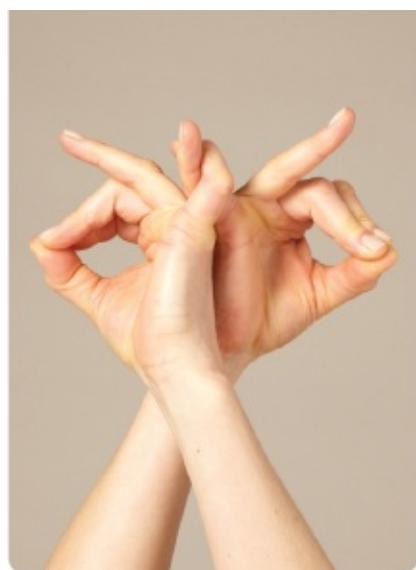
Sitting with your legs crossed in this way is an excellent way to enhance the benefits of Shakti Mudra because it directs energy to your pelvic region. This leg position is usually associated with the arm exercise on [page 29](#), where it helps to release tension in your neck and shoulders. Used with Shakti Mudra, it acts more on the sacral region and benefits the swadhisthana chakra.

- 1** Place a mat or folded blanket on the ground. Kneel on the mat then bend one knee and bring it on top of the other one. Sit between your feet on a cushion or bolster.
- 2** Bring your hands into Shakti Mudra and rest them on your top knee.
- 3** Close your eyes and inhale deeply; imagine drawing the breath down to your sacral region (in the middle of your lower back). Hold your breath there for a few moments.
- 4** As you exhale, visualize your breath as a mist that is lifting and clearing away all your mental and emotional toxins.
- 5** Repeat for 5–10 minutes daily.
- 6** When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



KILAKA MUDRA

Key to Good Health Gesture



Turn to this mudra when something is puzzling you. The Sanskrit word *kilaka* denotes a clue to a mystical puzzle. In the yoga tradition, a teacher initiates a student by giving a kilaka, such as a mantra and a certain way to recite it.

Practise Kilaka Mudra also for emotional support and maintaining balance. By strengthening the water element, it brings about a sense of safety that facilitates intimacy and close relationships.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Bring the backs of both hands together in front of your breastbone. Interlock the little fingers, then join the end of each thumb to the tip of the index and middle fingers on the same hand. Extend your ring fingers so they point up slightly. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

By linking the two little fingers (water element) and joining the other elements (represented by the other fingers and thumbs), you evoke the union of Siva (consciousness) and Shakti (the creative principle), the masculine (ha) and feminine (tha) principles of hatha yoga. This is very balancing and supportive of relationships.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND PICTURE YOUR MIND AS A LAKE. NOTICE THE WAVES (THOUGHTS) ON THE LAKE. DON'T TRY TO DRIVE THEM AWAY; JUST BREATHE GENTLY AND WATCH YOUR MIND-LAKE GROW CALMER. SIT FOR 15–45 MINUTES DAILY OR WHEN YOU FEEL MENTALLY TIRED OR HAVE A PROBLEM.

KARANA MUDRA

Instrument Gesture



In Sanskrit, *karana* is an instrument but also refers to your body as the instrument through which you work out karma: the consequences of your actions. You can use Karana Mudra as an instrument to purify the inner space of your body and also to clear the space in which you live. In your physical body, the mudra achieves its detoxifying effect by strengthening the urinary system and kidney energy. In the home or work place, it cleanses the energy of your space when practised in a moving meditative ritual using incense (see below).

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise in any position. Use your right hand only. Bend your middle and ring fingers into your palm, and press down on the nails with your thumb. Allow your index and little fingers to remain extended, but relaxed. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

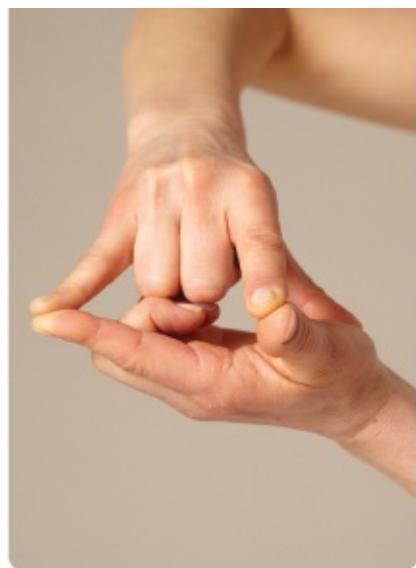
By pressing down on the nails of the middle and ring fingers, you are reducing the influence of both the ether (enclosing space) and earth (grounding) elements. At the same time you free the purifying effects of the water element (your little finger) and the expansive effects of your airy index finger.



ACCOMPANYING MEDITATION: HOLD SOME WHITE SAGE, FRANKINCENSE OR SANDALWOOD INCENSE IN YOUR LEFT HAND. WITH YOUR RIGHT HAND IN KARANA MUDRA, WALK AROUND YOUR SPACE MINDFULLY, SLOWLY ROTATING YOUR HANDS CLOCKWISE TO MOVE STAGNANT, NEGATIVE ENERGY. PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO CORNERS.

KURMA MUDRA

Tortoise Gesture



Kurma in Sanskrit means ‘tortoise’, a water animal also comfortable on land. It represents someone who can adapt to survive by withdrawing within, when necessary, for protection. One of the core myths of Hinduism tells of Vishnu taking the form of a tortoise to protect the world from negativity.

This mudra is effective because it encourages pratyahara, withdrawing mental energy from the senses. Practising pratyahara is like closing windows on a cold day to save energy: closing down your senses conserves the reserves of energy usually spent when you engage outward.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up, with hands as follows: Left hand – with palm facing up, fold middle, ring and little fingers into the palm.

Right hand – with palm facing down, bend the middle and ring fingers into the palm.

Extend your right thumb and rest it on the base of your left wrist. Join the end of the right index finger to the left thumb. Then join the tip of the right-hand little finger with the left-hand index finger. Hold for up to 30 minutes once or twice daily.

HOW IT WORKS

Bringing your hands into this intricate gesture blocks the outward movement of the senses, encouraging pratyahara.



ACCOMPANYING FOCUSING EXERCISE: IN CROWDED OR NEGATIVE PLACES OR THE COMPANY OF DRAINING PEOPLE, BRING YOUR HANDS INTO KURMA MUDRA. CLOSE YOUR EYES IF YOU CAN AND BREATHE GENTLY, FOCUSING ON THE SOUND OF YOUR BREATH TO PREVENT YOUR SENSES FROM ENGAGING WITH YOUR SURROUNDINGS.

YONI MUDRA

Seal of the Goddess



A *yoni* – the Sanskrit word means ‘seal’, ‘resting place’, ‘womb’, ‘source’, ‘repository’ and ‘receptacle’ – is an abstract representation of Shakti, the dynamic feminine power of nature. It often holds a linga stone, representing Siva (the passive, witnessing consciousness). Practising Yoni Mudra similarly balances opposing but complementary energies in your body, particularly those of the two brain hemispheres. During meditation, it stabilizes body and mind, developing greater concentration and internal awareness. The mudra redirects prana back into the body that would otherwise be dispersed and enhances the downward flow of apana, the subtle energy that cleanses body, mind and emotions.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Loosely interlock the fingers of both hands, then release your thumbs and index fingers. Bring the tips of the thumbs together, pointing up. Bring the tips of the index fingers together,

pointing down. Rest your hands in your lap. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Interlocking your fingers creates greater connection between the energies from the right and left hands. Joining the tips of your index fingers and thumbs, and pointing them down stimulates downward-flowing cleansing energy. Bringing your thumbs together intensifies the upward flow of prana for enhanced health.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘MY FINGERS GREW WARM WHERE THEY FORMED THE OUTLINE OF THE MUDRA. IT DREW MY MIND TO FOCUS ON THE TRIANGLE THE FINGERS HAD MADE. IT FELT AS IF ENERGY WAS DRAWN FROM THE BODY INTO THE SPACE BETWEEN THE FINGERS.’

MĀSIKI MUDRA

Monthly-relief Gesture



This mudra comes from the kinesiology tradition and is used to help relieve monthly menstrual discomfort and cramping. It serves to ease pain and restore balance to the entire body. It also removes blockages of the sacral chakra, which may be the energetic cause of physical pain. You can use the mudra both preventively and at times of acute distress. As a preventative, start practising several days before your period, especially if you suffer from pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). If you experience extreme pain, cramping or other discomfort, hold the mudra for 10 minutes up to four times a day, taking a break of at least 25 minutes between practice sessions.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or lie down. Each hand does something different: Right hand – bring the thumb tip to the inside of the nail on your ring finger.

Left hand – bring the tips of your thumb and little finger together.

Hold for 3 minutes twice daily, with at least 25-minute break between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

Your right hand is decreasing the earth element that may be causing pain as you place the thumb on the nail of your ring finger. Your left hand balances the water element when you bring the tips of the thumb and little finger together.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: 'I FIND THAT REGULAR PRACTICE OF THIS MUDRA, ESPECIALLY IN CHILD'S POSE, HAS NOT ONLY REDUCED MY MENSTRUAL CRAMPS BUT ALSO HELPS ME TO OVERCOME INSOMNIA.'

MĀSIKI MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Balasana: Child's Pose

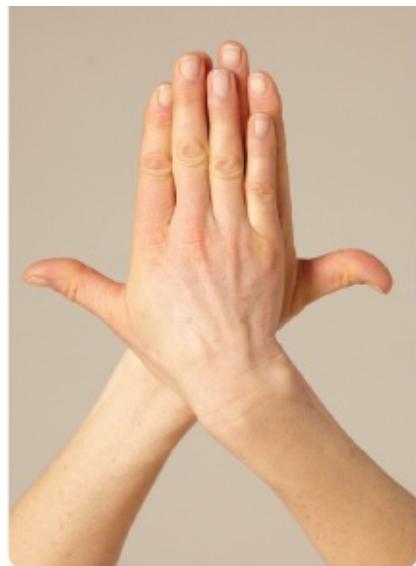
Most people find that the most effective way to practise Māsiki Mudra is by bending forward in Child's Pose, resting your abdomen on your thighs. Practising in this pose helps to cultivate the calming and rejuvenating quality of letting go usually associated with apana, your cleansing breath.

- 1 Place a mat or folded blanket on the ground. Kneel on the mat with your feet and knees together – or if it is more comfortable, have your knees slightly apart. Then sit back so that your buttocks rest firmly on your heels.
- 2 Slowly lower your upper body forward, bringing your forehead to the ground – you may place a cushion under your forehead if it feels more comfortable.
- 3 Stretch your arms straight out on the ground in front of you and bring your hands into Māsiki Mudra. Close your eyes and feel as if you are breathing into your pelvic region.
- 4 Hold the pose for at least 5 breaths, gradually building up to 25 breaths or more.
- 5 When you have finished, open your eyes, release the mudra, push yourself back slowly to a kneeling position and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



MATSYA MUDRA

Fish Gesture



Matsya Mudra activates your body's healing potential. It stimulates the water element to enhance flexibility, relaxes your muscles, helps hydrate your system and feels refreshing. Practise any time you would like to increase your physical or mental flexibility. It's especially useful if you practise yoga asanas. This mudra is named for a fish (*matsya*) who, from the stream, overheard Siva telling his wife Parvati about a system he had devised to unleash the dormant potential within each individual. When the fish turned into a human called Masyendranath, he became the first hatha yoga teacher; his teachings are still followed by practitioners today.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. Place your right palm flat against the back of your left hand. Extend your thumbs to the sides and bring your other fingers together. Hold for 3–5 minutes. To make the mudra more effective, rotate your thumbs clockwise, as if the fish is swimming.

HOW IT WORKS

By bringing your hands and fingers together and releasing the fire element (thumbs) to the side, you intensify the effect of the opposing element, water, enhancing both your inner peace and physical flexibility.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: SIT ON THE GROUND WITH LEGS TOGETHER, STRETCHED OUT. PLACE A BOLSTER OR FOLDED BLANKET LENGTHWAYS BEHIND YOU TO SUPPORT YOUR UPPER BACK AND HEAD AS YOU LIE BACK. STRAIGHTEN YOUR ARMS, RESTING THEM ON YOUR BODY, AND BRING YOUR HANDS INTO MATSYA MUDRA. HOLD FOR 3–5 MINUTES.

MAKARA MUDRA

Crocodile Gesture



In Indian tradition, a *makara* is a mythological animal with the body of a crocodile and the tail of a fish (or sometimes a snake or a peacock). He carries the goddess Ganga, the personified form of the River Ganges. Crocodiles are known for their ability to remain absolutely still for long periods, then pounce at lightning speed, quickly converting reserves into usable energy.

This mudra is useful if you have difficulty accessing and unleashing your own potent energy reserves, feel depressed or frustrated or just have too much on your plate. As well as calming and bringing serenity, this mudra helps to relieve bags under your eyes and strengthens the kidneys.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Practise in any position. Join the tips of your left thumb and ring finger. Bring the right thumb between the ring and little finger of your left hand and place its tip on the base of your left thumb. Bring your right palm flat against the back of your left hand. Hold for 5–10 minutes three times daily.

HOW IT WORKS

The left hand balances the fire and air elements as you join your thumb and ring finger, producing a meditative effect similar to Dhyana Mudra (see [page 50](#)). The right thumb decreases the ‘heat’ of a situation by stimulating the earth and water elements of the ring and little fingers.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: TO MAKE MAKARA MUDRA MORE EFFECTIVE, PRACTISE NEAR WATER OR CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE A BODY OF WATER. DEEPEN YOUR BREATHING AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND PICTURE THE SCENE.



7

MIND MUDRAS

INCREASING CONCENTRATION AND CLARITY

Part of hand: palm

Element: mind

Related chakra: third eye

Physical associations: overall control of the body and senses

Emotional associations: concentration, intuition, intelligence, insight

‘Yoga is the experience you have when your mind is peaceful.’

Patanjali, Yoga Sutra

INTRODUCING THE MIND MUDRAS

In Indian philosophy the palms relate to the mind and to the ajna chakra in the centre of the brow. The palms control your fingers and their five linked elements just as your mind controls your actions and senses. The mind is beyond all elements, but controls the five elements in your body as well as the associated senses. By practising these mudras, you bring balance and focus to the mind and clarity to the senses In Sanskrit, the mind is referred to as *chitta*, meaning an individual's consciousness. This encompasses your intelligence, emotions, thoughts, memories and dreams, as well as your conscious and sub-conscious mind. Chitta, or mind, may be likened to a lake on which waves of thought rise and fall constantly, sometimes gently and at other times more violently. When the waves are still, you can see the bottom clearly. Likewise with the mind: when disturbing thoughts subside – for example when you practise these mudras – your mind becomes peaceful and life comes into focus.

Some of the mudras in the chapter involve joining the palms of both hands. This helps to balance the rational and logical thoughts of the left side of the brain with the intuitive non-linear thinking of its right side, enhancing abstract thinking, intuition, imagination, concentration, mental discipline, insight and your ability to understand symbols and signs. Other mudras work on brain integration, better equipping you to remember words on the tip of your tongue or to put names to faces.

Mudras that apply pressure to your palm can – depending on which finger you use – enhance contentment, concentration and the ability to meditate, while relieving such problems as confusion or mental fogginess, poor memory, migraines and insomnia. Many of these mudras are easily practised at work, making them useful for boosting performance and efficiency, too.

The palm is linked to the ajna chakra, commonly referred to as the ‘third eye’ or ‘mind’s eye’. This is the command centre of your subtle body; the inner instrument that controls your five senses, all the other chakras and the nadi energy highways feeding into them (see [pages 14–15](#)).

In your physical body, your brow chakra governs your eyes, ears, nose and the region of the base of your skull. An energetic imbalance or blockage of this

chakra may contribute to symptoms including vision problems, headaches, dizziness and acute sinusitis. You can relieve many of these problems by working with palm mudras.

Emotionally, practising these mudras can enhance your intuition and give you clearer insight into your life purpose. They may help you to become a more imaginative person, with the ability to think symbolically as well as literally. In addition, working with palm mudras is an excellent way to enhance determination, overcome obstacles, counter fear and relieve an overactive mind.

The palms also contain minor chakras – your hand or palm chakras – and bringing both palms together stimulates these, leading to the easy expression of joy. Notice how when you feel happy or have enjoyed something, you quite naturally clap your hands. I hope that the mudras in this chapter encourage you to put your hands together – in joy or as an expression of peace and contentment.

Mind mudras at a glance		
Mudra	Benefit	Page
Ajna	Helps you to plan for the future	134
Nirvana	Overcomes resistance to change; awakens compassion	135
Bhairava	Supports resolution to remain peaceful; aids meditation	136
Ganesha	Builds self-confidence and courage; helps in facing difficult situations; fosters compassion and respect for others	137
Namaskar	Reduces stress; balances energy within body; assists inward focus	138
Anjali	Boosts gratitude, compassion and generosity; decreases greediness; lowers blood pressure; balances digestive system	139
Abhaya	Instils attitude of fearlessness that will inspire others	140
Varada	Encourages forgiveness; improves focus; offers new insight	141
Handshake	Offers friendship and encourages others to open up	142
Hakini	Boosts memory and intuition; enhances intellectual capacity	144
Samasti	Balances intuitive and rational thinking; aids communication	145
Maha-shirsha	Relieves headaches and sinus congestion; reduces tension; helps clear an overactive mind	146
Mandala	Enhances overall wellbeing, relieving health problems and protecting from negativity	147
Mushti	Releases frustration; protects heart; lowers blood pressure	148

ACTIVATING THE PALM CHAKRAS

Sensitizing the Hands



What do you do when you bang your elbow or knee, or feel tired or achey? Without thinking, you rub the painful area with the palm of your hand. You use the energy centres in the palms of your hands all the time to stimulate a flow of healing energy. This exercise helps to sensitize your hands by activating the minor chakras in your palms. With practice, it can help you to start experiencing energy on a more subtle level and eventually to transmit healing prana to yourself and other people.

The oils used in the accompanying massage below enhance your compassion, your sensitivity to other people's energy and your ability to comfort others in times of sorrow or grief.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Rest one hand on top of the other palm and gently press the centre of the top palm with the thumb of your opposite hand. Sense the location of your hand chakras and notice any sensations. Hold

for 3–5 seconds. Swap hands and repeat.

HOW IT WORKS

While not actually a mudra, this exercise sensitizes your palms and prepares you to practise any of the mudras in this chapter.

 **ACCOMPANYING MASSAGE:** AS YOU PRESS THE PALMS, MASSAGE IN $\frac{1}{2}$ TEASPOON OF SWEET ALMOND OIL OR OLIVE OIL CONTAINING 1 DROP OF ESSENTIAL OIL OF ROSE (FOR CHANNELLING LOVING ENERGY AND COMFORT), MELISSA (FOR BALANCING WILLPOWER AND COMPASSION) OR LAVENDER (FOR INCREASING SENSITIVITY TO OTHERS).

HAND SENSITIZING IN A MOVEMENT PRACTICE

Sensing a Ball of Subtle Energy

This exercise further sensitizes your palms and brings you in contact with your ability to experience and transmit energy. Don't confuse the subtle energy you experience with body heat; it is more like a magnetic field floating between your palms.

Placing your tongue flat against the roof of your mouth, as is done in this exercise, helps to silence a busy mind.

- 1 While sitting or standing, extend both arms in front of you. Keep them parallel to the ground with your elbows straight. Turn your arms so that one palm faces up and the other down.
- 2 Gently seal your lips and place the tip of your tongue on the hard ridge on the roof of your mouth; keep it there throughout the exercise as you breathe through your nostrils.
- 3 Make fists and release them quickly, opening and closing your hands 20–30 times.
- 4 Reverse the direction of your hands so the palm that was facing up is now down, and vice versa. Repeat the opening and closing movement 20–30 times.
- 5 Turn your palms to face each other, keeping your hands open. Slowly bring your palms toward each other. When they are about 10cm (4in) apart, see if you can sense a subtle ball of energy. Move your palms away from each other and back again to help to locate it.
- 6 Close your eyes and play with the energy, bouncing it from hand to hand. Then move your hands in a circle, first in one direction, then the other. When you have finished, gently shake out your hands.



AJNA MUDRA

Brow Chakra Gesture



This is the key mudra of ajna, the brow chakra, the seat of your judgment, emotional intelligence, rational thought, intuition and wisdom. When this chakra is in balance, your vision is clear; you are able to see the ‘bigger picture’ and even become open to psychic perception. Practising Ajna Chakra Mudra helps you to recognize the various patterns in your life for what they really are. Practise it whenever you feel the need to ‘see’ where something is leading you or to plan for the future.

HOW TO PRACTISE

You can practise in any stationary position. Raise your left hand in front of your face. Gently curl all the fingers of your left hand into the palm, making a loose fist with your thumb on the outside. Release your index finger and extend it upward. Bring the fingers of the right hand around the extended left index finger, using your right thumb to gently press on the outside edge of the nail. Hold for 1–2 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

By stimulating the finger you use to point on the left side of your body, you motivate the right hemisphere of the brain to give you direction. Working with both hands helps to bring all viewpoints into balance.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: TO OPTIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF THIS MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA AND MENTALLY REPEAT THE MANTRA OF THE AJNA CHAKRA, ‘OM’

NIRVANA MUDRA

Liberation Gesture



Everything in life is subject to change, and Nirvana Mudra helps you to stop clinging to the unhelpful thought that things can stay the same. This mudra is used in the yoga tradition to awaken compassion, reduce selfishness and liberate you from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The word nirvana literally means ‘extinguished’ – like a candle blown out.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand. Stretch your arms in front of you, cross your wrists and bring your palms together. Rotate your joined hands first down, then in toward your body and up, so all your fingers point upward. Your palms will bow out slightly, but try to keep each fingertip pressing against its opposite finger. Keep your thumbs side by side and elbows as close together as possible. Bow your head slightly so your fingertips come closer to your brow chakra. Hold for 10–60 seconds or longer. Release your hands, shake out and repeat with wrists crossed the opposite way.

HOW IT WORKS

As the tips of all your fingers join, all your elemental energies balance and are brought under the control of your mind, represented by your palms.



ACCOMPANYING CHANT: EMPOWER THE MUDRA WITH THE PEACE MANTRA: ‘A-SATO MA, SAT GA-MA-YA TA-MA-SO MA JYO-TIR GA-MA-YA MRIT-YOR-MA A-MRI-TAM GA-MA-YA’ – ‘LEAD ME FROM THE UNREAL TO THE REAL, FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, FROM DEATH TO IMMORTALITY.’ ‘OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI OM’ – ‘PEACE PEACE PEACE’.

BHAIRAVA MUDRA

Fierce Determination Gesture



Hold this mudra when you find yourself in a situation that requires you to be fiercely determined to remain peaceful. This is a traditional meditation mudra, and the one most commonly used in Buddhist groups. In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, Bhairava takes a fierce or terrifying form and has the power to destroy the negativity associated with your lower nature to allow more positive qualities to emerge.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) and place your hands in your lap – on a small cushion if it feels more comfortable. Rest your right hand on top of your left, with both palms facing upward. Allow your joined hands to rest in your lap. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required. As a variation, repeat with the left hand on top, which accentuates the fierce feminine energy of the mudra and is known as Bhairavi Mudra.

HOW IT WORKS

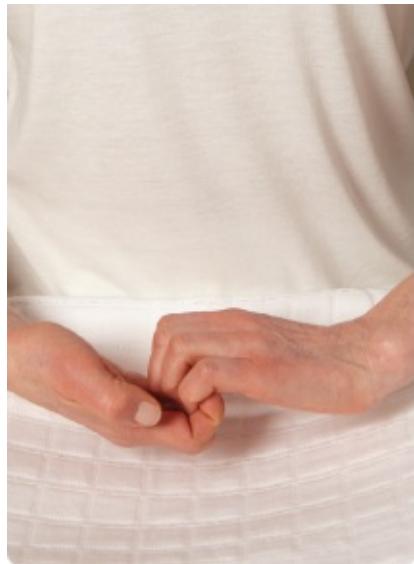
Joining your hands in this way enhances peaceful communication between the two hemispheres of your brain. In terms of yoga philosophy, you bring about the union of two of the main nadis, or energy pathways (see [pages 12–13](#)): the ida channel that flows to the left of your spine and the pingala to the right.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: ‘KEEPING MY PALMS TOGETHER IN THIS WAY GAVE ME A SENSE OF SUPPORT, AS THOUGH I WAS SUPPORTED BY THE UNIVERSE. I FELT LIGHT AND MORE ENERGETIC.’

GANESHA MUDRA

Remover of Obstacles



This gesture builds self-confidence and courage, instils in you the courage and willpower to face difficult situations, and fosters compassion and respect for other people. Physically, Ganesha Mudra has a powerful effect on the veins and bronchial tubes, encouraging them to open. Ganesha is a favourite Indian deity, with many admirers in the West, too. He represents the energy that removes problems that get in your way. This is relatively easy for him to do, since he is the one who puts obstacles there in the first place. His goal in doing that is to make you physically, mentally and emotionally stronger.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand or lie down. Have your right hand palm up and place your left palm face down over it. Bend all your fingers and hook them together. Keep your joined hands at waist level or rest them in your lap. Hold for as long as feels comfortable without moving. Repeat as required, for example during difficult meetings or when standing on a

crowded commuter train.

HOW IT WORKS

Hooking the fingers brings all five elements together, and as the palms press against each other, your mind joins them to give strength and determination to body and mind.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: TO MAKE THIS A MORE DYNAMIC PRACTICE, WHILE HOLDING THE MUDRA EXHALE AND GENTLY PULL YOUR HANDS IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS; INHALE AND RELAX. REPEAT SIX TIMES, THEN CHANGE THE CROSS OF YOUR HANDS AND REPEAT.

NAMASKAR MUDRA

My Essence Meets Your Essence Gesture



The word *namaskar* means ‘I salute your essence’, and this symbol of greeting used in India since ancient times is perhaps the best known of the mudras. Practising this graceful mudra reduces stress, balances the energies on the right and left sides of the body, and assists you in drawing your mind inward.

Usually you hold your hands in front of your breastbone when greeting people with this gesture. Holding it in front of your face is a sign of great respect, sometimes accompanied by a slight bow of the head. Holding your hands over your head indicates that you are saluting a higher power.

You might see this gesture referred to as ‘Namaste’ and many yoga practitioners call it Anjali Mudra, not to be confused with the Anjali Mudra opposite. In the West, Namaskar Mudra is commonly known as ‘prayer position’.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand. Bring both palms

together, flat against each other with all your fingers pointing upward. Bring your thumbs against your breastbone. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Joining both hands in this simple symmetrical way balances all your energies, connecting the energetic currents of your right-side, rational brain with those of your left-side intuitive brain.



ACCOMPANYING EXERCISE: TO TRY THE INDIAN DANCE VERSION OF THE MUDRA, RAISE YOUR ELBOWS SO YOUR FOREARMS ARE PARALLEL TO THE GROUND AND YOUR HANDS ARE A HAND-WIDTH IN FRONT OF YOUR BREASTBONE.

ANJALI MUDRA

Gesture of Offering



Practise this mudra to increase your capacity for gratitude, compassion and generosity. Anjali Mudra decreases greediness and grasping for more than you need, and on a physical level reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and balances digestion and elimination. The Sanskrit word *anjali* means both ‘offering’ and ‘hands joined in reverence’. Traditionally in India, people get up before sunrise to bathe in a river or stream. There they face the rising sun and say morning prayers while holding their hands in this mudra to offer water. Anjali Mudra is often referred to as *pushpanjali*, or ‘offering of flowers’.

HOW TO PRACTISE

While standing, bring the little-finger sides of your hands together with palms cupped and facing upward. Tip your hands slightly so the fingers are just lower than the wrists, as though you have water in your hands and are pouring it out. Relax your shoulders and hold for as long as is comfortable

HOW IT WORKS
Joining and opening your hands with palms facing up indicates that you are

giving with an open heart and desire to receive inspiration.

 **ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION:** HOLDING THIS MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND BRING YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR HEART. PICTURE AN ISLAND IN AN OCEAN OF NECTAR, WITH FRAGRANT FLOWERING TREES. FOCUS ON THE MOST BEAUTIFUL TREE, THE *KALPA-VRIKSHA* (WISHING TREE). ASK FOR GUIDANCE. WHEN READY, OPEN YOUR EYES AND TAKE 2–3 DEEP BREATHS.

ABHAYA MUDRA

Have No Fear Gesture



This is an instinctive gesture that parents might use to calm a fearful child with the promise, ‘Don’t worry, I’m here.’ The Sanskrit word *abhaya* literally means ‘no fear’, and the mudra conveys a promise of protection. It is an ancient gesture of friendship and benevolence often depicted in paintings and statues of buddhas and other Eastern deities and teachers.

A Buddhist legend relates that when the Buddha was being attacked by an angry elephant, he simply held his hand in Abhaya Mudra. Immediately, the raging animal became calm. Bringing your own hand into this mudra instils in you a similar attitude of fearlessness that extends out to everyone who comes into contact with you.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand up. You practise this mudra with one hand, usually the right hand. Bend your elbow and bring your hand up to shoulder level. Flatten your palm and extend it to face

outward, keeping your fingers together and pointing up. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Extending and flattening your palm transmits your thoughts of fearlessness out into your environment.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS ILL OR GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME, SIT FOR A FEW MINUTES WITH YOUR HAND IN THIS MUDRA. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE SENDING POSITIVE THOUGHTS AND HEALING ENERGIES TO THAT PERSON.

VARADA MUDRA

Forgiveness Gesture



In this gesture of ‘open-handed’ generosity, the five fingers symbolize the following attributes: generosity, morality, patience, effort and meditative concentration. The Sanskrit word *varada* means ‘favourable’, and in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist iconography Varada Mudra represents charity, gift-giving and the granting of wishes. Try it when you wish to give yourself or others the gift of forgiveness. It also improves your concentration and offers you new insight.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Practise this mudra with your left hand. Let your left arm hang down, with the elbow slightly bent, and rest the back of your wrist on your left knee so your hand is in front of the knee with the palm flat and facing outward. Keep your fingers together and pointing down. Hold for as long as feels comfortable; repeat as required.

HOW IT WORKS

Bringing all your fingers together indicates that all your elemental energies are united. Having the hand facing down demonstrates an attitude of humility and loving generosity.



ACCOMPANYING MEDITATION: HOLDING THE MUDRA, THINK OF ALL THE WAYS YOU HAVE HURT YOURSELF WITH NEGATIVE OR CARELESS THOUGHTS, WORDS OR ACTIONS. REPEAT MENTALLY: ‘FOR ALL THE TIMES I HAVE HURT MYSELF THROUGH ACTION OR INACTION, OUT OF FEAR OR CONFUSION, FORGIVE MYSELF. I HAVE CARRIED THIS PAIN TOO LONG. NOW I LET IT GO.’

HANDSHAKE AS MUDRA

Shared Gesture



In many cultures, people greet each other, offer congratulations or express gratitude with a handshake. It can signal agreement, be a sign of good sportsmanship or seal a contract. The custom of shaking hands is an ancient gesture of peaceful intent, showing you hold no weapons. This is both a formal gesture and an intimate one, drawing another person to you while setting safe boundaries. When you shake hands, you exchange prana (subtle energy) and influence the impression you leave on others. Use this mudra to offer friendship and encourage others to open up to you.

HOW TO PRACTISE

You will need a partner. Practise with your right hand (most people are right-handed). Stand facing your partner and extend your right arm, elbow slightly flexed. Hold your hand vertically, all four fingers together and thumb up slightly. Contact your partner's hand and gently wrap all five fingers around it; make sure your palms connect. Adjust your grip to the other person's: don't squeeze tightly

but avoid a limp hand. A typical handshake consists of 2–4 up-and-down shakes, or simply hold for 3–4 seconds. Keep your left arm relaxed and your left hand unclenched by your side.

HOW IT WORKS

Joining palms ensures an energy exchange that allows you to sense the other person's sincerity and assure them of yours.

 **ACCOMPANYING INTENTION:** AS YOU SHAKE HANDS, MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH A GENUINE SMILE. FEEL THE TRANSFORMATION THIS INTENTION BRINGS TO YOUR EYES AND FACE, EXPRESSING YOUR OPENNESS AND PLEASURE AT ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER PERSON.

HANDSHAKE IN PRACTICE

Handshake Variations

In Vedic palmistry, the palm of the hand is said to indicate who you really are, while your fingers show only what you want to reveal, so variations in hand position while shaking hands allow you to convey slightly different information to the person you are greeting. Holding the hand vertically in the Handshake Mudra, for example, demonstrates an equal relationship with the other person. With all variations, add a smile in order to communicate self-confidence and sincerity.

VARIATION 1



Stand facing your partner and extend your right arm, elbow slightly flexed. Tilt your hand slightly so that your palm is facing upward. Then contact your partner's hand as opposite. This conveys a subtle message that you are willing to help the other person.

VARIATION 2



If you tilt your hand slightly so that your palm is facing downward before you contact your partner's hand, you convey a subtle message that you feel superior in some way to the other person, so it is best not to use this variation.

VARIATION 3



Stand facing your partner and extend your right arm, elbow slightly flexed. Hold your hand vertically and contact your partner's hand as above, then use your left hand to cocoon the hand. This 'hand-hug' is seen as the friendliest and most trustworthy form of handshake.

HAKINI MUDRA

Problem-solving Gesture



This mudra helps you to remember things, allows you to tap into your intuition for guidance, and enhances your intellectual capacity by stimulating communication between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Try it when you feel you have ‘lost the thread’ of a conversation or would like more focus.

In yoga philosophy, Hakini is the guardian of the doorway to higher consciousness. She personifies the energy of the ajna chakra, and is often depicted with six faces and four arms. Two of her hands are in Abhaya and Varada Mudras (see [pages 140–41](#)), representing fearlessness and forgiveness; the other two hold a drum, whose steady sound induces meditation, and a skull, symbolizing the mind.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or stand. If you lie down you might fall asleep. Press the tip of each finger against the tip of the same finger on the other hand. With eyes open or closed, look up slightly, directing your gaze

toward your ajna chakra at the centre of your brow. For extra emphasis, gently tap your fingertips together. Hold for 5–10 deep breaths.

HOW IT WORKS

Each fingertip stimulates and balances the respective element and rebalances the energy of your ajna chakra.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: PRACTISING THIS MÜDRA DEEPENS RESPIRATION, HELPFUL WHEN MULLING SOMETHING OVER OR TRYING TO SOLVE A PROBLEM. EACH TIME YOU INHALE AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, BRING THE TIP OF YOUR TONGUE TO THE HARD RIDGE BEHIND YOUR TEETH. RELAX YOUR TONGUE AS YOU EXHALE.

SAMASTI MUDRA

Integrating Brain Hemispheres Gesture



Used in kinesiology, Samasti Mudra encourages both hemispheres of the brain to communicate more effectively, so you can express yourself more fully and think intuitively (right-brain function) as well as objectively and rationally (left-brain). *Samasti* is the Sanskrit word for ‘integration’. Samasti Mudra is especially effective alternated with Sankalpa Mudra (see [page 83](#)) – try them in turn while breaking from computer work. Sankalpa Mudra enhances your ability to see the ‘big picture’ while Samasti integrates your various brain functions.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand, walk or lie down. Fold down the ring and little fingers of each hand so the fingertips touch their respective palms. Press on the backs of the bent fingers with the thumb of the same hand. Keep your index and middle fingers extended and relaxed. Hold for 4 minutes six times daily, waiting at least 20 minutes between sessions.

HOW IT WORKS

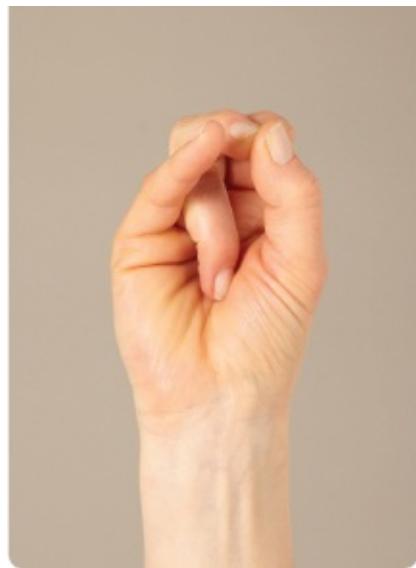
By holding down your ring and little fingers, you reduce the heavy effect of the kapha (see [pages 18–19](#)) elements of earth and water on your mental faculties. This releases your mind from restraints and helps to integrate its components.



ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION: WHEN YOU FEEL STUCK WITH A PROJECT OR DON'T KNOW HOW TO PROCEED, GO FOR A LONG WALK WITH YOUR HANDS IN SAMASTI MUDRA. FOCUS ON YOUR BREATH: BREATHE IN FOR FOUR STEPS AND OUT FOR FOUR. YOUR MIND WILL CLEAR AND AN IMAGE OF THE WAY FORWARD WILL PRESENT ITSELF.

MAHA-SHIRSHA MUDRA

Overactive Mind Relief Gesture



Maha-shirsha means ‘great head’ in Sanskrit. This is the mudra to turn to for relief from headaches, particularly migraines. It takes the edge off tension, eliminates sinus congestion and also helps you to clear your mind when you have too much to think about. This mudra is also useful whenever you experience a period of acute stress.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)) or lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor. Practise with either or both hands. Curl your ring finger down into your palm. Bring the tips of your index and middle fingers to touch the tip of your thumb. Extend your little finger. Close your eyes and breathe gently. Hold for as long as feels comfortable and repeat as required. For chronic headaches, practice for 8–15 minutes daily.

HOW IT WORKS

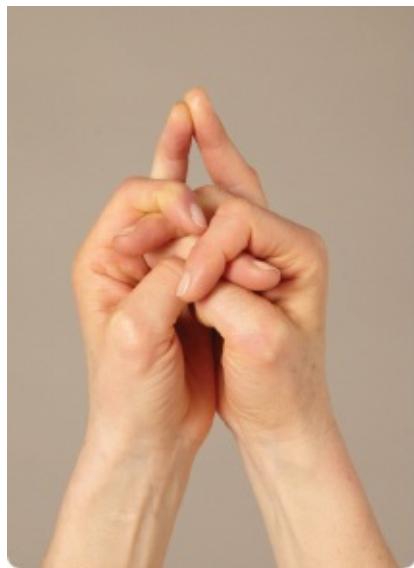
By using your ring finger (earth element), which represents stability, to push on the palm (the mind), you reduce its fluctuations. The other elements are brought into balance as your thumb (fire), index finger (air) and middle finger (ether) come together.



ACCOMPANYING BREATHING: AS YOU HOLD THE MUDRA, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND REGULATE YOUR BREATH, BREATHING OUT FOR A COUNT OF 8 AND IN FOR A COUNT OF 4. YOU CAN ADJUST THE COUNT IF YOU WISH, BUT MAINTAIN THE RATIO OF 2:1. WITH EVERY EXHALATION, BREATHE A LITTLE MORE TENSION OUT OF YOUR BODY.

MANDALA MUDRA

Circle Universe Gesture



This mudra enhances overall quality of life; it relieves health problems, protects you from negativity and awakens your awareness of the transitory nature of existence. A mandala is a circular symbol with a geometric form representing the energy patterns of the universe. As you meditate on its form, you draw energy from the world outside and direct it toward your inner being to enhance your intuition and concentration.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting position (see [pages 20–21](#)). Start with your palms facing up with the little-finger sides touching. Cross your little fingers and press them into your palms with the thumbs of the opposite hands. Cross your middle fingers; press them apart from each other with the index fingers of the opposite hands. Keep your ring fingers as straight as possible and beside each other. Rest your hands in your lap (on a small cushion if more comfortable). Hold for 5–30 minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

By interlocking and pressing on the backs of the fingers, you reduce yet balance the influence of all the elements, with the exception of the ring fingers, which offer the stability and protection of the earth element.



ACCOMPANYING MEDITATION: WITH HANDS IN THE MUDRA, SIT FACING A FLOWER. THROUGH HALF-CLOSED EYES GAZE AT THE TOP OF THE FLOWER. SLOWLY ROTATE YOUR GAZE CLOCKWISE AROUND THE FLOWER'S OUTER EDGE, NOTING COLOURS AND SHAPES. AFTER 3–5 ROUNDS, LET YOUR EYES SLOWLY SPIRAL INWARD. AFTER SEVERAL SITTINGS, REACH THE CENTRE.

MUSHTI MUDRA

Closed-fist Gesture



The closed hand is a universal symbol of strength, anger and aggression. We often respond unconsciously to negative emotions like anger or fear by clenching our fists. But if you practise Mushti Mudra in a conscious way, it can help to release irritation and frustration, while reducing the effects of stress on your heart and lowering high blood pressure. It also cures lethargy. This mudra stimulates the positive flow of energy to your liver and stomach, making an excellent time for practice directly after meals.

HOW TO PRACTISE

Come into a sitting or kneeling position (see [pages 20–21](#)), stand or move about. Using both hands, bend all your fingers and curl them into your palm, with your

thumb either inside or resting on the outside of your fingers. Hold the mudra whenever you feel the need to release pent-up emotion, or practise for 5–15 minutes daily to relieve suppressed anger and frustration.

HOW IT WORKS

As all your fingers curl into the palm, so all the elements become concentrated and make your mind one-pointed.

 **ACCOMPANYING VISUALIZATION:** TO INCREASE YOUR PATIENCE, SIT IN VAJRASANA (SEE [PAGE 99](#)) WITH BOTH HANDS IN THIS MUDRA, RESTING ON YOUR THIGHS. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND LIPS; BREATHE THROUGH YOUR NOSE. REMEMBER A TIME YOU WERE ANNOYED. RELIVE THE EVENT, THIS TIME CALMLY, WITHOUT ANXIETY – YOU CAN REPLAY THIS WHEN STRESSED.

MUSHTI MUDRA IN A YOGA POSE

Yoga Mudra: Gesture of Yoga

This powerful yoga pose employs a *hasta mudra*, a hand gesture that seals in energy. As your hands press into the abdomen and pelvis, you stimulate nadi energy pathways and chakras in the lower part of your body. A fresh flow of blood rushes to this region, relieving constipation and stimulating your urinary system to function more efficiently. Your spine becomes more flexible and the variation with arms raised relieves tight muscles and improves circulation around the neck, upper back and shoulders, too. Practise first thing in the morning after drinking water with the juice of a lemon squeezed into it.

- 1** Kneel with your buttocks on your heels (or adopt Lotus Pose if you find it comfortable). Bring your hands into Mushti Mudra with your thumbs outside your fingers, on top of your curled index fingers.
- 2** Place the little-finger sides of your hands on your abdomen, on either side of your navel. In Lotus Pose, place your fists behind your heels.
- 3** Inhale deeply. As you exhale, bring your forehead toward the ground without allowing your buttocks to lift. You may rest your forehead on a cushion.
- 4** Hold between 10 seconds and 1 minute, breathing gently through both nostrils.
- 5** As a variation, in step 2, clasp your hands behind your back with palms as close together as possible. Straighten your elbows and lift your arms as you bring your forehead toward the ground.
- 6** When you have finished, open your eyes and gently shake out your hands from the wrists. Take 2–3 deep breaths before standing up.



8

MUDRA ROUTINES

BUILDING OPTIMAL WELLBEING

In this chapter you will find a basic daily routine of seven mudras for maintaining health in body and mind. There are also suggested routines for common ailments, with explanations of those ailments according to the five elements used in Indian philosophy. Practise these routines alongside or instead of the everyday maintenance sequence. There are two routines to choose from – just select the one with most appeal on any particular day. When your ailment is less troublesome, return to the basic daily routine.

For instructions on how to practise each of the recommended mudras and exercises (and their specific benefits), turn to the page reference in the main mudra chapters.

DAILY ROUTINE FOR WELLBEING

Practise the ‘basic seven’ mudras daily for 10 minutes each: Dhyana Mudra ([page 50](#)), Vayu Mudra ([page 56](#)), Chin Mudra ([page 62](#)), Shunya Mudra ([page 75](#)), Prithivi Mudra ([page 94](#)), Prana Mudra ([page 100](#)), Apana Mudra ([page 101](#)).

HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES

For prevention as well as symptom-relief:

Option 1: Pittapacifying Mudra ([page 48](#)) for 5 minutes, five times daily, leaving at least 3 minutes between sessions + Hridaya Mudra with Compassionate Heart Meditation ([page 61](#)) for 20 minutes, focusing on steps 1–6, learning to love yourself.

Option 2: Ajna Mudra ([page 134](#)) for 2 minutes + Nirvana Mudra with accompanying chant ([page 135](#)) for 2 minutes + Maha-shirsha Mudra with accompanying tension-release breathing ([page 146](#)) for 10 minutes.

Avoid: Agni Mudra ([page 36](#)) and Guru Mudra ([page 37](#)).

DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS

To tackle fire-element issues, either too much fire or a deficit of heat:

Option 1 (acidity and heartburn): Pittapacifying Mudra ([page 48](#)) for 5 minutes, twice daily + Surabhi Mudra ([page 87](#)) + Apana Mudra ([page 101](#)) + Prithivi Mudra ([page 94](#)).

Avoid: heating fire mudras, such as Linga Mudra ([page 39](#)).

Option 2 (appetite loss): Surya Mudra ([page 40](#)) for 10 minutes + Pitta-energizing Mudra ([page 49](#)) for 3 minutes, twice daily.

Also try to chew food properly and eat your main meal at midday, when your digestive fire is strongest.

MENSTRUAL PROBLEMS

To help ease menstrual problems, which relate to the water element and swadhisthana chakra; for cramp-relief, practise Māsiki Mudra in Child's Pose ([page 125](#)):

Option 1: Yoni Mudra ([page 123](#)) for 15 minutes + Māsiki Mudra ([page 124](#)) for 3 minutes, twice daily + Shakti Mudra ([page 118](#)) for 10 minutes + Mahatrika Mudra ([page 116](#)) for 10 minutes + Jalodar-nāshak Mudra ([page 113](#)) for 5 minutes.

Option 2: Kali Mudra in accompanying squatting exercise ([page 106](#)) for 3 minutes + Yoga Mudra holding Mushti Mudra ([page 149](#)).

Avoid: Varuna Mudra ([page 112](#)) for at least a week before and during your period. Also try to reduce your intake of salt and salty foods during the week leading up to your period.

ASTHMA AND SKIN DISORDERS

To relieve a complicated number of factors, often involving a lack of the air element and an excess of earth and fire:

Option 1 (prevention): Bhramara Mudra ([page 78](#)), either alone for 5 minutes or with three rounds of the accompanying breathing + Jalodar-nāshak Mudra ([page 113](#)) for 5 minutes + Pranāpana Mudra ([page 66](#)) for 5 minutes, four times daily, leaving at least 15 minutes between sessions + Matangi Mudra with Kneeling Crescent Moon Pose ([page 85](#)) to open your lungs.

Option 2 (relief): When you feel short of breath, hold Dhyana Mudra ([page 50](#)),

close your eyes and focus on exhaling for twice as long as you inhale + Supported Fish Pose ([page 67](#)).

Avoid: Sun Breathing ([page 41](#)), Pittapacifying Mudra ([page 48](#)), Prithivi Mudra ([page 94](#)) and Bhumi-sparsha Mudra ([page 95](#)).

Also try to reduce your consumption of dairy products and grains, and eat as much fresh fruit and green vegetables as possible.

HAY FEVER AND ALLERGIES

For easing disturbances of the air and fire elements:

Option 1: Vayu Mudra with three rounds of 20 pumpings in Shining-skull Breathing ([page 57](#)) + Vishnu Mudra with ten rounds of Alternate Nostril Breathing ([page 105](#)) + Varuna Mudra ([page 112](#)) for 10 minutes.

Option 2: Shankha Mudra ([page 46](#)) for 5 minutes + Pranāpana Mudra ([page 66](#)) for 5 minutes, four times daily, leaving at least 15 minutes between sessions + Pittapacifying Mudra ([page 48](#)) for 5 minutes, five times daily, leaving at least 3 minutes between sessions.

Also try to reduce your intake of mucus-forming foods, such as dairy products.

ARTHRITIS AND STIFF JOINTS

Begin with the Hand Massage and Finger Exercises on [pages 25–26](#). To ease disturbance of the air and space elements, stimulate prana flow (subtle energy) and loosen up:

Option 1: Vayu Mudra ([page 56](#)) for 15 minutes with three rounds of Shining-skull Breathing ([page 57](#)) to begin to detoxify the body + Vishnu Mudra with ten rounds of Alternate Nostril Breathing ([page 105](#)) + Muladhara Mudra ([page 96](#)) for 3 minutes.

Option 2: Prana Mudra ([page 100](#)) for 15 minutes to ground the disturbed air element + Apana Mudra ([page 101](#)) for 15 minutes to let go of tension and physical impurities + Sthira Mudra ([page 102](#)) for 3 minutes, twice daily.

Also drink lots of water, and reduce your intake of coffee, tea and acid-forming foods (meat, fish, eggs, nuts, grains). Eat plenty of alkaline-forming fruit and vegetables.

STRESS

For strengthening the earth element and balancing the disturbed air and space elements that cause stress; for immediate stress-relief, use Ganesha Mudra ([page 137](#)):

Option 1: Kaleshwara Mudra ([page 82](#)) for 15–20 minutes while watching your breath + Kubera Mudra ([page 86](#)) for 5 minutes + Kilaka Mudra ([page 120](#)) for 5 minutes.

Option 2: Bhumi-sparsa Mudra ([page 95](#)) for 10 minutes + Muladhara Mudra ([page 96](#)) for 3 minutes + Apa Mudra ([page 101](#)) for 10 minutes + Sukham Mudra ([page 103](#)) for 2 minutes, twice daily + Matsya Mudra ([page 126](#)) for 3 minutes. Also decrease your intake of coffee, tea, white sugar and carbonated drinks (even sugar-free).

ANGER

To counter a heated condition produced by too much ‘fire’ in the mind:

Option 1: Pittapacifying Mudra ([page 48](#)), preferably while watching your breath for 5 minutes, five times daily + Kamajayi Mudra ([page 43](#)) for 10 minutes, twice daily + Shankha Mudra ([page 46](#)) for 5 minutes.

Option 2: Dhyana Mudra ([page 50](#)) with Meditation to Transform Anger ([page 51](#)) for 15–20 minutes daily + Kubera Mudra ([page 86](#)) for 5 minutes + Vishnu Mudra with ten rounds of Alternate Nostril Breathing ([page 105](#)).

Avoid: Surya Bheda Mudra ([page 153](#)) and the following heat-producing mudras: Agni Mudra ([page 36](#)), Guru Mudra ([page 37](#)), Linga Mudra ([page 39](#)), Surya Mudra ([page 40](#)) and Pitta-energizing Mudra ([page 49](#)).

Also try to reduce your consumption of coffee, spicy foods, alcohol and tobacco. You may have the occasional black tea with milk and a pinch of cardamom.

JET LAG

For adapting to your new environment; practise regularly if a frequent flyer to restore balance to the disturbed space and earth elements:

Option 1 (during the flight): Akasha Mudra ([page 74](#)) for 15 minutes, at least twice, more often on long hauls + Shunya Mudra [page 75](#)) for 4–5 minutes, 2–3 times.

Option 2 (recovering from the flight): Sitting quietly or meditating for 20–30 minutes daily holding Jnana Mudra ([page 97](#)), Muladhara Mudra ([page 96](#)) or Bhumi-sparsa Mudra ([page 95](#)) + Varuna Mudra ([page 112](#)) for 5 minutes. Also try to drink lots of water and reduce your alcohol intake.

INSOMNIA

To restore balance to disturbed air and ether elements:

Option 1: Jnana Mudra ([page 97](#)) for 10 minutes + Prana Mudra ([page 100](#)) for 10 minutes + Bhu Mudra ([page 98](#)) for 5 minutes.

Option 2: Shunya Mudra ([page 75](#)) + Prana Mudra ([page 100](#)).

Avoid: Sun Breathing ([page 41](#)) and mudras that enhance the air and space elements, such as Vayu Mudra ([page 56](#)) and Akasha Mudra ([page 74](#)).

Also try eliminating coffee and black tea from your diet; if necessary, drink a little green tea early in the day.

CHRONIC FATIGUE

To rebuild your mental and physical resources by strengthening the fire and earth elements:

Option 1: Vishnu Mudra with ten rounds of Alternate Nostril Breathing ([page 105](#)) + Surya Mudra ([page 40](#)), alone for 10–20 minutes or with ten rounds of Sun Breathing ([page 41](#)) + Kilaka Mudra ([page 120](#)) for 10 minutes.

Option 2: Prana Mudra ([page 100](#)) for 10 minutes + Prithivi Mudra ([page 94](#)) for 5 minutes + Pushan Mudra ([page 42](#)) for 10 minutes + Kilaka Mudra ([page 120](#)) for 5 minutes.

Also try to reduce your intake of sugar, alcohol, coffee, tea and carbonated drinks (even sugar-free).

GLOSSARY

- Abhaya Mudra:*** Have No Fear Gesture 140
- Adho-mukha Mudra:*** Downward-facing Gesture 45
- Agni Mudra:*** Fire Gesture 36
- Ajna Mudra:*** Brow Chakra Gesture 134
- Akasha Mudra:*** Touching the Void Gesture 74
- Anahata Mudra:*** Heart Chakra Gesture 58
- Anjali Mudra:*** Gesture of Offering 139
- Apana Mudra:*** Cleansing-energy Gesture 101
- Ashva-ratna Mudra:*** Jewelled Horse Gesture 44
- Bhairava Mudra:*** Fierce Determination Gesture 136
- Bhramara Mudra:*** Humming Bee Gesture 78
- Bhu Mudra:*** Touching the Earth Gesture 98
- Bhuchari Mudra:*** Gazing into the Void Gesture 80
- Bhumi-sparsha Mudra:*** Earth Witness Gesture 95
- Chin Mudra:*** Unrestricted Consciousness Gesture 62
- Dhyana Mudra:*** Meditation Gesture 50
- Ganesha Mudra:*** Remover of Obstacles 137
- Garuda Mudra:*** Eagle Gesture 64
- Granthita Mudra:*** Knot Gesture 65
- Guru Mudra:*** Jupiter Gesture 37
- Hakini Mudra:*** Problem-solving Gesture 144
- Hridaya Mudra:*** Compassionate Heart Gesture 60
- Jalodar-nāshak Mudra:*** Water-reducing Gesture 113
- Jnana Mudra:*** Wisdom Gesture 97
- Kaleshwara Mudra:*** Lord of Time Gesture 82
- Kali Mudra:*** Black Goddess Gesture 106
- Kamajayi Mudra:*** Victory over Excessive Desires Gesture 43
- Karana Mudra:*** Instrument Gesture
- Kilaka Mudra:*** Key to Good Health Gesture 120
- Kshepana Mudra:*** Letting Go Gesture 68
- Kubera Mudra:*** Guardian of Wealth Gesture 86
- Kurma Mudra:*** Tortoise Gesture 122
- Linga Mudra:*** Mark of Siva 39
- Maha-shirsha Mudra:*** Overactive Mind Relief Gesture 146

- Mahatrika Mudra:** Great Triangle Gesture 116
- Makara Mudra:** Crocodile Gesture 127
- Mandala Mudra:** Circle Universe Gesture 147
- Manipura Mudra:** Solar Plexus Chakra Gesture 38
- Māsiki Mudra:** Monthly-relief Gesture 124
- Matangi Mudra:** Guardian of Wisdom Gesture 84
- Matsya Mudra:** Fish Gesture 126
- Muladhara Mudra:** Root Chakra Gesture 96
- Mushti Mudra:** Closed-fist Gesture 148
- Nadānasudhana:** Four Mudras in a Chanting Practice 88
- Namaskar Mudra:** My Essence Meets Your Essence Gesture 138
- Nirvana Mudra:** Liberation Gesture 135
- Nivedana Mudra:** Deep Listening Gesture 81
- Padma Mudra:** Lotus Gesture 59
- Pitta-energizing Mudra:** Blues-banishing Gesture 49
- Pitta-pacifying Mudra:** Excess Heat-reducing Gesture 48
- Prana Mudra:** Life-force Gesture 100
- Pranāpana Mudra:** Taking In and Throwing Out Gesture 66
- Prithivi Mudra:** Earth Gesture 94
- Pushan Mudra:** Giver of Good Health 42
- Samasti Mudra:** Integrating Brain Hemispheres Gesture 145
- Sankalpa Mudra:** Practice Intention Gesture 83
- Shakti Mudra:** Essence of Power Gesture 118
- Shankha Mudra:** Conch Shell Gesture 46
- Shanmukhi Mudra:** Tuning into Silence Gesture 79
- Shunya Mudra:** Silence of the Void Gesture 75
- Sthira Mudra:** Steady and Stable Gesture 102
- Sukham Mudra:** Stress-relief Gesture 103
- Surabhi Mudra:** Wish-fulfilment Gesture 87
- Surya Mudra:** Sun Seal 40
- Swadhisthana Mudra:** Sacral Chakra Gesture 114
- Udana Mudra:** Upward-flying Energy Gesture 77
- Varada Mudra:** Forgiveness Gesture
- Varuna Mudra:** Water-balancing Gesture 112
- Vayu Mudra:** Air Gesture 56
- Vishnu Mudra:** Universal Balance Gesture 104
- Vishuddha Mudra:** Throat Chakra Gesture 76
- Vyana Mudra:** Expansive Prana Gesture 63
- Yoni Mudra:** Seal of the Goddess 123

RESOURCES

ONLINE

Revital Carroll and Cain Carroll Several excellent books, teaching aids and mudra courses at: shaktibhakti.com/mudras.php

Joseph and Lillian Le Page Visit iytyogatherapy.com to learn about their innovative work with healing mudras; they also teach courses at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York.

Kali Ray Find her breathtaking mudra work at triyoga.com. She has an excellent audio course on mudras at yogauonline.com and teaches worldwide.

Swami Saradananda Contact her via her website: www.FlyingMountainYoga.org

BOOKS

Bunce, Fredrick W., *Mudras in Buddhist and Hindu Practices*, D.K. Printworld Ltd, New Delhi, 2005

Chakravarti, Sree, *A Healer's Journey*, Rudra Press, Portland, Oregon, 1993

Chiplunkar Suman K., *Mudras and Health Perspectives*, Abhijit Prakashan, Mumbai, 2008

Keshav, Acharya Dev, *Mudras for Healing*, Aacharya Shri Enterprises, New Delhi, 1995 and at www.mudrasforhealing.com

Saradananda, Swami, *Chakra Meditation*, Watkins Publishing, London, 2008

Saradananda, Swami, *Essential Guide to Chakras*, Watkins Publishing, London, 2011

Saradananda, Swami, *Power of Breath*, Watkins Publishing, London, 2009

Weintraub, Amy, *Yoga Skills for Therapists*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to G. Venu, Nirmala Paniker, Kapila Venu and Swami Hariomananda of Natanakairali, who are doing magnificent and innovative work rejuvenating Kerala's traditional arts: natanakairali.org. Special thanks to Solihin Thom, who not only motivated me to go more deeply into mudra practice, but also gave me a taste of realization of the underlying purpose of being human: innerdialogue.org. Also to Kim da Silva, whose work has inspired me although we have never met: kinesiologieschule.de/en/

PUBLISHER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Publisher would like to thank Wellicious Ltd for the generous loan of clothing to use in the photoshoot. Find out more about Wellicious at: wellicious.com

PICTURE CREDITS

The publisher would like to thank the following individuals, photographic libraries, museums and galleries for permission to reproduce their material. Any errors or omissions are entirely unintentional and the publisher will, if informed, make amendments in future editions of this book. [Page 13](#) From *Subtle Body: Essence and Shadow* by David V. Tansley © David V. Tansley 1977. Published by Thames & Hudson Ltd., London; [Page 14](#) The Granger Collection/Topfoto.

Mudras for Modern Life Swami Saradananda

First published in the UK and USA in 2015 by
Watkins, an imprint of Watkins Media Limited

19 Cecil Court

London WC2N 4EZ

enquiries@watkinspublishing.co.uk

Copyright © Watkins Media Limited 2015 Text copyright © Swami Saradananda 2015 Artwork copyright © Hannah Davies 2015 Photography copyright © Watkins Media Limited 2015
For copyright of other photographs see [page 160](#) which is to be regarded as an extension of this copyright
The right of Swami Saradananda to be identified as the Author of this text has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Development Editor: Kelly Thompson Senior Editor: Fiona Robertson Editor: Susannah Marriott
Design and Art Direction: Georgina Hewitt Picture Research: Jennifer Veall Production: Uzma Taj
Commissioned Photography: Christina Wilson Commissioned Artwork: Hannah Davies A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library ISBN: 978-1-78028998-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset in Agenda
Colour reproduction by XY Digital Printed in China

Publisher's note: The information in this book is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice and treatment. If you are pregnant or are suffering from any medical conditions or health problems, it is recommended that you consult a medical professional before following any of the advice or practice suggested in this book. Watkins Media Limited, or any other persons who have been involved in working on this publication, cannot accept responsibility for any injuries or damage incurred as a result of following the information, exercises or therapeutic techniques contained in this book.

If you are taking medication, please do not stop taking it when you begin to work with mudras – and consult your healthcare professional if you plan to stop or alter your medication. If you spend most of your day with your hands on a computer keyboard, you may find some of the mudras, such as Mandala Mudra (see [page 147](#)) or Swadhisthana Mudra (see [page 114](#)), especially demanding. Even some simple gestures, such as Chin Mudra (see [page 62](#)), may be difficult or even painful to hold if you suffer from repetitive stress injuries, rheumatoid arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome. Discontinue any mudra that causes pain, soreness or aggravates symptoms.

www.watkinspublishing.com