

*In yoga, asanas (physical postures) is where we begin: we get the basic shape of the pose, and then begin to refine our alignment to make the structure more stable and less subject to strain. The earth aspect of a pose is its foundation, that part of the body that is touching the floor. When we are pressing our feet into the floor in Tadasana (Mountain pose) or press our hands firmly into the mat in Adho Mukha svanasana (Downward Facing Dog pose), we are expressing the earth element.*

At the beginning of a yoga journey, it is some time difficult to get the hang of proper hands and feet placement when practicing asanas. Not that it is that hard, but it takes time to break out of the habit of just placing hands and feet any which way and start becoming more aware of how we move and put our body.

As you know, our hands and feet are essential to our daily movements, interactions, and well-being and the importance of this are not lost in Yoga. This is where the bandhas come into play. The word bandha is translated as “body locks” in Sanskrit. *“They support the toning and lifting of the systems of the body against the natural laws of gravity.”*

There are three major bandhas: Muladhara (perineum), Uddiyana (navel), and Jalandhara (throat), and two minor ones: Hasta and Pada (which we will explore today). This week we are going to explore proper placement and alignment of our hands (Hasta) and feet (Pada) within our yoga practice, in order to keep feet, hands and wrists happy and healthy.

**The feet** deserve particular attention as they are our foundation. They hold up our entire body weight, provide lift, extension, and balance for the body. The foot is made of 26 bones and has three arches: the medial longitudinal arch, lateral longitudinal arch, and the transverse arch. These arches are important as they provide flexibility, shock absorbency and the ability to adapt to different surfaces we tend to walk on. The ancient peoples who developed yoga realised the importance the arches played in bearing our weight. When anything goes wrong with the foot, the problem can radiate up through the leg towards the hips and back. For example, if the inner arches of your feet sag down, this will affect the legs by weakened thigh muscles and into the lower back causing stiffness and compression. For many, the feet could be the source for many back aches. Hence the emphasis on taking care of the feet in yoga practice.

In Sanskrit, *pada* means foot and *bandha* (in this case) means “to lift or to catch or to harness.” The purpose of **pada bandha** is to activate the arches which support elevation in the knees, inner groin, and aids in the lift of the pelvic floor (which is known as *Muladhara bandha*). A common practice to help activate or to help find lift in your feet, is to roll a tennis or a golf ball under your foot. Doing so will stimulate all points of the foot which will release any blockages in the connective tissue, muscles, and ligaments within the foot, thus bringing back a “spring” or “lift” into your foot. So please bring a tennis or a golf ball for this part of the practice. We will continue to explore other stretching practices involving the feet during this week session.

### The hands

The wrist and hands may not seem as important as the feet; however, they do hold importance in our yoga practice. Our hands can act as our foundation in many poses that involve arm balances or inversions. Therefore the placement and alignment of our hands and wrist are just as important as the feet in standing postures. The practice of **hasta bandha** allows the yogi to set their hands up to take on the weight of the body in a safe way, protecting the wrist from injury. The action of *hasta bandha* is to “*root down through the pads and mounds of the thumb and fingers, and energetically draw/suction upwards through the center of the palms, creating a lift upwards through the hands, wrists and lower arms.*”

All yoga postures start from the ground up, whether it is on the feet or the hands. The *pada* and *hasta* bandhas provide an excellent way to keep our feet, hands and their respected joints in good shape so they are able to provide us with the stability, strength, and protection needed to prevent injury.

