

YogaFit – Heart Openers and Back Bends

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"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it" ~ Rumi

The heart chakra, known as Anahata (meaning un-struck or unhurt) is literally at the heart of the chakra system, located near the physical heart, and associated with the chest, lungs, diaphragm, shoulder blades, ribs, heart, and respiratory system.

When the energy of Anahata is deficient, one may develop a fear of intimacy, begin to isolate themselves, or become judgmental. When the energy of this chakra is excessive, one may become co-dependent and even desperate for love and attention. In an energetic state of equilibrium, Anahata demonstrates radiance, joyfulness, and generosity towards ourselves and others.

Love is our true nature, and sometimes life experiences may cause us to contract and constrict this area, leaving us feeling heavy, lonely, and guarded in an unhealthy way. When feeling this way, our body often responds with rounded shoulders, restricted breathing, and slouched posture – all physical signs of energetic deficiency of the heart.

To counteract this rounded posture and “break the shell” we often encapsulate around our energetic heart. Therefore, chest expanding and spine extending postures are practiced to change the circuit of prana (life force energy) in our body. Through softening our stance, opening the chest, and expanding the breath on the mat, we strengthen the physical body to support and shift the energetic body into a state of unconditional love and acceptance for self and others. Practicing forgiveness, empathy, compassion, and generosity are ways we can shift the flow of prana off the mat and ensure our heart stays free of restrictions, staying open to give and receive love.

As with any physical practice, there are key alignment concepts for all chest expansion/spinal extension movements. Some important things to remember:

- Expand the chest by drawing shoulder blades towards one another and away from ears (engaging rhomboids and lower traps), and expand across chest by breathing deeply and stretching chest
- Activate the bandhas (locks) to contain subtle energy and stabilize the pose
 - o Mula bandha (root lock) – pelvic floor engagement
 - o Uddiyana bandha (belly lock) – transverse abdominus activation
 - o Jalandhara bandha (throat lock) – slight contraction of neck muscles

Ending practice with a heart centered meditation is like the cherry on top of this practice, allowing us to better connect to the energy of our heart and clearly focus on using it for our highest divine expression.

Mountain 1 – Warm Up

YogaFit Supine Warm-up

Valley 1 – Sun Salutations

Add crescent lunge and chest expansion options

Mountain 2 – Work Phase

Standing lateral flexion

Chest expansion (forward fold option)

Warrior 1

Warrior 2

Triangle

Crescent Lunge

Twisting Lunge

Lunge with cow-face arms

Valley 2 - Balance

Dancer

Standing chest expansion

Mountain 3 – Floor Work + Deep Stretches

Locust

Bow (Half bow option)

Downward dog to wild thing

Queen Pigeon

Boat

Butterfly

Bridge (Wheel option)

Knees to chest

Dead bug

Relaxation

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