



# Hannah Lovegrove

## **Yoga during your period.**

Throughout your reproductive life it's important to make allowance for your monthly cycle, to treat your body with respect and understanding as it changes from one phase of the cycle to another.

So during your period, do not practice inverted poses like shoulder-stand or headstand, or poses which place demands on your abdominal muscles. In fact, any practice which over-stimulates the body is not recommended – this includes jumping and fast repetitions. Ask your teacher if you are unsure. Standing poses are fine, and can be very helpful for moderating blood flow and supporting the mind and emotions. The point is to be sensitive to your body – softness and quiet extension will benefit your body, your mind and emotions through this natural process.

This routine helps with the normal symptoms associated with menstruation, like cramps, headache, nausea, or frequent bowel movement – these are all normal - but if you have a persistent or abnormal difficulty do see your doctor. The sequence also helps with some of the emotional aspects of menstruation, low energy levels and 'heaviness' in the lower body.

**You will need a yoga mat, a blanket, a block, a bolster, a strap and a chair.**

The following routine should take about 15 minutes. You can lengthen or shorten the routine as you wish, using the number of breaths you count during the poses (1 breath = one soft slow round of inhalation and exhalation). Once you are familiar with the routine, you will begin to work in a more intuitive way, holding poses for longer if you feel you need to.

The sequence should flow. Study the sequence – read it through completely first, then refer to the pictures for a reminder. Try to move quietly into and out of the poses so that you create as little disturbance as possible in the mind, body and nervous system.

Best wishes, Hannah.



Before you start, observe how you are feeling. Choose the appropriate poses to begin and end your sequence and moderate them according to the instructions as you work through the sequence.



**Passive backbend** Begin with this pose if you feel emotionally upset or have low energy reserves.

Place a folded blanket at the top end of your mat, and your bolster across your mat about a third of the way down. Sit on your mat in front of the bolster with your legs bent, feet flat on your mat. Roll down over your bolster so that your back ribs come to rest on it, your chest lifts strongly up, and the back of your head rests on the blanket beyond. Your shoulders will be in mid air and your arms will be on the floor at shoulder height, just beyond the bolster. Look at the picture to get your position correct before you finally stretch your legs out straight and relax. If you find the stretch intense at first, have more height in the blanket under your head, or sit on a block at first. As you become familiar with the pose, reduce the height of the blanket, and try without the block. Once you have mastered the position of your body over the bolster, it is also pleasant to push the soles of your feet into a wall. This is a passive back bend. Although your chest is lifting and opening, the bolster is doing this for you so the pose should still feel relaxing. Stay breathing evenly for 3-4 minutes. To come up, bend up your knees again and roll your whole body over to your right hand side to push yourself up from the floor. Do not sit straight up!



**Prasarita Padottanasana** Begin with this pose if your body feels generally tense, or your head feels heavy.

Put a chair in front of you on the wide edge of your mat with its front feet just on the mat, so it won't slip about, and a bolster on the seat. Stand on the back edge of your mat and take your feet very wide apart, keeping them parallel. (Hold onto the chair for support if necessary.) Stand up and put your hands on your hips or stay holding the chair for balance. Press your feet firmly into your mat, lift and tighten your kneecaps, and press your thighs back. Lift your chest and roll your shoulders back, tucking your shoulder blades in. Keeping the lift in your legs, hinge at the hips, and keeping your back straight, take your trunk towards the chair, holding onto the seat of the chair for balance. As you go further down, fold your arms and take your elbows wide until they are resting on the bolster. Rest the top of your chest, your folded arms and your head on the bolster, keeping your legs stretching and lifting up strongly. Stay, breathing quietly and naturally, for 2-4 minutes. (It can also feel very pleasant if you rest your bottom on the wall, but keep your heels slightly away from the wall so your legs are upright.) When you are ready to come up, use your hands for support and 'heel and toe' your feet back together.



**Supta Baddhakonasana**

Put your bolster on your mat with a folded blanket at the top end. You might need yoga bricks or cushions to support your knees and a strap around your feet to draw them close, so

have them to hand. Sit in the middle of your mat and bring the soles of your feet together, knees wide. Slowly lie down, drawing your feet towards you, and arrange the support for your knees so that there is no strain on your inner thighs. Arrange the folded blanket under your head and neck, not your shoulders. Lift your chest, allow your spine to lengthen and your inner thighs to extend towards your knees. Relax and stay in this position, breathing quietly and naturally for 2-4 minutes. When you feel ready to come out, slowly lift your knees together, roll to one side, push the bolster away and lie back in the centre of your mat. Take your feet wide with your knees bent and lie back, resting your inner legs and abdomen. If you tend to get low back pain, lift your hips and slide a block under as shown, **not under your waist**. Then roll over to your right side, and push yourself up to sitting. (Don't sit straight up - you'll undo all the good work you have just done!)



**Trikonasana** This pose can be helpful if your period is heavy or painful. Use the chair for balance or if you are a Beginner.

Stand in the middle of your mat, take your feet wide apart, feet parallel, and hands on your hips. Turn your left toes in slightly and your right foot out. Lift and tighten your kneecaps. Inhale and stretch your arms out to the sides at shoulder height. Exhale and take your right hand to your right shin, or to the seat of your chair for balance, and your left hand straight up, eyes looking forward. Stay for a couple of breaths and inhale to come up. Release your hands onto your hips and bring your feet back to parallel again. Repeat to the left hand side. Come back to the centre and pause for 2 or 3 breaths. Repeat the pose again to each side.

When you have finished, put the chair on the long edge of your mat with a bolster or folded blanket on the seat back, and a block to sit on near the back edge of the mat.



**Upavista Konasana, resting forwards on a chair**

Sit on your block, facing your chair. Gently straighten out your legs and stretch them away from your body at a wide angle, keeping the centre of the back of each heel on the floor and your feet upright. Push your thighs firmly down to support the lift of your trunk. Put the heels of your hands or fingertips on the floor by your hips for extra support. Lift your

chest and lengthen you upper spine up, lower spine down, creating space around your waist and abdomen. Holding your elbows, extend forwards over your bolster and rest your arms and head. Stay, breathing quietly and naturally, for 2-4 minutes. When you feel ready to sit up, put a hand under each knee to lift your legs and bring them together. Stay sitting, facing the seat of your chair.





### **Baddhakonasana, resting forwards on a chair**

Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees spread apart. (You can support your knees on bricks or two large cushions.) Allow your upper spine and chest to lift up and your lower spine to release down, creating space around your waist and abdomen. Put your fingertips on the floor by the back of your hips to support your back if you need to, or rest your hands on your inner knees for a few moments. Allow the muscles along your inner thighs to release, extending gently from your groins to your knees. Now, holding your elbows again, extend forwards over the chair onto your bolster and rest your arms and head, allowing your abdomen and spine to extend, your pelvis to widen. Relax and stay in this position, breathing quietly and naturally, for 2-4 minutes. When you feel ready, sit up again, bring your knees up and stretch your legs forwards.



### **Passive backbend**

Place a folded blanket at the top end of your mat, and your bolster across your mat about a third of the way down. Sit on your mat in front of the bolster with your legs bent, feet flat on your mat. Roll down over your bolster so that your back ribs come to rest on it, your chest lifts strongly up, and the back of your head rests on the blanket beyond. Your shoulders will be in mid air and your arms will be on the floor at shoulder height, just beyond the bolster. Look at the picture to get your position correct before you finally stretch your legs out straight and relax. If you find the stretch intense at first, have more height in the blanket under your head, or sit on a block at first. As you become familiar with the pose, reduce the height of the blanket, and try without the block. Once you have mastered the position of your body over the bolster, it is also pleasant to push the soles of your feet into a wall. This is a passive back bend. Although your chest is lifting and opening, the bolster is doing this for you so the pose should still feel relaxing. Stay breathing evenly for 2-4 minutes. To come up, bend up your knees again and roll your whole body over to your right hand side to push yourself up from the floor. Do not sit straight up!

**Choose one of the following methods for your final relaxation:**



### **Savasana - with support for your chest for emotional stability.**

Place your bolster lengthways on your mat, with a folded blanket at the top end. Sit in the middle of your mat with bent legs and roll down over the bolster, keeping your spine in the centre and resting the back of your head on the blanket. The bolster should start just above the back of your

waist and below your back ribs, and the blanket should be under your head and neck, not your shoulders. Stretch your feet away and relax your legs completely. Lift your chest, tuck your shoulder blades under and release your arms and shoulders down, relaxing your trunk, neck, face and head completely. Relax your face, your jaw and close your eyes. Take your tongue away from the roof of your mouth. Stay, breathing quietly, for up to 5 minutes. When you are ready to come up, roll over to your right side and rest there for a few moments before you come up to sitting.



**Savasana – with legs over a chair if your lower legs or ankles feel heavy.**

Put a chair sideways on your mat with a folded blanket on the seat. Sit down close to it, swinging your legs over the seat, and lie with your back on the floor and your legs resting over the seat of the chair. The edge of the seat should come right into the backs of your knees, so your calves rest completely

on the seat. If you are less than about 5'6" tall, you might be more comfortable with a block under your hips. If you are over 5'9", you might find an extra folded blanket on the chair seat more comfortable. Roll your shoulders back and have your hands either side of your body, palms facing upwards and fingers relaxed. Relax your face, your jaw and close your eyes. Take your tongue away from the roof of your mouth. Stay, breathing quietly, for up to 5 minutes. When you feel ready, roll over to your right side and stay resting there for a few moments before you come up to sitting.



**Savasana - with your knees over a bolster to support your lower back.**

Sit in the middle of your mat with your knees bent. Roll slowly down, keeping your spine straight, roll your shoulders back and put a folded blanket under your head if it feels 'thrown' back. Place a bolster under your knees and extend your legs over it. Let your thighs feel heavy and relax

your legs completely. Draw your shoulder blades down your back, lifting your chest and rolling your shoulders to the floor. Let your arms roll out so the backs of your hands find the floor quite naturally. If this doesn't feel comfortable, bend your elbows and rest your hands on your tummy, elbows out. Relax your face, your jaw and close your eyes. Take your tongue away from the roof of your mouth. Stay, breathing quietly, for up to 5 minutes. To come up, bend up your knees again and roll onto your right side. Rest here and push yourself up to sitting when you feel ready.