

# Mulabandha – return to your source with the Pelvic Lock

By James Bone

**Mulabandha** or the Pelvic floor lock is a subtle, but powerful practice, which can aid your yoga practice, or your health in general.

- 'Mula' has many meanings including "root", as in the root of action or thought, base, foundation, or source.
- 'Bandha' usually is referred to as "lock", but can also mean binding or joining, or damming.

Mulabandha is a practice, which involves the muscles of your pelvic floor (and possibly lower deep abdomen) and your awareness, to contain and lift your energy upward from the pelvis. Because of this it can have both physical and mental/emotional benefits.

## ***Healthy Pelvis***

**ALL FALL DOWN** - The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and ligaments, which sling between the tail bone, called the coccyx, and the pubic bone. They hold everything from falling downward, supporting the bowel, bladder, and uterus. The group of pelvic floor muscles is often called Levator Ani and is primary in drawing the pelvic floor upward. Within the pelvic floor are muscular bands (called sphincters), which tighten around the urinary tube, anus, and vagina.

**BACK PAIN AND BALANCE** - Pelvic floor muscles also have a postural function. Along with the deep abdominal muscle called the Transversus Abdominus, they help to stabilise the pelvis in movement, creating a solid foundation for the pelvis and spine. Pelvic floor dysfunction has been shown to be associated with low back pain in women, and poor balance.

**REVERSE BREATHING** - The pelvic floor also has an important breathing function, acting like a reverse diaphragm. As the pelvic floor lifts upward it creates inner abdominal pressure, which helps with exhaling, or breathing outward.

**EMOTIONS, POSTURE AND MORE** - The pelvic floor can become weakened by childbirth, obesity, constipation, excessive coughing, surgery, menopause, poor posture, and over doing it with lifting. Some research suggests that pelvic floor function may also be influenced by emotions and posture of the neck and shoulders.

**BLADDER CONTROL** - A poorly functioning pelvic floor is often associated with bladder control issues, pelvic prolapse and anal incontinence. Research tends to indicate that different dysfunctions can be associated with different dysfunctions within the pelvic floor muscles.

A Systematic review (a study looking at all research on a topic) has found that pelvic floor exercise is one of the first line managements for pelvic floor dysfunction leading to incontinence problems.

CARE - However some research suggests it is not just about strengthening weakness, but about control of pelvic floor muscles – more is not better, but it is more about the right amount of contraction, at the right time. If the pelvic floor muscles are over contracted, then they may need to be relaxed.

Over doing pelvic floor work may actually increase incontinence problems.

### ***Yoga Wise***

CHAKRA CONNECTION - From a Yoga perspective the area of the pelvic floor and base of spine is said to be concerned with the base chakra called Muladhara. This is said to be connected to our consciousness concerned with safety, security and basic needs.

STABLE BASE - When you practise Mulabandha, it helps you to connect to your base, and your source. Often in yoga people like to give awareness to the higher areas of consciousness, such as the heart centre or the eyebrow centre. However if one has not established a strong base, then instability can occur with awareness higher up. Like building a house, one needs to establish strong foundations, if the house is to last and be stable.

FEAR AND LETTING GO - Due to the association with safety and stability, Mulabandha can aid in the process of letting go – and aid in reducing clenching patterns we can hold ourselves in, which are associated with fear. Thus it may aid in the relaxation process.

CONTROL AND SUPPORT - When you activate Mulabandha in a Yoga practice or asana, it provides a form of internal support and stability (as described above). Thus you can move with control, but without rigidity, moving from your core with more ease and control. This action can also be applied to your daily actions and movements.

MOVING ENERGY - Mulabandha also helps to direct energy flow. Yoga describes 5 primary energy flows. One is called apana, which is concerned with energy moving down and out (for example, when we need to urinate.) Mulabandha contains this downward energy and helps to direct it upward. In higher yoga meditation practices, this awareness is used to help direct consciousness energy upward, helping with personal growth.

SAFETY VALVE - Mulabandha is also used in yoga pranayama practices as a safety valve. In breathing practices where the breath is retained, there can be a build up of inner pressure. Applying the locks can help to prevent stress and strain.

### **Getting Practical**

“Mulabandha - A posture where the body from the anus to the navel is contracted and lifted up and towards the spine.” *Iyengar*

Mulabandha is a simple practical skill you can learn to do, but it may take some time and patience, as it is a subtle practice, which requires good sensitivity and awareness. When you first start you may not have good sensory awareness of the area of the pelvic floor.

CARE - If you have a pelvic floor dysfunction it may be advisable to go to a Pelvic Floor Physiotherapist who can help teach proper functioning of these muscles.

### POSTURE, FEET AND POSITION

Research demonstrates that activation of the pelvic floor is influenced by your posture, feet and body position.

You are better able to activate the pelvic floor in standing than sitting, and better able to activate it in sitting, rather than in lying with legs bent up.

The pelvic floor also activates better when the spine is lengthened upright with natural curves, than when slumping.

Lifting the arches of the feet may help activate the pelvic floor. Also lifting the front feet, or lifting up on the toes (including arm raising), may also aid pelvic floor activation.

CARE – Pelvic floor activation should be gentle – for postural support only 15-30% effort is required. From a yoga perspective, the lock is activated subtly, more with mind intention, than actually a physical action. Be able to both contract and relax the muscle. Breath work may help. Over doing pelvic floor exercise may lead to problems, especially if you have incontinence issues already.

The action begins physically but becomes more refined with awareness. For women awareness is usually around the area of the cervix, and for men the perineum.

Sitting or standing – with spine in a natural curve and lifted  
Bring awareness to pelvic floor deep within.

Lift gently the pelvic floor diaphragm upward – like raising the centre of a tent.

You may feel the lower deep abdominals gently draw you lower belly inward also.

The sense should be of inner strength and support, not tension.

Be aware of also relaxing the tension and being able to modify the contraction.

The action is isolated:

- not squeezing the sphincter muscles around the anus. This is called

Ashwini Mudra in yoga. It may have a specific purpose if there is weakness in this area.

- nor squeezing the muscles around the urinary tube, as you would do to stop the urine flow. This is called Vajroli or Sahajroli mudra and again would be used for a specific purpose.

#### TIPS

Try a little often

Be gentle – 15 to 30% effort – awareness issue

Be aware of both contracting and relaxing and altering the tension subtly

Walk tall

Lift tall

Practise good posture

Observe its effects upon you

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