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Align Right - The Shoulders

Our shoulders are complex. They are acted upon by the shoulder girdle (shoulder blades and collar bones), forearms to elbow (with ulnar deviation), and the freely moveable range of motion at the shoulder joint itself. There is a wide range of places you can place your arms and shoulders in poses such as Warrior I (Virabhadrasana I), Low Plank (Chaturanga Dandasana) and Downward Dog (Ardho Mukha Svanasana) that we quickly find ourselves falling into old habits and unhealthy positions. By learning how to **Align** the shoulders **Right**, you have an opportunity to build upper back and shoulder stability, mobility and strength as well as take the pressure off of areas that can lead to injuries.

For Warrior I, try experimenting with the freedom of the shoulder and the stability and connection of the shoulder to the shoulder blades by playing with the alignment of the arms. As you bring your arms over your head, rotate the elbow creases towards the face and feel the shoulder blades widen along the ribcage on the back of the body. Raise the shoulders up and down and feel the shoulder blades move along the ribcage. Find the place where the lower trapezius (under the shoulder blades) are engaged and the collar bones are wide, shoulders out of the ears. Notice what you feel active, how open the thoracic spine can become, and how it all becomes connected.

In Low Plank, rotate the elbow creases forward and squeeze the inner arms tight to the body. As you lower, keep the elbows in this position and the shoulder blades wide on the back of the body. If you start to feel the shoulder blades pinching towards the spine or the elbows poking out to the sides or the shoulders rise up to the ears, lower the knees, reconnect and stay at this level versus going lower. Build the strength in alignment gradually over time to develop shoulder girdle stability and strength. Not only will you feel increases in strength but you will also notice the change in your posture when you stand.

Before you even rise up into Downward Dog align the shoulders. Try the action of rotation of the elbow creases forward to engage the shoulder stabilizers just as you did in Low Plank. Feel how the pressure in the hands switches from the thumb side to a more even pressure throughout the hand. As you rise up, keep the shoulder external rotation and feel the activity in the shoulder girdle stabilizers.

One of the benefits of yoga is to break yourself of old, unconscious habits and replace them with healthy, aware and connected ways of living. **Align Right** and see the difference.

Namaste,

Suzette O'Byrne

Flow Training & Yoga

Heavens Elevated Fitness - Offsite Program Director - The Glencoe Club

Yoga Alliance Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher

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Finding Your Yoga Style (Continued)

According to his son Desikachar, one of Sri Krishnamacharya's most important teachings was that everything should be geared to the individual's needs and abilities. He recognized that his path was an evolution from his many teachers and considered the variations in teachings to be components of teachings versus a divergence. By choosing a path that allows each individual to find their yoga path that is just right for them, we honor the essence and the teachings of yoga.

Namaste,

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References:

1. Wikipedia
2. Video: Professor Sri T Krishnamacharya - The First Tribute in America, 1987.