

Standing Poses - The Foundation

We are upright beings living in the gravitational pull of earth. We are well designed to stand, walk, and run upon this planet. Standing poses are yoga's conscious skillful means taking full advantage of our design.

Standing is a posture that is a dynamic process that keeps us in position. We have conceptualized standing as weight bearing, righting, and equilibrium reactions. We know that our center of gravity is in front of the second sacral vertebra. Some have defined standing as the ability to maintain our center of gravity within the supporting legs with the equilibrium reactions.

We can further reduce standing into the study of bony alignment.. A more vertical bony alignment of feet, legs, pelvis, and spine are more supportive, more efficient, less muscular work necessary.

Arthokinematics studies the relative movement of each concave on each convex joint surface and vice versa. Manual therapists are very skilled in normalizing joint movement, as well as releasing soft tissue restrictions.

Manual muscle tests, length-tension relationships, range of motion measurements are included in the evaluation of standing function. I have a difficult time utilizing the concept of strength when evaluating the gross motor behavior of standing.

We even have gait analysis labs to show movement of specific spots on the body , muscular electrical activity, and pressure gradients of our feet over a time and distance. We then resort to our mechanistic treatments from the information we obtain from the computer printouts of gait analysis.

We then assume that inefficiencies in these mechanistic terms are the cause of dysfunction. We further assume that treatment should be working on these component structures to improve standing function. Emphasis on the component parts is effective in many situations. But sometimes emphasis on the whole of movement quality and function is more effective.

Pediatric developmental therapists are less mechanistic, more holistic in their approach to standing. We structure situations and activities to normalize tone, and facilitate equilibrium reactions. We work gradually up the developmental scale by facilitating one's body to react to weight bearing, weight shifting, and disequilibrium situations. People will work on standing by standing in appropriately challenging ways.

Yoga uses the same basic tenet of developmental therapists, looking at standing as standing poses. These are challenging movements into weight bearing postures calling on all the above described components of alignment, tone, arthokinematics, and equilibrium. But it adds the powerful component of consciousness. Attention to breath, sensation, and imagery are very powerful tools in developing skill in posture and movement.

I prefer to consider the concepts of rooting, centering, and lifting in treating standing dysfunction. These are internal actions that stand someone in even challenging situations. Some might call this weight bearing, weight shifting, and equilibrium reactions. But rooting, centering, and lifting are actualized when the nervous system is trained by attention to sensation, and imagery. The famous neurophysiology of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, C.F. Sherrington said that the nervous system recognized movement, not muscle activity. Yogis have known from a long time that awareness brings skill to movement.

Sherrington would agree that working on the skill of standing by activities in standing was appropriate, more effective than working on the component parts of "strengthening muscles."

Rooting is the foundation of any posture or movement in gravity. Grounding or rooting is the process whereby one controls their inertia or momentum in position, weight shift, or locomotion. One does contain their center of gravity with the support limbs or moves the center of gravity in the intended direction for locomotion. This control is more than viewing the muscles as contracting concentrically, isometrically, or eccentrically. This is much more than viewing the support limb as co-contracting to stabilize one bone upon another.

As well, we could look at rooting at pushing the earth away or pulling the earth towards us. When push into the earth at an angle away from us, we are in essence, push ourselves away [or pushing the earth away]. Or if we push into the earth at an angle towards us, we are pulling ourselves forward [or pulling the earth towards us]. This image of pushing or pulling the earth creates a momentum of our center of gravity to move in an intended direction over the joint axis of a support limbs.

In the yogic paradigm, we attend to the space below the ground we stand on. We move a line of energy, from our center, through the center of our support limb, through the corners or sides of our feet into the earth. We then can curve this rooting in a direction to move us in the opposite direction.

Victor van Kooten uses the image of the "cosmic egg." We attend to space, expanding outward from our center, we release our surface body downward through the corners of our feet through the earth and allow the roots to curve into a center that rises back through the earth into our center of arches, perineum, pelvis, and head creating lightness and length of spine.

Anyone who believes in the mechanistic view of the body as a system of pulleys and levers can not see this view. But yogis for many centuries experience this reality in their movements in asanas [postures] of hatha yoga.

Mechanistically, our pelvis needs to be neutral in tilt/tuck and vertically over our support limbs to stand upright. This pelvis alignment allows the normal curves of the spine. But in the yogic paradigm, we see the energy belly [within the pelvis] as rotating, moving energy down in the rooting, and from the center move energy up through the spine /trunk towards into the lift vertical upwards and forward through pelvis and trunk for forward weight shift or locomotion.

Standing poses are provocations from the basic upright pose, *tadasana* [mountain pose]. Moving from the center [pelvis/belly] into the root and lift. We challenge the legs to maintain rooting, the center to stay neutral, and the lift to stay light and lengthening. These are motor skills to help us out of dullness and overactivity that lead to pain and dysfunction.

Yogis take the idiom "Stand on your own two feet" literally. With awareness and skill, we can confidently walk upon this earth.

Stan Andrzejewski PT