

yoga behind bars

a regular column from The Prison Phoenix Trust



not sitting pretty?

by Jane

making space

Sometimes it's very difficult to start and maintain a meditation or 'sitting' practice. If you've found it difficult, please read on ... First and foremost, this is a private practice, a space for you to touch your heart-mind. If you are in a cell on your own, great! If you share, think about how you can do this. For most men and women, the best time is early in the morning, before cell mates have woken up. Wear comfortable warm baggy clothing - tracksuit trousers are ideal. Bring a sense of occasion and purpose to your sitting.

are you sitting comfortably?

You can roll up a blanket or towel and use that as a meditation cushion. Experiment with different things. Some people sit on upturned washing bowls in their cells. Your body needs a comfortable position so that you can then concentrate on your practice. Keep the back, neck and head in a straight line, then relax! To do that you need your bottom off the floor. See picture!

then we'll begin

Straighten out your legs. Bring your right foot in close to the body. Bring your left GENTLY on to your right thigh, if you can, with no straining at all. If you can't, bring it to rest just in front of the other leg. There should be no pain.

Try to make sure that your left knee is on the floor. If it isn't, put a pillow underneath to support your knee - see picture. You are aiming to form a solid triangle with your knees and buttocks, so you can sit like a mountain!

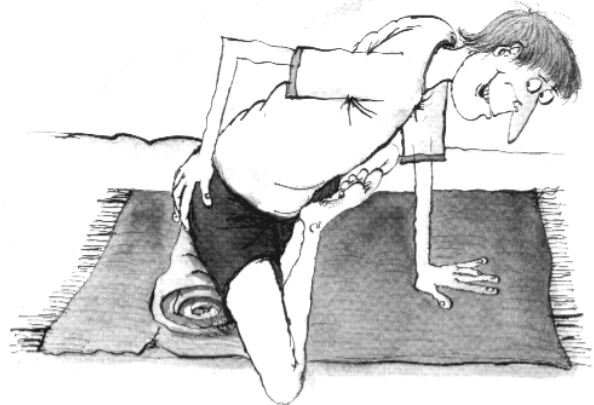
I can't sit cross legged

There are lots of different ways to sit. If sitting on the floor is too hard, sit on a chair away from the back rest, feet squarely on the floor, bottom bones connected with the seat, spine straight, back of the neck long. Rest your right hand in your left, knuckles touching, and gently bring the thumb tips together forming an oval shape. According to Chinese medicine, this hand position connects the body's energy circuits.

sit the way you can

Keep alert, all your senses open. Rest your eyes gently on a spot about 1 metre away. Close your mouth, resting your tongue on the back of your front upper teeth.

Breathe naturally through the nose a few times. Then begin counting. *Breathe in, counting 1. Breathe out, counting 2. Breathe in, counting 3. Breathe out, counting 4.* Carry on until you get to 10. If you forget and get lost, no problem! Begin again at 1. Try to be one with your breath. Listen to your breath. Just keep beginning again. Try for 4 minutes minimum (10 to 15 maximum to begin with).



Illustrations by Korky Paul