



# 3 YOGA

Alignment Secrets

NO ONE HAS EVER TAUGHT YOU BEFORE

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TINT teacher Young Ho Kim with Ami Norton

# CONTENT

Why You Want This eBook	3
Moving with Grace – Lightness Through Engagement	4
Understanding Shoulder Alignment – Scapulohumeral Rhythm	7
The Secret of the Joint Lock	10
Take Your Practice One Step Further	13

## Why You Want This eBook

As a committed practitioner of yoga, you're always looking for guidance on how to make your practice as healthy and safe as possible. The online yoga world offers a vast number of asana manuals, taking you step by step through every single posture and providing you with an overwhelmingly large number of alignment cues for every single asana. However, it is hard to identify high-quality content amongst the masses and it is almost impossible to memorize all the cues.

While it is important to keep in mind the correct alignment and execution of a yoga posture, there is no way around understanding the basic principles behind yoga alignment. The alignment secrets revealed in this eBook refer to the most common misconceptions in yoga.

The best thing is: Once you've come to grips with those fundamental ideas of how to align your body in yoga, most of the alignment cues become self-explanatory and you don't need to pay additional attention to them. With this eBook, you can take the most important alignment principles with you whenever and wherever you need them. If you are a yoga teacher, you may find this eBook helpful as a quick reference just before your next class.

However, we encourage you to experiment with these alignment principles in your home practice first – whether you're a student or a teacher. The safety of your own four walls will give you enough time and space to consciously feel into your body when exploring them.

## Moving With Grace – Lightness Through Engagement

Each body is unique and should be treated with love and respect. It is important to view the human body from a holistic perspective. Each and every movement – as minor as it may be – has an impact on the entire system since all parts of the human body are interconnected. This unity of our musculoskeletal system is established by the connective tissue, in particular the fascia. Fascia is a sheet or band of connective tissue covering or binding together different structures of the body such as muscles and organs. Engaging the muscles helps to move the body in unison and with lightness and ease. So the key to a safe and beneficial yoga practice is **Lightness Through Engagement – LTE**.



TINT teacher Young Ho Kim. Photo by [Yongsubi](#).

## What Is the Problem?

One of the most common misconceptions in yoga is that we think we have to relax our muscles to create lightness in our movements. However, relaxation is not the same as non-engagement, which means surrendering to gravity. Think of an unconscious person, who is much heavier to carry than a person that engages all the muscles (as, for example, a ballet dancer). Muscle mass weighs more than body fat. It is therefore more efficient for the body to engage the heavy mass and distribute the load evenly through the fascia. Lack of muscle engagement also makes your practice more perceptible to unnecessary twirls and squiggles, which does not only seem uncontrolled, but also makes your practice more prone to injury.

## What Should You Do Instead?

Instead of relaxing the body, we have to engage all the muscles up to the fingertips and toes. Conscious engagement activates entire muscle chains in the body. As a result, every movement will seem effortless and thus create the impression that the body defies the laws of gravity instead of surrendering to it. Constantly engaging the muscles encourages controlled movements. It therefore also makes your practice safer as you mitigate the risk of injury caused by hasty, uncontrolled movements. It therefore also makes your practice safer as you mitigate the risk of injury caused by hasty, uncontrolled movements.

*Activating your LTE creates the impression that your body defies gravity.*

## What Do You Risk If You Do Not Apply this Principle?

Apart from hanging into asanas and struggling to sustain them for a longer period of time, not activating your LTE may also cause injury. People with joint problems, such as arthritis, may risk wear and tear of their muscles if they do not engage their muscles. For example, if you have knee arthritis, firming the muscles on all sides of your thighs in Extended Side Angle (*Utthita Parsvakonasana*) will help support your knees. People who are hyperflexible should consciously engage the muscles that are supporting them in a pose in order to prevent hanging from the joints, which can cause injury.

## How Will this Principle Improve Your Practice Immediately?

LTE creates more activity and dynamic through the engagement and synergy of the muscles and will thus help to awaken the body in yoga poses instead of just 'hanging out' in a particular asana. LTE increases strength, vitality and stability in all poses while at the same time drawing a connection between body and mind by creating focus on what is happening in the body. It brings more awareness into the asanas and thereby enhances and invigorates the practice, helping to get stronger, more focused and more alive in each pose.

*Engaging the muscles helps to move the body in unison and with lightness and with ease.*

## When to Apply This Principle?

LTE is essential to every single yoga pose. Think, for example, of the action of floating from Downward-Facing Dog (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*) into Standing Forward Bend (*Uttanasana*) for example. LTE is also crucial in difficult poses, such as balance poses and in particular arm balances since it makes it easier to transition into the pose and to sustain it for a longer period of time. However, it plays a predominant role in flowing yoga styles such as Vinyasa yoga or Inside Flow yoga, especially in the transitional movements.

### Top Cues For Yoga Teachers

- Activate (flex/point) the feet even when they leave the ground.
- Spread the toes by simultaneously spreading the fingertips.
- Pull your ribs in to engage the core.
- In backbends, pull the ribs away from each other to create tension through your core.

## Boost Your Yoga Practice

### With Inside Flow

Experience the benefits of LTE in Inside Flow classes. Check out the various Inside Flow programs on TINT, for example to the song [Pillow Talk](#) or [Falling Slowly](#). The plans provide you with proper alignment in order to perform each asana correctly, safely and beneficially. Once you've built a strong foundation you can fully enjoy the Inside Flow class which will give you a clear and structured sequence to learn the Inside Flows.



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## Understanding Shoulder Alignment – Scapulohumeral Rhythm

A very common cue in yoga classes is: "Draw your shoulders away from your ears" or a similar cue. While this may be helpful to make students become aware of unconscious shrugging of the shoulders related to stress or postural habits, it can lead to serious problems in any pose where you move your arms overhead, such as Downward-Facing Dog or Warrior I.

*Scapulohumeral rhythm is the interaction between the scapula, i.e. the shoulder blade, and the humerus, i.e. the upper arm bone.*

### What Is the Problem?

Pulling the shoulders down in asanas where the arms are above the head does not only limit the range of motion and decrease stability in the shoulder joint, but may even be harmful and lead to shoulder impingement. The underlying principle behind this is an action called **scapulohumeral rhythm**, which is the interaction between the scapula, i.e. the shoulder blade, and the humerus, i.e. the upper arm bone.

To better understand what the scapulohumeral rhythm is, take a look at Figure 1 to understand the structure of your shoulder joint. This complex construct is actually composed of three joints:

- 1 The **glenohumeral joint** between the upper arm bone (humerus) and the shoulder blade (scapula),
- 2 The **acromioclavicular joint** that connects the clavicle and the acromion, and
- 3 The **sternoclavicular joint**, basically connecting the shoulder to the rest of the skeleton.

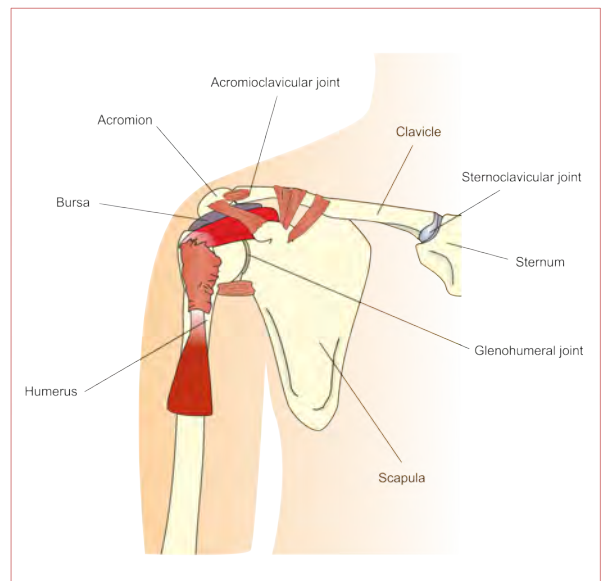


Figure 1: Anatomical view of the shoulder joint.

So, when raising the arms overhead, the scapula moves upwards with the humerus. Pulling the shoulders down in this movement results in the bones colliding into each other, causing compression and, thus, pinching or friction in the muscles and tendons that encapsulate the shoulder joint.

## What Should You Do Instead?

To bypass compression between the scapula and the humerus, upward rotation of the scapula is required. This can be achieved by elevating and protracting the shoulder blades and at the same time externally rotating the upper arm bone so that the arm pits turn forward. When raising the arms up, reach through the outer line of the arms as if climbing up a ladder. As a result, the scapula will turn in a way that allows the joint to be angled

differently so that the humerus can be vertical. However, if you have your hands on the ground, as you do in Downward-Facing Dog make sure you pronate your forearms by pressing the inner palms or the index fingers into the ground. Otherwise, there may be too much weight on your outer palms, which can eventually cause injury.

*Upward rotation of the scapula helps to bypass compression between the scapula and the humerus.*

## What Do You Risk If You Do Not Apply This Principle?

Pulling the shoulder blades down when lifting the arms overhead will block the movement of the arms and make the action more difficult. It will also lead to compression in your shoulder joint since your humerus will collide into the scapula, which may cause shoulder impingement syndrome.

## How Will This Principle Improve Your Practice Immediately?

Combining external rotation of the shoulder with upward rotation of the scapula creates more range of motion in the shoulder while at the same time enhancing the stability of the joint and, thus, preventing shoulder injury and impingement.

### Top Cues For Yoga Teachers

- Externally rotate the upper arms.
- Raise the arms overhead.
- Reach up from the outer line of the arms like climbing a ladder.
- Turn the armpits forward.



## When to Apply This Principle?

Scapulohumeral rhythm plays a role in any pose where the arms are overhead, including:

- from Mountain (*Tadasana*), raising the arms overhead into *Urdhva Hastasana*
- Warrior I (*Virabhadrasana I*)
- Tree Pose (*Vrksasana*)
- Downward-Facing Dog (*Ado Mukha Svanasana*)
- Handstand (*Aho Mukha Vrksasana*).

Asanas like Downward-Facing Dog or Handstand may feel a bit different since the hands are fixed on the ground, but the principles are exactly the same as for poses where the hands are up in the air.

## Boost Your Yoga Practice

### [With Yoga for Neck & Shoulders](#)

If you're already suffering from shoulder impingement or any other kind of shoulder pain, check out [Yoga for Neck & Shoulders](#) on TINT. The program will teach you techniques to soothe tension and pain in the neck and shoulders. It will also help you to improve your posture when sitting and standing – and overtime, any problems you're experiencing in the neck and shoulder area will disappear. Anyone can benefit from relaxed neck and shoulders!



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## The Secret of the Joint Lock

Have you ever wondered how to increase the range of motion of your pelvis and shoulders? So, you may have tried various exercises to improve the mobility of the hip and shoulder joints and the flexibility of the surrounding muscles – with modest success. The truth is that the underlying problem is not necessarily mobility or flexibility but rather a joint lock caused by full extension of the knees or elbows

*Lack of range of motion may be due to a joint lock caused by full extension of the knees or elbows.*

## What Is the Problem?

Fully extending the elbows creates a joint lock in the shoulder and full extension of the knees causes a lock in the pelvis. The result is that you are unable to use the full range of motion of the shoulder or pelvis, which will consequently limit your mobility and prevents you from experiencing the full advantage of the pose you're in. As an example, let's take a look at what happens in your pelvis area when you bend your knees in *Uttanasana* (Figure 2): Instead of the hamstrings pulling the pelvis down like a rope, the pelvis can tilt forward if the knees are bent. This allows you to bend forward from the hip joint rather than from the lumbar spine because the hamstrings do not pull the pelvis down so that it is free to tip forward and follow the movement of the sacrum.

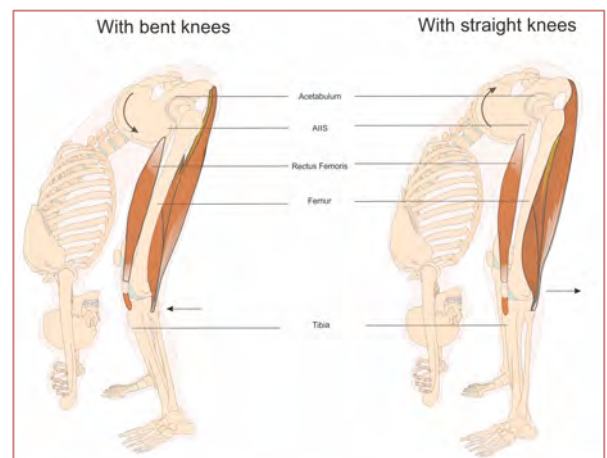


Figure 2: Difference between bent knees and straight knees in Uttanasana.

## What Should You Do Instead?

Keep a micro-bend in your arms and legs. The range of motion of your pelvis increases if you bend your knees slightly. Bring your pelvis in the desired position before you start extending your knees. The same applies to the elbows and the shoulder joints: Keep your elbows bent to bring your arm into your shoulder and then start extending the arms.

## What Do You Risk If You Do Not Apply This Principle?

The joint lock will not only prevent you from going deeper into a certain pose. Apart from that, you also risk putting too much stress on your hip and shoulder joints and the muscles surrounding them if you 'pull' yourself into the pose, trying to overcome lack of range of motion by overstretching the muscles.

## How Will This Principle Improve Your Practice Immediately?

Unlocking your joints will give you more range of motion in your yoga practice and thus enable you to experience every asana more deeply. If you have constantly been struggling with shoulder and hip mobility in your previous practice, applying this principle will instantly make a big difference.

*Unlocking your joints increases your range of motion in almost every yoga pose.*

## When to Apply This Principle?

The issue of the joint lock is applicable to almost every yoga pose. Try to think of an asana where you don't move your pelvis or your shoulders. Apart from *Savasana*, there will probably not be many poses coming to your mind. However, here are some examples to make this principle more tangible:

- Downward-Facing Dog (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*)
- Cobra (*Bhujangasana*)
- Standing Forward Fold (*Uttanasana*).

Try to apply this principle to these poses and you will immediately experience a big difference.

### Top Cues For Yoga Teachers

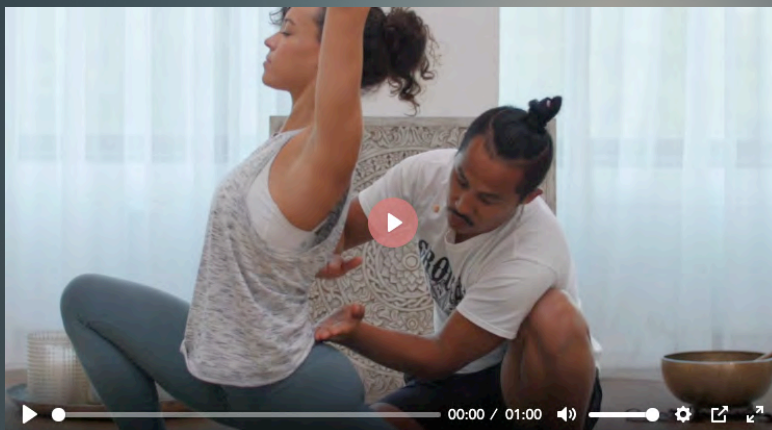
- Start with bent knees and bring the pelvis in the desired position before you start extending your knees.
- Start with bent elbows and draw the upper arm bone back into the shoulder socket. Then straighten your arm.

# Boost Your Yoga Practice

[With Inside Yoga Alignment](#)



If you want to learn more about this and other alignment principles, check out the [Inside Yoga Alignment](#) program on TINT. The program is based on applied anatomy that pragmatically conveys the body mechanics as easily and efficiently as possible. After having completed this program, you will be able to take advantage of the benefits of proper alignment to find that you are stronger and more agile than you thought – more than one "AH-experience" guaranteed!



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## Take Your Practice One Step Further

Congratulations – by reading this eBook, you've taken a big step towards transforming your yoga practice into a more efficient, healthy and save practice. All you need to do now is jump on your yoga mat and put your newly acquired knowledge into action. So, check out the yoga programs we offer on TINT. This will give you the opportunity to practice your favorite yoga style right in your living room (or wherever you want to practice). And with our app, you can even take your favorite programs with you and watch them offline.

We believe that knowledge is crucial for developing a profound understanding of your body and physical health. This is why TINT provides universal access to some of the world's best in yoga education, partnering with leading yoga pioneers to offer classes online. Using our website, you can stream videos to practice yoga and deepen your knowledge. So, get ready and practice with us!

Namaste!

**TINT. There is no try. Made with ♥ in Frankfurt.**





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*Josie,  
passionate yogi*



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*Matt Giordano,  
renowned yoga teacher*

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