



# Ask a Yoga Therapist

## How Can Yoga Therapy Support Students Joint Replacements?



[www.matthewjtaylor.com](http://www.matthewjtaylor.com)

o: 480-699-4867 f: 480-699-4894 10213 N. 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Suite 102 Scottsdale, AZ 85258

The "Ask a Yoga Therapist" series is for general information purposes and does not constitute as medical advice or prescription. Readers should seek local, qualified consultation and direction from their healthcare professional prior to acting on portion of these columns. Individual consultation is available with Dr. Taylor at [www.drmatthewtaylor.com](http://www.drmatthewtaylor.com) .

© 2009 MJT Brands. All rights reserved.

## Ask the Yoga Therapist

This column is part of a new, ongoing column where you can submit your or your students' questions about yoga challenges and related health and safety concerns. Submit your questions to [askatherapist@yogatherapy.com](mailto:askatherapist@yogatherapy.com)

**Q:** Dear Matt, I have two students with hip replacements. One student has a scar on the outside of her right hip and the other the surgeon went in through the front of the right hip. I have heard that the modifications vary depending on where the incision is located. However, I have been warned all poses that require too much turning of the leg or crossing over are unsuitable. What sort of Yoga asana practice would be beneficial for an individual with artificial hips? - Yoga Teacher - Phoenix

**A:** I would gently suggest the best Yoga practice for individuals who have had a joint replacement is one that widens the lens across more than asana practice. Let me answer the asana question first, then further explain my suggestion.

The technology around hip replacements is changing rapidly and with it, the function and recovery of those undergoing the procedures. Quite frankly you can find students having 15 year old procedures and those pushing the limit with new techniques. Therefore communication with the student's rehabilitation team is critical. Do NOT assume anything. Generally the most accessible person is the physical therapist. They should know what procedure was done, issues specific to that student, and the surgeon's protocol and limitations of motion. You will need a privacy information release from the patient in order to get that information. The therapist's office will have the form. Once you have that information that becomes the boundaries for your asana selection.

Typically the student will have residual compensations from the pre-operative patterns of movement. Identify those and choose your asana to address them. I prefer to start people with supine and prone awareness to discover these and then instruct asana in those positions that bring awareness and release to the areas involved. From there we build to kneeling and standing poses that then incorporate strength and balance. Trying to do this before setting the foundation is frustrating and can lead to strain. Keep the postures narrow in base initially in introduction and emphasize alignment over distance or breadth of stance. If all you worked on was mountain in supine, prone, sitting and standing that would be plenty....keep it simple and teach awareness rather than performance. I see far too many people coming in trying to master more advanced poses and they have no idea where they are in these foundational postures.

Returning to my suggestion about broadening from a strictly asana practice. I believe we underserve the student and Yoga as a profession when we limit instruction to a single limb of practice. Something went out of balance to break down the joint...excellent fruit for the study of the yamas and niyamas. The new joint also begs awareness of ahimsa vs. striving to achieve a life list of asana...teach that point. The breath is always altered both before and after such a procedure. Help the student to recover/discover their breath and fully develop that relationship...it is more important than asana in my opinion at the

person's life stage and needs. Lastly, the replacement of a joint begs deep spiritual questions around death, mortality, and separation (is the joint "artificial" or just part of the material plane no different than the original....this is key for integrating the new anna mayakosha element into their life.).

In summary, having a hip replaced is a call for transformation in the person's life. Don't miss the unique opportunity you as a Yoga teacher have to assist in this transformative process by yielding to our societal headlong rush to "get over, get past and get back to normal" ....normal is what produced the suffering. What might we discover for each other by exploring beyond just asana that our world needs now?

**Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, RYT has a doctorate in transformational learning and change (a.k.a. Yoga). Matt is an AYA member living in Scottsdale where he and his wife have a Yoga-based rehabilitation clinic. He is an author, researcher and practitioner of Yoga therapy. He is president of the board of directors of the International Association of Yoga Therapist and teaches nationally. He is an expert legal witness for Yoga injuries and is passionate about Yoga safety. For more information see [www.drofyoga.com](http://www.drofyoga.com) .**