

## Feeling It!

by Jinjer Stanton

I learned a new word today: proprioception or “felt sense”. I was overjoyed to discover there is a word for a vital piece in successful yoga though the word itself is not too inspiring. It means a person’s awareness of the relative positions of the parts of his or her body in relation to one another (dry, dry, dry). It is the sense that allows us to tell from the inside whether our body is in a straight line in the plank position (or where our noses are relative to our index fingers in the popular sobriety test). Proprioception is generally unconscious.

But the experience of the sense is anything but dry and academic (or medical). For me it is like the sensations of swimming — the feeling of water resistance makes me hyperaware of where all my various parts are and what they’re doing — but without the water. I get an impression of being self-contained, supported and at one with oneself.

In yoga the value of making a conscious connection to this generally unconscious sense is that it enables us to make adjustments in our position to bring us closer and closer to the ideal for any given pose. Training our consciousness to tune into this sense is also easier said than done. As with any sense, some of us are naturally more in tune with it than others. But we can cultivate this awareness (and, coincidentally, mindfulness — a popular kind of meditation).

The nice part about this first exercise is that you can do it anywhere, anytime (except when you’re driving or doing surgery, please wait until the car is stopped and the incision sewn up). You probably know intellectually whether you are sitting or standing or lying on your back (or belly). Now, close your eyes and pay attention to your body. Pay attention to how each part of it feels, how each

finger is positioned with relation to its neighbors, how your arms are positioned in relation to each other and your body. Is one knee higher or in front of the other? Feel the way your spine curves and the tensions in the muscles of your face.

Now that you are familiar with how your body feels right now, shake things up a bit and try some warm up exercises.

### Bear Hug

Stand where you can swing your arms freely without crashing into anything with your feet shoulder width apart. Inhale as you throw your arms wide as though you are about to hug someone very dear to you. As you exhale, throw your arms around yourself in a big bear hug that squeezes the breath out of you.

Repeat this several times making sure that you are inhaling as your arms fly open and exhaling as they wrap around you again. Alternate which arm comes out on top during the hug portion of the movement. The bear hug helps loosen tight shoulders, and replace stale air with fresh.

### Carnival Ride

I love this one. You start out in the same position as the bear hug only now you gently rotate your body back and forth around your waist letting your arms fly free. Turn your head to follow the arm that’s flying back at any given point.

This exercise, all by itself, can go a long way toward easing any tension in your back while increasing flexibility.

Finally, When your body returns to rest, pay attention again to how it feels. Notice what’s changed.

The spirit in me salutes the spirit in you.  
We’re all in bodies together.



## forwarded by Marcia Thomas:

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) are in the midst of a research project designed to measure the benefits of integrating yoga techniques into classrooms. They are using mindfulness, centering, and breathing techniques to help students calm their bodies in the classroom. They are also offering staff development seminars to 500 Minneapolis and St. Paul teachers. Teachers are noting improvements in attention span, comprehension and respectfulness. Yoga has resulted in “a calmer class,” “more focus,” “feeling stronger,” and “more energy for those students who slouch.” Furthermore, teachers themselves are feeling positive effects. Benefits, which include increased concentration and fitness skills and a greater sense of community for both teachers and students. Yahoo!



## Reminders for Your Yoga Practice:

1. ***Don't beat yourself up*** if you can't do all of the poses as easily as others seem to. If you do the best you are capable of, you still receive the benefits. Also, it is inevitable that you improve over time. Be gentle with yourself. Keep in mind that our bodies are as individual as our personalities.
2. ***Pay attention to your own body and emotions.*** If something seems scary, don't do it. If something is painful, either back off until it doesn't hurt any more or don't do it at all. This is particularly important if you are practicing without a teacher. Even if you are practicing with a teacher, that teacher may not know what's going on with you. Every body is different. Respect yours and trust your own experience.

Also, paying attention to how your body feels through all the exercises increases the benefit you get from them and increases your awareness of what's going on with your body at other times.

3. ***Remember to integrate your breathing with the exercise.*** There's more room for the lungs whenever your chest is opening as in backbends. That's the time to be inhaling. When you're bending forward is when it's best to be exhaling. Integrating breath with movement maximizes the benefit of all the poses.



## Jinjer Stanton's Yoga Classes

7 to 8:30 Monday evenings at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church <http://www.htlcmpls.org/> (generally in the Mary/Martha room). Call 612/722-9703 for more information about this class.

If daytime or weekend classes work better for you, Contact **Hiawatha Lake Park** (612/370-4930) for classes Saturday mornings from 11:15 am to 12:30 pm or for the Monday afternoon class that goes from 2 to 3:15 pm.

These yoga classes are fun as well as mindful and beneficial. The Monday evening class lasts an hour and a half. The other classes are one and a quarter hours long. In all classes the last ten minutes are devoted to meditation so our bodies can fully integrate the benefits of the class just past. Wear clothes that are easy to move in and if you have a mat, bring it. Other nice helps to bring are a bath towel and woven fabric belt. We look forward to meeting you. You can call me at 612/722-9703 for more information.



## Yoga Bytes:

Yoga Bytes is a message intended to bring yoga to your consciousness regularly by suggesting a little something you can work on right now. For more information and additional Yoga Bytes go to [www.jinjerstanton.com](http://www.jinjerstanton.com).