

## Building Strength Where it Counts

by Jinjer Stanton

Those heroes who build our buildings, roads and bridges, and the heroes who make sure our trash gets toted away each week need all-over body strength every day of their lives. But most of the time, in our daily lives, most of us have no need for strong abs and strong arms. Until we do. Until something happens that makes the strength our bodies are heir to vital and valuable—and it's not there because we've let it slip away.

If our vanity has lead us to join gyms and we actually go, we may be ready when the strength is needed. It's easy for many of us to lose strength in our arms and shoulder (not to mention the core — back, sides and abs) because our lives simply don't call for that kind of strength.

Besides not having strength when it's needed there are other consequences of being weak in these areas. When our muscles lose strength we lose strength in the bones as well. We also lose the stability strong muscles provide to our joints and back so that any injuries that occur are more serious. Luckily, there is an easy exercise that can be done pretty much anywhere.

Begin by standing facing a chair (something sturdy like a kitchen or office chair) that's braced against your desk, a wall or counter. With your hands resting securely on (even grasping) the sides of the front edge of the seat, take a few steps back — arranging your body into a straight line from your heels to your head — your shoulders should be directly over your hands. Have a friend or family member check to see whether your hips are sagging or your hips are poking up. Ask your helper to coach you into as straight a line as is within your power. Pay attention to how

your body feels both before any adjustments are made and after. An important key to getting better in yoga is paying attention to how your body feels at every step along the way and in every pose.

Breathe deeply and slowly. Hold this position long enough to feel you've done something — or until the phone rings, whichever comes first.

This is a simple pose that can be adjusted for your individual degree of fitness. If the chair is too low for you to start with, use the table or kitchen counter. As you grow stronger, you can choose lower and lower support for your hands: table, chair and, ultimately, the floor.

*If you have trouble standing and walking, start by sitting in a chair with sturdy arms (if you are in a wheel chair, they probably come built in) that are about four to six inches above the seat of the chair (lower arms are easier to start out with). Make sure wheels can't roll and the chair back stays put. Grasp the arms of the chair right next to your hips and press down with the intention of lifting your shapely fanny up off the chair. Be gentle with yourself. Work at it every day and you'll grow stronger.*

*When you get to the point that you can lift your body up off the chair, even for a few seconds, plant your feet firmly on the floor about one and a half to two feet apart (making sure your chair is well anchored) and lift your hips upwards so your body is in a straight line from knees to shoulders. You are now in a kind of reverse plank that also works those core muscles.*

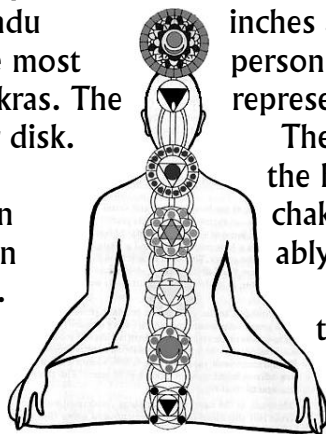
The spirit in me salutes the spirit in you.  
We're all in bodies together.

# The Energetic Body

The energetic body is recognized in many ancient healing traditions, but it is the Hindu tradition that gives us the nomenclature most used for the vortices of energy: the chakras. The word *chakra* in Sanskrit means wheel or disk. While there are many chakras located throughout the body, most people when using the word are referring to the seven major chakras along the spine and head.

The health of these chakras has repercussions not only for physical health but for the very shape a person's life takes. For instance, a weak root chakra can be seen in a person's life through struggles with money and the basics of staying alive. A healthy root chakra would be seen in the relative comfort of a person's lifestyle and a lack of worry around financial issues. The root chakra is also referred to as the first chakra and is located at the very base of the spine.

The second chakra (sacral) is located a couple of inches below the navel and pertains to sex and passion and generative creativity.



Chakra three (solar plexus) is about two inches above the navel and has to do with a person's ability to attain his or her goals. It represents personal power.

The bridge between the lower chakras and the higher chakras is the fourth or heart chakra (guess where it's located). Predictably it has to do with love and compassion.

Number five is the chakra located at the base of the throat. It is literally our ability to express ourselves through words, to speak our truth.

The sixth chakra (third eye), in the center of the forehead just between the eyebrows is the center of our ability to "see" literally and metaphorically and psychically.

Finally, the seventh chakra (crown) which is located at the very top of the skull is our connection to the infinite, the divine.

Connecting these and the other chakras of the body are the nadis or lines of energy in the body. They roughly correspond to the meridians of Traditional Chinese Medicine.



## Suggested Reading:

**Yoga, Youth and Reincarnation:** Written in the 60's by professional sceptic, Jess Stern, this book's a good story about his introduction to yoga, his remarkable yoga teacher. and it includes asanas (poses, exercises) to help the newcomer get started.

## Yoga Classes:

**7 to 8:30 Wednesday evenings**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (2nd floor)

<http://www.htlcmpls.org/>

(generally in the Mary/Martha room)

612/722-9703.

**11:15 am to 12:15 pm**

**Saturday mornings**

**Lake Hiawatha Park**

1 block east of 28th Ave. on 45th Street

(612/370-4930)

This gentle, mindful approach honors where your body is right now. These yoga classes are fun and beneficial. Wear easy to move in clothes and if you have a mat, bring it. Also helpful are a bath towel and a woven fabric belt. We look forward to meeting you. FMI call me at 612/722-9703.



## 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). *Yoga Bytes is published in cooperation with Lake Hiawatha Park.*