

Womb Yoga / Well Woman Yoga Therapy: Welcome and Course Pre- Reading

Dear Yoginis – here’s a message from the course designer and lead tutor, Uma Dinsmore-Tuli:

Thank you so much for your interest in the Womb Yoga / Well Woman Yoga Therapy Training Course. I have written this brochure to give you a sense of what this course is about and where it is coming from, so you can make an informed decision about whether it is the right course for you.

Background and development

I am proud to say that this extraordinary course sets a gold standard in yoga therapy trainings for women’s health. It has been developed over the past eight years through the collaborative work of a number of excellent yoga therapists, ayurvedic practitioners and other women’s health care experts, including Ruth Gilmore, Marinella Benelli, Sofia Ansari, Emma Cannon, the Lady Cunt Love and Alexandra Pope, contributions from all of whom have helped me to create a course of great depth and breadth.

Elements of the course were first developed as a component of the Yoga Biomedical Trust’s old diploma in yoga therapy (which has since morphed into the current Yoga Campus Diploma in Yoga Therapy). The range of remarkable yoga practices, philosophical understandings and techniques for sharing this work with women have all been refined and explored through my on-going yoga therapy practice in Stroud and London, and through my international work running women’s retreats and yoga teacher trainings for all kinds of women in all kinds of places. This means that the contents of the course have been tried and tested in many different contexts and locations – from the far west of Ireland to the heart of Moscow, and from Reykjavik to Venice, by hundreds of women over the past twelve years.

The **Well Woman Yoga Therapy Training** provides not only practical experience of a full spectrum of womb yoga practices to support women’s health and vitality at all stages of life, but also a clear presentation of relevant anatomy and physiology, form and function, in relation to physical and esoteric bodies, both from western medical and ayurvedic perspectives.

There is experiential anatomy (making maps of the pelvis, and discovering how form and function interconnect), and there are slides and diagrams to make the relevant anatomical and functional understandings clear. There is an exposition of the practical benefits of menstruality consciousness, which dovetails perfectly with many key yogic and tantric philosophies. There is a manual that includes evening homework reading each night of the course, and it there are charts and diagrams and photographs and tables and lots of recommended further reading to enable you to follow through with your own special interests in the range of different women’s life experiences that we explore. There are also very many case studies and testimonies to share, because it is through the individual experiences of many different women that we can see how the combined wisdom of yoga, Ayurveda and relevant western understandings of the female body can effectively support women’s health now.

This document is intended to give you a feel for the course, by outlining the topics we cover, the approach of the course, and also offering some further reading to prepare you if you decide to attend the course. It gives you all the details of pre-course reading and also offers you some links to browse for information about the inspiring yoginis whose contributions have helped to develop the course together with me over the years.

What does the course cover?

In terms of **women's life-cycles**, we explore the following experiences in women's lives, from a yogic perspective that explores the multi-dimensional nature of these experiences as operating in the five bodies (*kosas*), and as initiations in to powers (the female *siddhis*)

Menarche and adolescence
Menstrual health through childbearing years
Fertility
Impact of pregnancy, labour and birth on women's five bodies
Lactation
Postnatal recovery
Peri-menopause
Menopause
Post-menopause and the ageing process in women

Please note that I run a separate and self-contained training for pregnancy and birth yoga that also includes yoga therapy for the immediate post-partum. The Well-woman Yoga Therapy course explores the impact of pregnancy and birth on women's health, but it does not provide a full training in pregnancy yoga. Although many (most) of the practices shared in the Well Woman course are suitable and indeed beneficial for pregnant women, if you are looking for a complete training to teach pregnancy yoga, please do the pregnancy yoga course instead.

In terms of **women's health issues**, the case studies presented on the course, combined with further practical and theoretical material present yoga therapy to support the following experiences:

Menstrual health –

Pre-menstrual tension,
Menstrual pain and ovulation pain,
Endometriosis,
Erratic menstrual cycles,
Heavy bleeding

Mental health in relation to experience of being female in a patriarchy –

Anxiety and depression
Body image issues and eating disorders
Issues around self-esteem, including during menopause (in social and cultural context),

Reproductive health –

Conscious conception and contraception choices (natural fertility management)
Assisted reproductive technologies (yogic support for these experiences),
Miscarriage,

Termination of pregnancy,
Pelvic inflammatory disease,
Polycystic ovaries

Pelvic organ health –

Fibroids,
Cystitis and other urinary tract disorders,
Pelvic organ prolapse (postnatally and in later life)
Uterine and other cancers

Postnatal and menopausal health issues

Prolapse
Diastasis rectus and other postnatal recovery issues
Hot flushes, night sweats, hair loss and other menopausal symptoms

Breast health

Lactation
Lymph circulation
Effects of ageing
Esoteric significance of the breast energies
Breast cancers

Bone health and ageing

Osteopaenia and osteoporosis

The primary intention of the course is to present *practical and positive ways* to use **all aspects of yoga** to support and enhance women's well-being and vitality throughout our lives, so this means the course places the 'women's health conditions' in the context of positive yoga therapeutic self help strategies that are drawn from all aspects of yoga.

When I say all aspects of yoga I really mean that: asanas (yoga postures specifically intended to empower and delight women) are only one important part of what is taught on the course, and in my experience this physical aspect of yoga only has value when it is practiced in conjunction with the following elements:

SATSANG / Sangha:

In many ways, the sharing of women's stories in women's circles is one of the most powerful yogic healing forces we have. For this reason, we make practical use of the *sangha* of the course participants, and we learn to facilitate and respond with kindness and conscious attention to the healing needs of the women in our circle. This is a part of the daily experience of the course, and it serves not only to heighten our skills in facilitating such circles ourselves, but also enables us to deepen our connection with the intuitive understanding and heart-based responsiveness that is the most powerful basis of any yoga therapeutic relationship

Mudra:

We learn over a dozen different mudras [gestures] to enhance the flow of energy for women: eg. opening the lotus to prana shakti, hridaya mudra, apana mudra, ashwini and sahajoli mudra, as well as a number of versions of yoni mudra and methods to use mudra to enhance the flow of energy in the hridaya-yoni nadi [the heart-womb meridian]).

Bandha:

We explore how traditional hath yoga bandhas can be adapted and enhanced to support women's vitality at different points in our menstrual and life cycles, for example we learn a menstrual mulabandha, a yogini's mulabandha, and healing forms of supta uddiyana bandha that are valuable during postnatal recovery and menopause, and for the support and healing of pelvic organ prolapse.

Pranayama:

I teach a selection of different forms of pranayama on the course to support women's healing, eg golden thread breath, variations on ujjayi breath and a selection of psychic alternate nostril breath practices to enhance the flow of prana shakti along feminine routes to support vitality, enhance sexual response and promote healing.

Total Yoga Nidra:

We practice total yoga nidra at least once (sometimes twice) every day on the course in a variety of different forms derived from a range of approaches to yoga nidra, including the Himalayan tradition, Satyananda yoga and Richard Muller's i-rest protocols. The value of the total yoga nidra is to deepen our understanding of the relevant life cycles and women's health issues we are exploring intellectually, and heighten our capacity to learn and retain information whilst remaining connected to the deep source of our intuition and inner guidance.

Meditation:

I teach a series of individual and group meditation practices specifically designed to promote healing, release and loving energy for women, including a heart/womb meditation, a heart/head meditation and a variety of meditations for thanksgiving and release.

Nada yoga:

[the yoga of sound] This is helpful aspect of yoga for women's healing, and we learn a selection of different bhramari practices and the integration of bija and vedic mantra with sound and awareness sequences. We also make time each morning and afternoon to chant (or to listen) to a selection of goddess-focused songs and prayers, for example Mahalakshmi Stotrum and excerpts from Saundaryai Lahiri and Devi Mahatmyam – audio tracks of these mantras are available for download at www.yonishakti.co to support your learning (if you have an interest!)

In addition, we also learn a range of deliciously

feminine asana flow sequences

that support and enhance women's vitality and well-being, including heart/womb standing sequences, flowing dance asanas and seated sequences to support elemental connections.

Restorative asanas, and a whole range of **purna pawanamuktasana** sequences (asanas to liberate energy) are also taught, and there are many rhythmic **shakti bandhas** (asanas to unblock stuck shakti or energy) are also part of the therapeutic range of physical practices shared on the course.

What can I read to prepare for the course?

In the first place I am proud to invite you to take a visit to the lovely site that shares information about my new book **YONI SHAKTI** www.yonishakti.co There you will also find lots of audio and video material that gives you a flavour of the practices I will be sharing.

There you can read a little more about the genesis and application of womb yoga. There are also further resources and downloads on www.wombyoga.org

I am delighted to have been supported in the development of this course by some wonderful yoginis. The links below give you a sense of who has been involved so that you can discover more about their work. Some of these yoginis contribute to every course and others are have been ‘visiting attractions’ on previous courses, all of them are impressive women doing great work in the promotion of women’s health and optimal vitality through yoga.

My menstrual guru for the past five years has been her very divine loveliness Alexandra Pope, author of the *Women’s Quest Workbook* *The Wild Genie* and *The Pill – are you sure it’s for you?* All of these books are recommended reading for the course. I also really recommend browsing these sites to find out more about Alexandra's work here: <http://www.womensquest.org/> and also <http://www.wildgenie.com/>

I have been incredibly fortunate to have Colette Nolan (aka The Lady Cunt Love) assisting on the course and also sharing some opportunities to celebrate women's power and beauty through craft (totally awesome cuntpcraft) during evening sessions on the residential versions of these courses in Dublin and in Stroud. Colette’s wonderful pro-cunt materials will be used in the course. Colette is a dear colleague from the women's leadership apprenticeship with Alexandra Pope, and you can hear some of her poems and find out more about her really amazing art work here: <http://cherishthecunt.com/>
<http://clitorarty.wordpress.com/colette-and-rebecca/>

If you are looking for even further reading, then I can warmly recommend any one or all of the following books for uplifting and challenging perspectives on being a woman (don't agree with everything in them, but am interested to discuss this work with you!)

Caitlin Moran's *How to be a Woman* (http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/939363.Caitlin_Moran)

Inga Muscio's *Cunt - a declaration of independence*

(http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/29673.Inga_Muscio)

Naomia Wolf's *Vagina - A New Biography* <http://naomiwolf.org/vagina/>

I'd be fascinated to discuss these books with you on the course!

Another valuable resources to connect with is *Women’s Waterworks* by Pauline Chiarelli. This is fabulous, world best-selling guide to the female pelvic floor, written by a physiotherapist continence advisor. Chapter One is available as a free download on

http://www.womenswaterworks.com.au/?gclid=CPDPkom70KQCFc0_4wodUgM5Ow.

Alternatively the whole book can be bought for £6 from

<http://www.win-health.com/womens-waterworks.html>

A good general overview of the background material that supports the course can be obtained from *Nawa Yogini Tantra* and *Luna Yoga* (details at end of document).

For an inspiring vision of the anatomy of the female pelvis, see *The Female Pelvis*. Other useful background reading is the Muladhara and Swadisthana chapters from *Kundalini Tantra*. I will also be referring to some of the restorative postures and remedies outlined in Judith Lasater’s book *Relax and Renew* (in particular the cycle of poses for “Moon Club”).

I would also highly recommend that you explore two US websites in preparation for the course. In terms of approaches to prolapse and the general health and support of the pelvic organs in women, please take the time to visit Christine Kent's *Whole Woman* website and take a root around the articles and testimonials she has collected. I have found her approach deeply inspiring and very helpful indeed, and will be sharing some yoga practices informed by her thinking:

<http://www.savingthewholewoman.com/>

<http://wholewoman.com/>

I also very warmly recommend that you encounter the work of Dr Christiane Northrup, either in terms of her phenomenally useful books, especially *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* or by visiting her website: <http://www.drnorthrup.com/>

With both of these websites, to access the information and articles that are most useful you have to sign up as a member. I would advise that this is well worth doing, especially if you are planning to work in this area of women's healing. Enjoy your surfing!

Finally, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the coming course, or if you have particular issues which you would like to see included, for example if you are working with clients who pose particular questions for you.

I look forward to seeing you and working together,

With great respect and love I send warm wishes for your well-being.

Uma Dinsmore-Tuli

wombyogauma@gmail.com

Selection of titles from the course bibliography

Don't panic as we do not expect you to buy all these books – this is a list of resources you may care to look at.

Calais-Germain, Blandine. 2003. *The Female Pelvis: Anatomy and Exercises.*

Eastland Press: Seattle.

Useful reference for this module – try out some of the exercise if you get a moment.

Chiarelli, Pauline. *Women's Waterworks.*

Neem press. A fabulous, world best-selling guide to the female pelvic floor, written by a physiotherapist continence advisor. A free e-book version is available to download at www.womenswaterworks.com

Lasater, Judith Hanson. 1995. *Relax and Renew: Restful yoga for stressful times.*

Rodmell Press: Berkeley, California. Crucial information and guidance on appropriate restorative poses for women's health.

Ohlig, Adelheid. 1994. *Luna Yoga: Vital fertility and Sexuality.*

Ash Tree Publishing: Woodstock, New York. Comprehensive and inspiring – full of helpful modifications and good ideas. Sadly this book has been out of print for some time, and can be a very expensive title if you do find it. The French edition is often more easily available

Saraswati, Sw. Satyananda. 1984. *Kundalini Tantra.*

Bihar School of Yoga. Munger. Classic reference on chakra energetics. This is the approach on which the chakra and other energetical body information in the course is based.

Saraswati, Sw. Satyananda. 1992 [1977]. *Nawa Yogini Tantra.*

Bihar School of Yoga. Munger. Full of insight and helpful yoga guidance on many aspects of women's health. Essential reference for this course, but be wary about the guidelines during pregnancy and birth. Apart from that, Everything else is trustworthy.

Saraswati, Swami Muktibodhananda. 1999. *Swara Yoga; the tantric science of brain breathing.* Bihar School of Yoga. Munger. Full of fabulous information about the flow and function of pranas in the body. This table is from p.67 and provides a very valuable cross-referencing system between the elements, Kosha and prana vayus to which we shall be referring the course.

In addition, many of the practices taught in the course are described and/or illustrated in detail in the following texts written by the course tutor, so for that reason, if you do not already have these texts, it may be helpful for you to have copies of:

Dinsmore-Tuli, Uma. 2006. *Mother's Breath: a definitive guide to yoga breathing, sound and awareness practices during pregnancy, birth, postnatal recovery and mothering.* Sitaram and Sons. London.

Dinsmore-Tuli, Uma. 2002. *Yoga for Living: Feel Confident.* Dorling Kindersley. London.

Dinsmore-Tuli, Uma. 2008. *Teach Yourself Yoga For Pregnancy and Birth;* Hodder Education, London.

Special student multi—buy discounted offers are available on these titles for students on the course. See www.wombyoga.org