

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Mudras

A Beginner's Guide to Hand Gestures

Eight simple hand gestures used in yoga and meditation, how to practise them, and what to expect

By Ranjana Sinha | ranjanayogaclass.com

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1. What mudras are

A mudra (Sanskrit for "seal" or "gesture") is a symbolic position of the hands or body used in yoga, meditation and Indian dance and art. Hand mudras are the best known. They are formed quietly and held during breathing or meditation.

Traditional texts associate each gesture with a quality, such as calm, focus or openness. In practice, many people use them as a simple cue: the hands give the mind a small, steady task.

The short answer

Mudras are symbolic hand gestures held during breathing or meditation. They are a traditional practice with spiritual meaning. They can serve as a focus cue, but they are not a medical treatment, and claims that they cure illness are not supported.

2. Before you begin: safety first

Mudras are gentle and low-risk, but a few sensible points apply.

- Do not hold a position that causes pain, numbness or tingling in the fingers or wrists. Release and shake the hands out.
- If you have arthritis, a hand injury or nerve condition, keep gestures light or ask your doctor or physiotherapist.
- Do not use mudras in place of medical care. Claims that specific gestures treat diabetes, heart disease or other conditions are not backed by reliable evidence.

3. How to practise

- Sit comfortably with a tall spine. A chair is fine.
- Rest the hands on the thighs, palms up or down as the mudra requires.
- Press fingers together lightly, with no force or strain.
- Breathe slowly through the nose and stay for 3 to 10 minutes.
- Release and rest the hands before opening the eyes.

4. Eight simple mudras

Mudra	How to form it	Traditionally associated with
Gyan (Jnana)	Touch the tip of the index finger to the tip of the thumb. Other fingers relaxed.	Focus and receptivity
Chin	Same as Gyan, palms facing down.	Grounding, steadiness
Dhyana	Hands in the lap, right resting on the left, thumbs lightly touching.	Meditation, stillness
Anjali (prayer)	Palms together at the chest.	Respect, centring
Prana	Touch the ring and little fingers to the thumb tip.	Vitality (traditional term)
Apana	Touch the middle and ring fingers to the thumb tip.	Release (traditional term)
Surya	Fold the ring finger to touch the base of the thumb, press lightly with the thumb.	Warmth (traditional term)
Shuni	Touch the middle finger to the thumb tip.	Patience, discipline

"Associated with" refers to traditional symbolism. These are not proven effects.

5. A 10-minute practice

Time	Practice
1 min	Sit and take three slow breaths.
3 min	Gyan mudra with easy breathing.
3 min	Dhyana mudra with quiet awareness of the breath.
2 min	Anjali mudra. Reflect on one thing you are grateful for.
1 min	Release the hands and sit quietly.

6. Four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length
1	Gyan and Anjali	5 min
2	Add Dhyana	7 min
3	Add Chin and Shuni	10 min
4	Choose your favourite	10 min

7. What to expect, honestly

Many people find that holding a mudra helps them focus and slows the mind a little. Some feel nothing special. Both are normal. The benefit is more likely to come from the quiet, regular practice than from any particular finger position.

8. Where mudras come from

Mudras appear in many Indian traditions. In classical dance they are a language of expression. In Buddhist and Hindu art, statues are shown with particular hand gestures, each with a name and meaning. In yoga texts, mudra can also mean a whole-body seal or lock, used in more advanced pranayama and meditation practices. This guide covers only the gentle hand gestures suited to beginners.

Because traditions differ, the same gesture may be described with different meanings in different books. It is worth treating any single list of meanings as one tradition's view.

9. Why a hand gesture might help

There is no need to rely on traditional claims to understand why mudras can be useful. Holding a gesture gives your attention a small, steady sensory anchor. If your mind wanders, you can come back to the feeling of fingertips lightly touching. Many people also find that a regular gesture becomes a cue for the practice: as soon as the hands settle into the shape, the body remembers that this is quiet time.

Some small studies have looked at hand mudras, but the evidence is limited and not strong enough to claim specific health effects. It is honest to say they are a traditional practice that some people find calming.

10. Pairing mudras with breath

Pairing	How
Gyan + easy breath	Notice breath moving in and out for five minutes.
Anjali + gratitude	Hold the palms at the chest and think of one thing you are glad of.
Dhyana + body scan	Move attention slowly from head to feet while the hands rest in the lap.
Chin + counted breath	Count each out-breath from one to ten, then restart.

11. Troubleshooting

Situation	What to try
My fingers go numb	Hold more loosely, or rest the hands flat. If it continues, stop and ask your doctor.
My hands cannot form the shape	Touch fingertips only where comfortable, or just rest the hands. The intention matters more than the shape.
I feel nothing	That is common. Try focusing on the breath instead and use the mudra as a gentle cue.
I cannot sit still	Use a chair and shorter sessions of three minutes.

12. Using mudras in daily life

You do not need a mat. Many people hold a soft Gyan mudra on the lap during a bus ride, or place their palms together for a moment before a meal. Small pauses like this can be a quiet reminder to slow down and breathe.

13. Questions people ask

Can mudras cure diseases?

No. There is no reliable evidence that hand gestures cure illness. Use them as a calming habit alongside medical care.

Do I need to do mudras with both hands?

Usually yes, but a comfortable one-handed version is fine if needed.

How long should I hold a mudra?

Three to ten minutes is common. Shorter is fine.

Are mudras religious?

They come from Indian spiritual traditions. You can use them simply as a focus aid without any belief.

14. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Mudra	A symbolic gesture or seal.
Gyan	Knowledge.
Anjali	Offering, palms together.
Prana	Breath or life force.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Mudra used	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				