

Open Zen Community: Postures for People with Chronic Pain

CHAIR POSTURES



This is a traditional chair-sitting posture in which the practitioner sits forward in the chair, feet flat on the floor, with hands in the universal mudra. The back is straight while maintaining the natural curves in the spine. Chin is parallel to the floor, mouth closed, and eyes open at about a 45° angle, softly gazing at the floor or wall. In this case, the meditator has placed cushions under her feet in

order to lift her legs so that circulation to her feet is not disturbed.



Here the practitioner sits in a chair that is cushioned in the back in order to provide support. Proper alignment and stability are achieved by moving the hips all the way to the back of the seat and placing a large cushion behind the back. In this way, the trunk is positioned slightly forward of the hips. The cushion under the feet is added as needed to align the knees just lower than the hips but so as not to cut off circulation to the lower legs and feet. Hands are in the diamond mudra described in detail below.



This is another view of the chair sitting posture that shows the back and foot cushions from a different view. You can also see the diamond mudra used for dynamic tension.



For some people with shoulder or arm pain, placing the hands in a “diamond mudra” on the upper thighs relieves pain. In this mudra, the hands are placed with index fingers and thumbs forming a “diamond” and fingers spread to provide dynamic tension. The hands sit at the bend of the hips. It might also be helpful to press slightly against the thighs to take pressure off the shoulders.

LYING DOWN POSTURES



This posture involves lying on your back with knees bent, providing stability and alignment of the spine. The mudra is completed by placing a zafu on the chest with the hands on the edge of the zafu in the diamond mudra. The thumbs and fingers are spread, with the index fingers and thumbs forming a "diamond" around the outer edge of the cushion. The positioning of the legs (knees together) and hands provide dynamic tension in this posture.



A different view of the lying down posture with the zafu on the chest, this image shows the diamond mudra on the edge of the cushion. Also note the eyes are open at a 45° angle, just as in the traditional upright sitting position.



Here is an alternative to placing the cushion on the chest while lying down. Simply place the hands in the diamond mudra on the lower abdomen, with index fingers and thumbs forming a diamond shape and fingers spread. The mudra, along with the bent legs with knees together, provide dynamic tension.



This image shows a side view of the lying down position with the diamond mudra on the lower abdomen.



A second option for lying down is the parinirvana posture. Here the practitioner lies on her side (either side) with a zafu or pillow under her head. Legs are straight, one on top of the other. The top arm is placed along the body and the bottom arm can lie out in front, as shown here, or bent upward along the cushion under the head. Head, mouth, and eyes are maintained as described above.

Please note that generally, the practitioner would be facing the wall during meditation. Here, for the purpose of illustration, she is facing into the room.



This is a different view of the parinirvana posture showing the leg and arm positions more clearly.

KINHIN (WALKING MEDITATION) POSTURES



During walking meditation, hands may be held at the sides, as shown in the image to the left, or clasped behind the back as shown to the right.

Find a hand posture that maximizes comfort and also allows for as much stillness as possible while walking.



ZAZEN INSTRUCTION IN PERSON

Everyone who provides Zazen instruction at Open Zen Community is knowledgeable in these postures and can assist you in finding a comfortable posture while sitting still. Please feel free to [contact us](#) if you would like more information.