



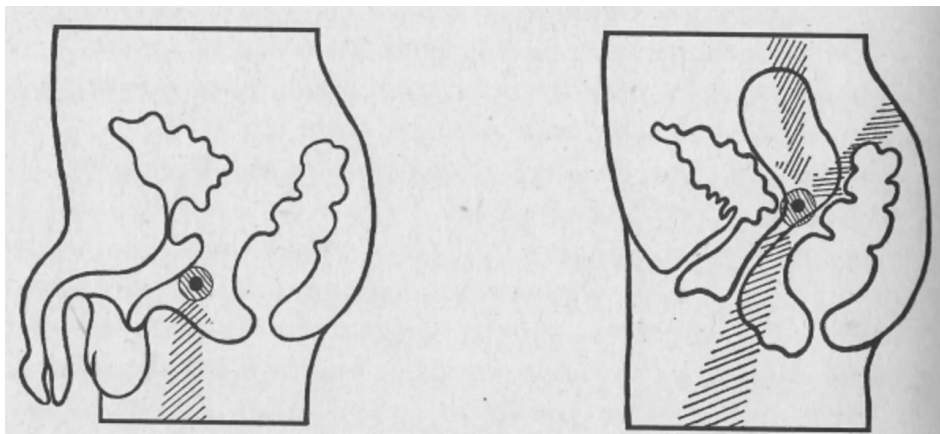
## Bandhas

In Sanskrit bandha means to lock, to hold, or to tighten.  
(should not be practiced while pregnant.)

*"Even an old person becomes young by constantly practicing Mula Bandha" - Hatha Yoga Pradipika.*

The first bandha is called **Mula Bandha**,

Which translates as “root lock.” The root referred to here is the root of the spine, the pelvic floor or, more precisely, the center of the pelvic floor, the perineum. The perineum is the muscular body between the anus and the genitals. By slightly contracting the pubo-coccygeal (PC) muscle, which goes from the pubic bone to the tailbone (coccyx), we create an energetic seal that locks prana into the body and so prevents it from leaking out at the base of the spine. Mula Bandha is said to move prana into the central channel, called sushumna, which is the subtle equivalent of the spine.



Locating the PC muscle might be difficult at first. It has been suggested that one should tighten the anus, or alternatively contract the muscle that one would use to stop urination, but these indications are not entirely accurate: Mula Bandha is neither of these two muscles but located right between them. These suggestions have their value, however, offering some guidance until we become more sensitive and are able to isolate the PC muscle more precisely.

For females it is essential not to mistake Mula Bandha for a contraction of the cervix. This contraction tends to occur especially during strenuous activity. In the beginning we employ mainly a gross muscular lock, which works mainly on the gross body. Through practice we shift to an energetic lock, which works more on the subtle or pranic body. When mastered, Mula Bandha becomes exclusively mental, and works on the causal body.

*There are two mudras that are closely related to Mulabandha. They are Ashwini mudra, activated by contracting the sphincter muscles of the anus, and Vajroli mudra, activated by contracting the urethra (similar to the action of stopping the flow, mid-stream, when urinating).*

To become familiar with Mula Bandha, sit tall and upright in a comfortable position and focus on slightly contracting the perineum, which is the center of the pelvic floor. With the exhalation, visualize the breath beginning at the nostrils and slowly reaching down through the throat, the chest, and the abdomen until it eventually hooks into the pelvic floor, which contracts slightly. As the inhalation starts, there will be an automatic reaching upward. Since we keep the breath hooked into the pelvic floor through contracting the PC muscle, we create suction and an energetic lift upward through the entire core of the body.

With this movement the first step is taken to arrest the downward flow of life force, which increases with age and invites death, disease, and decay like the withering of a plant, and convert it into an upward flow that promotes growth and further blossoming. Mula Bandha is held throughout the entire breathing cycle and during the whole practice. Every posture needs to grow out of its root. This is only finally released during deep relaxation in complete surrender.

The second bandha is [Uddiyana Bandha](#),

And it's can be very confusing to understand. As it's use differently depending the type of yoga you practice. Let's split in 2 sections one : for the Ashtanga and Vinyasa practitioners and the second for the Hata Practitioners who use the Full Uddiyana Bandha, to achieve one of the shat karmhe Hataas or six actions, also called kriyas (This Uddiyana is a preparation for nauli, the stomach roll. Nauli is practiced by sucking the entire abdominal content up into the thoracic cavity. It is done only during breath retention (kumbhaka)).

The Uddiyana Bandha of Vinyasa Yoga is a much gentler exercise. It consists of lightly contracting the transverse abdominis muscle, which runs horizontally across the abdomen and is used to draw the abdominal contents in against the spine. To

successfully switch on Uddiyana Bandha, it is important to isolate the upper transverse abdominis muscle from the lower part and use only the part below the navel. Doing otherwise impinges on the free movement of the diaphragm.

Richard Freeman says that Uddiyana Bandha is in fact only a slight suction inward just above the pubic bone. The more subtle Uddiyana Bandha becomes, the more blissful, peaceful, childlike, and innocent becomes the character of the practitioner. I suggest starting by firming the abdominal wall below the navel and then, as awareness increases with years of practice, allow Uddiyana Bandha to slide downward. Again, the more subtle it becomes, the more influence Uddiyana Bandha will have on the subtle body.

Uddiyana Bandha encourages an upward physical lift from the inside out. Floating from and landing lightly into Chaturanga Dandasana, flying upwards from Half Standing Forward Fold and finding an easeful landing into Bakasana, and pressing with grace up into Handstand all require the practice and mastering of both Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha.

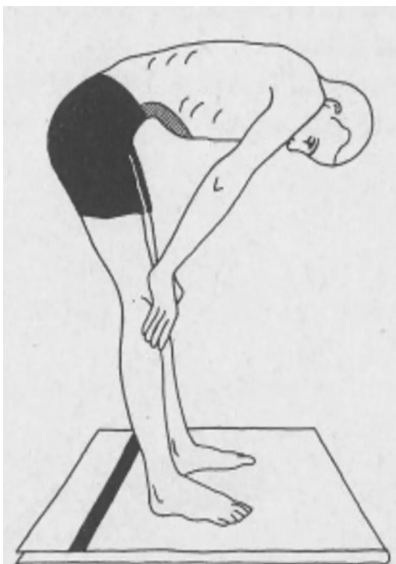
It is quite obvious when a yogi is muscling their way into inversions versus allowing the Pranic flow to be directed inward and upward via the bandhas. It is in the muscling through poses without the support of breath and Bandha activation that we find many root causes of on-the-mat injuries.

### The Full Uddiyana Bandha (kriyas) Hatha yoga

Uddiyana involves the contraction of the abdomen up and into the rib cage, so it is important to only practice this on an empty stomach. It facilitates better circulation through the abdomen's large organs.

Outside of the physiological benefits, activating your uddiyana can be very energizing and refreshing, a kind of 'reset button' for your breathing and digestion.

#### Here's How to Start Engaging Your Uddiyana Bandha



1. Stand with your back against a wall and your feet a few inches away from the wall, hip-width apart. Curl your torso so that your back is curved (as it is in Cat Pose) and bend your knees so that you can rest your hands on the tops of your thighs for support. Your tailbone is still touching the wall.

2. In this position, take a deep inhale through your nose and exhale quickly and powerfully. Exhale all the way until the very end of your breath—this stretches your diaphragm to its most expanded position.

3. At the end of your exhale, pull your belly in as

if you are trying to bring your navel to touch your spine. Once you have pulled in as much as you can, begin to pull up like you are trying to keep your navel as far back as possible while also pulling it up into your rib cage. It can help to visualize a string pulling your navel back toward the wall while another string then pulls your navel up toward your heart center. Some people describe this action as taking a ‘mock inhale’—performing the motion that your belly goes through when you inhale while not actually taking any air in through the nose or mouth.

4. Keep your belly like this while taking no further breaths—this is called breath retention.

5. When you can no longer hold your breath, bring your belly back down and out to its natural, relaxed position, gently and with control. Only after doing this should you inhale—again, do this gently and with control, trying not to gasp.

### Benefits of Uddiyana Practice

After practicing your uddiyana several times in this position, you can try it standing up against the wall with your hands on your hips. You may find that it takes more concentration to practice with a straight back, and it can be even more challenging in a seated pose.

Practicing this bandha first thing in the morning can be invigorating and can help prepare your abdomen for its work of digesting your food and keeping you upright. It can also help you take deeper breaths throughout the day, keeping you calm, centered and focused.



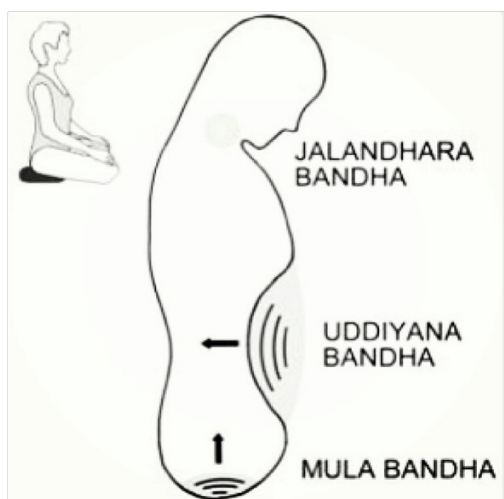
The third Bandha is **Jalandhara Bandha** – Chin Lock or Throat Lock

“Engaging Jalandhara Bandha destroys old age and death. Jalandhara bandha closes the opening of the group of Nadis, through which Amrita, the nectar that is housed in the Soma of the brain, falls down. In Jalandhara Bandha, a perfect contraction of the throat will ensure that the nectar does not fall into the fire (the Surya situated in the navel)” - Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

Jalandhara bandha should be practiced individually at first, and then it can be incorporated with the other bandhas, asanas, pranayamas and eventually mudras. To practice Jalandhara Bandha, come into a comfortable siddhasana or sukhasana cross-legged seated position with the palms facing down on top of the knees. Let the spine be long, the shoulders relaxed down and the sternum lifted. Let the eyes softly close and the breath slow and deepen. Take a slow deep inhale to two thirds of your lung's capacity and hold the breath in. Drop the chin to the chest and draw it in so the back of the neck stays long and does not round. Let the shoulders roll very slightly forward to deepen the lock in the throat, but keep them soft.

Hold the abdominal lock for as long as comfortable, without strain. To release, bring the chin up first and very slowly take a breath in through the nose. Take a few slow deep breaths in and out and allow your breath return to normal before practicing additional rounds. Begin with practicing three rounds and you can slowly increase it to up to ten rounds over time.

Jalandhara Bandha regulates the circulatory and respiratory systems, stimulates the thyroid to balance metabolism, and is said to cure all diseases of the throat. Jalandhara Bandha is contraindicated in high blood pressure and heart disease. Jalandhara Bandha is also be combined with Mula and Uddiyana Bandas to create the great lock, Maha Bandha.



[Maha bandha](#) : meaning The Great Bandha, is all three bandhas - jalandhara, uddiyana and mulabandha - performed at once on an exhalation retention.

This practice is used extensively in all the practices of hatha yoga - asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, and kriya yoga. It leads to pratyahara - the fifth of Master Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga as presented in his Yoga Sutras. This is the bridge from the "outer" four practices of yama and niyama (observances and commitments),

asana (physical yoga poses) and pranayama (breathing practices) to the “inner” three practices of dharana (bringing the mind to concentrate on an object of your choice), dhyana (single pointed focus on that object) and samadhi (meditation).

It is a pranic practice which can awaken the entire pranic capacity in the chakras and draw it into sushumna nadi.

Maha Bandha is also called the tri-bandha or the triple lock as it involves all the three major locks.

Maha Bandha is categorized as a Mudra or yogic gesture in both the classical texts Hatha Yoga Pradeepika and the Gheranda Samhita. As a Mudra it helps to channelize pranic energy in a certain way.

But the terminology Bandha refers more to the energy lock that it creates. Please note that the practice of Maha Bandha is described differently in Hatha Yoga Pradeepika and the Gheranda Samhita. The description here is based on how it is practiced in the modern day using the three basic locks.

The practice of Maha Bandha must be taken up only after one masters the three locks – Moola Bandha (Root Lock), Uddiyana Bandha (The Abdominal Lock) and Jalandhara Bandha (The Chin Lock) separately. First practice all the three bandhas separately, then integrate all of them together to do Maha Bandha.

Maha Bandha should not be practiced by those suffering from blood pressure problems, heart diseases, ulcer of stomach or intestine, stroke, paralysis and hernia. Also pregnant women should avoid this practice. Maha Bandha should be practiced under the guidance of an experienced yoga instructor after you have mastered the three basic locks.

How to do Maha Bandha (The Great Lock)?

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative posture preferably Padmasana or Siddhasana. If you have difficulty sitting in these asanas, then sit in any easy cross-legged pose like half Lotus Pose (Ardha Padmasana). Keep the spine erect. Breathe normally and relax the whole body.
2. Keep the palms on the knees and close your eyes.
3. Take a deep breath and then exhale fully. Simultaneously perform Jalandhara bandha (The chin lock), then Uddiyana Bandha (The abdominal lock) and then the Moola Bandha (The root lock) in that order. Retain the breath outside.

4. Retaining the breath outside is called Bahir Kumbhaka. Retain the breath outside for as long as you are comfortable. During retention, awareness can be maintained on any of the three chakras – Mooladhara chakra, Manipuraka chakra and the Vishuddhi chakra. You may also rotate the consciousness between these three chakras.
5. To release the Maha Bandha, first release Moola Bandha (root lock), then the Uddiyana Bandha (abdominal lock) and then finally the Jalandhara Bandha (chin lock) in that order.
6. This is one round of Maha Bandha. Repeat the process for as many times as you feel comfortable. Take ample rest after each round by doing relaxed breathing till you are ready for the next round.