

## Santa Cruz Zen Center: Postures for People with Chronic Pain

Zen Master Dogen Zenji said, "Zazen has nothing to do with sitting or lying down." Zazen is a beautiful practice of opening completely and facing directly whatever arises in each moment. In Zazen we reveal the fact that we are not separate from the myriad things that come forth and experience themselves in each moment.

At Santa Cruz Zen Center, we want everyone who wishes to participate in this ancient practice of still sitting to feel free to come and be part of our Sangha. Presenting alternative postures for people who don't think they can sit because of pain is our invitation and opening.

The postures presented here originated with Zen teacher Darlene Cohen of the Russian River Zendo in Guerneville, California. Darlene teaches that there are three essential features of Zazen posture:

1. That the spine is stable and properly aligned so that stillness can be maximized.
2. That the position incorporates dynamic tension to assist the practitioner in remaining awake and alert.
3. That one's whole body and mind can participate fully.

The postures presented here are various embodiments of these essential features. Please feel free to vary them in whatever way works best for your needs.

### CHAIR POSTURES



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 cushion behind the mid-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 traditional universal mudra.



This is another view of the chair sitting posture that shows the back and foot cushions from a different view.



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. 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.



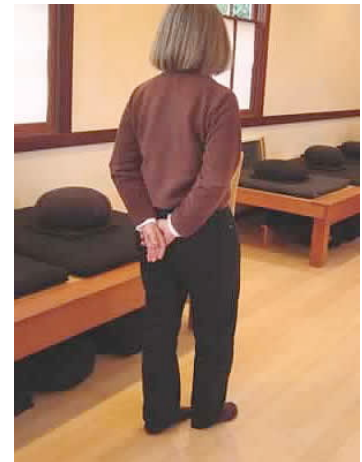
This image shows a side view of the lying down position with the diamond mudra on the lower abdomen.

## 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 Santa Cruz Zen Center is knowledgeable in these postures and can assist you in finding a comfortable posture in the Zendo. Please feel free to contact Zen Center at 831.457.0206 if you would like more information.