

Pandiculation

Pandiculation is the main technique that actually defines Gentle Somatic Yoga. This is specifically in contrast to traditional hatha yoga which involves the stretching of muscles. In Gentle Somatic Yoga we are not stretching muscles, we are pandiculating muscles.



If you looked it up in a dictionary, there would be a definition of a yawn as an example of pandiculation. That is because in a yawn, we open the mouth and the muscles of the jaw contract. Then as we close our mouth, the muscles release the contraction, and the jaw returns to a neutral state. You might also observe animals (e.g. pets such as cats and dogs) pandiculating their muscles naturally. As human beings, we also do this although we are often unaware of it. For example, after a night's sleep, spontaneously engaging then relaxing the body in bed upon awakening is an example of pandiculation.

There are three main forms in which pandiculation is used in Gentle Somatic Yoga:

#1 – Pandiculation is the simple use of one's own body weight and the forces of gravity to assist with neuromuscular re-education.

The action of pandiculation occurs in three distinct phases: Phase 1 – we choose an anatomical focus (e.g. shoulders); we mindfully engage (contract) a muscle group (i.e. we shorten the distance between the muscles' insertion and origin); Phase 2 – we slowly and mindfully disengage the muscle group with an intention to keep the movement smooth, until we reach the muscles' fullest natural range of motion (i.e. where the body's range stops naturally, to avoid going into a stretch); Phase 3 – releasing all muscular effort, we pause and allow the brain's neurocircuitry to register this sensorimotor experience.

The full release of all muscular effort with a pause between each sequence is required otherwise it equates to an exercise rather than a pandiculation, with no resulting neuromuscular re-education.



#2 – Self-pandiculation, which is adding one’s own touch to the above sequence in order to assist in the re-education of the targeted muscle group(s); this involves, for instance, applying consistent resistance to the movement in the form of feather-light pressure. This, combined with an inward focus, allows the Soma to receive more information by way of highlighting the targeted muscle group(s).

#3 – Assisted pandiculation, where another person provides the touch used in self-pandiculation; for the provider, it is generally a discovery process of ascertaining the proper degree of pressure to offer to the recipient; applying too light a degree of pressure can be unsatisfying (i.e. annoying) for the recipient, and applying too heavy a degree of pressure can induce muscle fatigue in the recipient; both are ineffective at best; pressure being applied on the lighter side is the “sweet spot”.

With both self- and assisted pandiculation, it is important not to push past the muscles’ fullest range of motion. This requires mindfulness when offering the pressure, i.e. sensing where the muscles’ natural range of motion ends in order to avoid stretching and strain. Otherwise, there is a risk of inadvertently inducing a stretch reflex (see Ch 2, Mod 2, Unit 6 for more information on the Stretch Reflex).

