



What are the Bandhas?

Bandhas (locks) are the activation and engagement of muscle fibres, in strategic areas in the body, that support in the toning and lifting of the systems of the body against the natural laws of gravity.

The three major Bandhas, and their approximate locations in the body are:

1. **Mula Bandha** - the pelvic floor muscles
2. **Uddiyana Bandha** - the abdominals up to the diaphragm
3. **Jalandhara Bandha** - the throat



Mula bandha

To lift the impurities (mala) up to the fire.



Uddiyana bandha

To hold the impurities close to the fire to burn them, and evaporate amrita to replenish the "lake of the mind".



Jalandhara bandha

To prevent amrita from falling into the fire.

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There are also two less generally mentioned Bandhas:

- **Hasta Bandha** - the palms of the hands
- **Pada Bandha** - the soles of the feet

Mula Bandha - Root Lock

Mula Bandha is your "Root Lock". This Bandha is a diamond shape hammock of muscles that spans the space between the bones of the pubis, the sitting bones and the coccyx. Activating and engaging these pelvic floor muscles brings much needed attention to the space between the pubis and the coccyx. This awareness of the space between the pubis and coccyx in yoga practice can help alleviate pre-existing tightness, tension and/or lower back pain and can help to counteract any future possibility of lower back injury - both on and off the mat.

Uddiyana Bandha - Upward Flying Lock

Uddiyana Bandha is the active engagement of abdominal muscles. You'll hear it taught in class as something like "*draw your navel in towards your spine*". It is engaged at the bottom of an exhale. This both tones and creates space for the abdominal organs as the diaphragm is drawn upwards under the ribcage. This toning increases the efficiency and productivity of the diaphragm muscle. In addition to supporting, toning and lifting our insides, activating Uddiyana Bandha enables us to "fly" in the transitioning from pose to pose, especially in the "jump back sequence" of Ashtanga Yoga.

Jalandhara Bandha - Throat Lock

Jalandhara Bandha is the “Throat Lock”. Engaged after the sequential order of Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha, the muscles of the front of the neck draw the chin towards the lifted superior portion of the sternum. One of the main physiological benefits of engaging the throat lock is the stimulation of the thyroid, which balances the regulation of hormones responsible for efficient metabolism.

Hasta and Pada Bandhas

Two Bandhas that are rarely mentioned, are the Bandhas of the feet (Pada Bandha) and the hands (Hasta Bandha). These Bandhas play an important role in injury prevention in yoga practice. Postures need to start from the ground up, by creating a strong and stable foundation we increase the benefits of every pose. While standing, even before fully engaging Mula Bandha, it is wise to bring awareness to the four corners of the feet and the energetic lift of the arches by the muscles on the inner and outer lower leg.

In postures that require the hands to hold the weight of all or most of the pose (Plank, Arm Balances...) build a strong foundation by rooting down through the pads and mounds of the thumb and fingers, and energetically draw upwards through the centre of the palms, creating a lift upwards through the hands, wrists and lower arms. Don't forget to eliminate all space between the mat and the fingers and palms of the hands.

Maha Bandha - The Great Lock

Engaging all three major Bandhas (Mula, Uddiyana and Jalandhara) is known as Maha Bandha or “The Great Lock”. Activating Maha Bandha increases the strength of the diaphragm and the efficiency of the respiratory system, tones the heart and increases the efficiency of the cardiovascular system. This action stimulates the digestive system and tones the abdominal organs, thereby increasing the efficiency of the systems of assimilation, digestion and excretion. It is also worth to consider that the stimulation of the thyroid and other endocrine glands increases the overall wellness and efficiency of the body's natural ability to grow and heal itself.

In ancient yoga texts Mula, Uddiyana and Jalandhara bandhas are often illustrated in seated postures such as Sukkhasana (Easy Pose), but in Asana (physical) yoga practices we find that we can brighten and strengthen almost all poses by engaging the Bandhas. The only exception to this is Jalandhara Bandha, which is primarily used in Pranayama, (yogic breathing), and also in shoulder stands and some back bending poses, (if in doubt, just ask). Activating and engaging our three major Bandhas can greatly support and inspire a safe, strong and graceful yoga practice.

