



Yoga Teacher Training

Teaching and Practicing Advanced Asanas

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Introduction

Advanced asanas can be useful in challenging ourselves and our students, and in learning to break through any limits we place on ourselves. However, it's important to first practice, and have your students practice, more basic yoga postures, and feel comfortable with those postures before moving on to increasingly advanced asanas.

Remind your students that it's not important to perfect these advanced postures, it's more important to approach the postures with a sense of ease and to pay close attention as they go into the posture, so they know when to stop and when to back off.

In this section, you will find the steps to teaching specific advanced asanas. Each asana is followed by a group of preparation postures that can be practiced first to develop the strength and coordination necessary for an effective practice of the more physically challenging posture.

1) Full Dancer (Natarajasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens the leg muscles and arches of the feet
- Opens chest and shoulders
- Stretches the hips and quadriceps
- Tones the spine
- Improves balance

Steps:

- Start standing with your hands at your sides and feet hip width apart and parallel
- Inhaling, bring your right heel towards your tailbone and hold onto your right foot (or ankle) with your right hand
- If you can balance here, begin to press your right foot up and away from your tailbone.
- Still holding your foot in your right hand, as your foot reaches the height of your head, shift your elbow forward (facing forward)
- Reach overhead with your left hand and hold onto your right foot with both hands.
- Kick your foot up higher, straightening your back knee as much as you can
- Take 5-6 slow long breaths in this position, focusing on one point in front of you to help still your mind and body
- On your next exhale, release your foot and bring both arms back down to your sides
- Repeat on the other side

Preparation Postures

Before practicing full needle, practice the following posture:

Dancer (Natarajasana)



Steps:

- Start standing with your hands at your sides and feet hip width apart and parallel
- Inhaling, sweep your arms overhead
- Exhaling, drop your right arm to your side (left arm still raised)
- Find a point to focus on
- On your next inhale, bring your right heel towards your tailbone and hold onto your right foot (or ankle) with your right hand
- If you can balance here, begin to press your right foot away from your tailbone, still holding your foot in your right hand (left arm still overhead)
- Kick your foot back and up, straightening your back knee as much as you can
- Take 5-6 slow long breaths in this position, focusing on one point in front of you to help still your mind and body
- On your next exhale, release your foot and bring both arms back down to your sides
- Repeat on the other side

You can also practice the full version of dancer using a yoga strap. Place the strap around the ankle of the leg you are lifting up. Turn your elbow forward and reach back with your other hand, so that both hands are holding the strap with your arms overhead. Pull on the strap to begin to raise your foot higher.

2) Standing Revolved Hand to Foot (Utthita Parivrtta Hasta Padangusthasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches your hamstrings
- Tones your thighs
- Improves digestion
- Improves balance and focus

Steps:

- Start standing in mountain pose
- Lift your right foot and bring your right knee to your chest
- Cross your left hand over your foot and wrap your left hand around the outside edge and sole of your right foot
- Wrap your right hand over your left hand and hold onto the inside edge and sole of your right foot
- Extend your knee and kick your foot straight forward
- Lift your chest and push through your heel (straightening your knee more)
- Inhale and release your right hand and reach it up towards the ceiling.
- Exhale and reach your right hand towards the wall behind you as you twist to the right.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Turn forward again
- Slowly release your right foot back to the floor
- Repeat on the other side.

3) One Leg Revolved Extended Side Angle (Eka Pada Parivrtta Parsvakonasana)



Benefits:

- Improves balance
- Stretches the shoulders and chest
- Strengthens legs
- Stretches the back

Steps:

- Start in extended side angle, with the right knee bent and the right fingertips touching the floor
- Move into bound extended side angle by bringing the right arm in front of the right thigh and the left arm around behind your back and clasping your hands together under your right thigh
- Inhale and open your chest towards the ceiling
- Begin to place more weight into your right leg and bend your right knee deeply
- Slightly straighten your right knee as you kick off and lift your left leg off the floor.
- Open your chest and stack your shoulders one on top of the other
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly come out of the position by dropping your left foot to the floor
- Come into a forward fold to relax
- Repeat on the other side

Note – If you find it difficult to balance in this position, try the posture with your back against a wall for support.

Preparation Posture

Bound Extended Side Angle



Steps:

- If starting from Warrior 2 (with right knee bent), simply drop right hand to the floor and sweep left arm around, bringing your upper arm next to your ear.
- Keep bringing left shoulder back, opening chest to the side
- Actively reach with your left hand as you breathe deeply through your nose
- Wrap right arm under right leg and bring left hand behind your back
- Clasp hands together behind your back or on the back of the thigh
- Open chest to the side and look towards the ceiling
- Take 4-5 long slow breaths in this position
- Slowly release your arms and come back up to standing
- Repeat on the other side

4) Half Moon with Foot Hold (Baddha Ardha Chandrasana)



Benefits

- Improves balance
- Stretches hamstring muscles
- Increases flexibility of the hip joints
- Strengthens front thigh muscles
- Stretches the shoulders and chest

Steps:

- Start standing with your right foot about two feet in front of your left, with your right foot facing the front of your mat and your left foot turned out
- Bend your right knee and lean forward to place your right fingers in front and slightly to the right of your right foot
- As you straighten your right knee, kick your left foot off the floor
- As you inhale, bring your left hand to your left hip and open your chest and hip up and to the side
- Bend your left knee and reach back with your left hand to hold your left ankle
- Continue to turn your chest up and open
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly release your foot and come back to standing
- Repeat on the other side

Preparation Postures

Half Moon (or half moon against the wall)



Steps:

- From triangle on the right side (right hand down), drop left hand to the floor.
- Place right hand on the floor diagonally away from right foot (in front and to the outside)
- Place weight onto right leg and bend right knee slightly
- Bring left hand to left hip
- Kick left foot off the floor, bringing left leg parallel to the floor, and straighten right leg
- Open chest to the side (try not to let chest face the floor)
- Draw left shoulder back, so left shoulder is directly over the right shoulder
- Reach left hand up, so there is one straight line from left hand/arm to right hand

Dancer is also a good preparation posture (see page 4)

5) Standing Turtle (Uttana Kurmasana)



Benefits:

- Improves spinal flexibility
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Improves digestion
- Stretches the hips and hamstrings

Steps:

- Start standing with your feet a little wider than hip width apart, and feet facing forward.
- Slowly fold forward, hinging from your hips
- Drop the crown of your head towards the floor
- Shift your weight slightly forward on your feet and bend your knees slightly
- Reach your arms around the backs of your thighs
- Clasp your hands together around your lower back
- If you can't reach your hands together, use a strap or towel for leverage as you move your hands towards each other.
- Straighten your knees as much as you can
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths.
- Release your hands and very slowly roll back up to standing
- Close your eyes and allow your body to settle for 3-4 breaths.
- Counter this posture with a standing back bend

Preparation Postures for Standing Turtle (Uttana Koormasana)

Standing Straddle Forward Fold (Prasarita Padottanasana)



Steps:

- Stand with your legs about 3 ½ to 4 feet apart with feet parallel (not turned out)
- Place your hands on your hips, drawing elbows back to open through chest
- Inhale, look up and arch back
- Exhale, fold forward, folding from the hips, pressing tailbone back to keep back flat (not rounded)
- Place hands on the floor about shoulder width apart
- Walk hands back until they are in line with feet
- Bend elbows, so they point behind you and drop the top of your head towards the floor
- As you inhale, reach up through tailbone, then as you exhale, drop head and shoulders more towards the floor
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths – breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Turtle (Kurmasana)



Steps:

- Start seated with knees bent and feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Bend elbows, bringing hands up next to sides with palms facing out
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, reach head and chest forward, as you drop the tops of the hands to the floor between the legs with your fingertips pointing behind you
- Begin pressing your hands under your legs and behind you with palms up
- Bring hands behind the back, clasping hands behind the back
- Bring feet towards each other and drop head towards feet
- Breathe softly in this position, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths
- To come out of the pose, release hands and press down with hands to come back to sitting

6) Folded Foot Behind Head (Ruchikasana)



Standing Foot Behind Head (Durvasana)



Benefits

- Deep stretch for the hips and hamstrings
- Engages the core
- Improves balance and concentration

Steps:

- Start seated (cross leg position)
- Bring your right foot in next to your chest
- Begin to lift your right foot up to your head and, if you can, place it over your head. You may just need to work on this step for a while.
- Once your foot is behind your head, bring the sole of your left foot to the floor (with your knee up)
- Push down into the floor with your hands and left foot and lift your hips as you drop your head towards the floor. You are now in the first position (folded forward with your foot behind your head).
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- When you are ready, bend your left knee slightly and slowly begin to stand up. Stop wherever you need to.
- Stay in this position for 2-4 breaths.
- Slowly fold forward again and come back to seated.
- Bring your right leg forward and over your head and shake it out.
- Repeat this posture on the other side.

Preparation Posture

Bird of Paradise



Steps:

- Start standing with your feet a little wider than hip width apart
- Fold forward and place your right arm between your legs
- Wrap your right arm around the inside of your right leg
- Wrap your left arm behind your back and clasp your hands together
- Put your weight onto your left foot
- Slowly begin standing up, with your arms still wrapped around your right thigh
- Once you are standing straight up, begin lifting your foot towards the ceiling
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly lower your right foot to the floor
- Repeat on the other side

7) Padasana (Rope Posture)



Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders and arm
- Stretches hips and ankles
- Strengthens legs

Steps:

- Stand in Tadasana next to a wall with your feet hip-width and parallel. Ideally, you will stand forearm distance from the wall.
- Bend your knees into a full squat, with your bottom sitting on your heels.
- Swing your knees slightly to the left. As you exhale, turn your torso to the right and press both hands into the wall. As your left hand presses into the wall, the elbow should press against the outside of your right knee. Support the pose by using your right hand for leverage.
- Press the knee and arm (or shoulder) firmly against each other. Use this pressure to lengthen the left side of your torso, sliding it along the tops of the thighs.
- Keep the right hand on the wall or bring the palms together with the elbows angled sharply away from each other. Use the pressure of the palms to increase the twist.
- Stay in this pose for 8-10 breaths. Release the twist with an exhalation, then repeat for the same length of time to the left.

Preparation Postures:

Prayer Squat (Malasana) with Twist



Steps:

- Start standing with feet a little wider than hip width apart and turned out
- With hands on your hips or out in front of you, squat down keeping your hips off the floor
- Bring hands to heart and use elbows to press knees farther apart
- Keep heels pressing into or towards the floor
- Stay here, or move into the twist
- Bring one arm in front of your shin and the other arm behind your back. Clasp your hands together and twist to the side.
- Stay in this position for 5-6 long, slow breaths
- Repeat the twist on the other side
- Sit down when done and shake legs out

Arm Balances

8) Split Leg Arm Balance



Benefits:

- Develops core strength
- Increases arm strength
- Improves balance and coordination

Steps:

- Start from a lunge with the right foot forward and both hands to the left side of the right foot
- Bring your right arm under your right leg, placing your right hand on the right side of your right foot.
- Kick your right foot diagonally forward, lifting your foot off the floor, and balancing your right thigh on your upper arm.
- Begin to lean forward, lifting your back foot off the floor.
- Balance your chest, belly and right thigh on your upper arms, as you lift both your left foot leg and right foot further off the floor.
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Lower your back foot to the floor and place your right foot back into a lunge position.
- Come back to all fours and repeat on the other side.

Preparation Posture

One-Leg Arm Balance



Steps:

- Start from down dog
- Lift your right foot, bringing your knee towards your right side, as you drop into plank
- Bend your elbows, placing your right thigh on your right upper arm
- Lean your chest forward as you lift your left foot off the floor
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Step back to down dog and repeat on the other side.

Knee to Chest Plank



Steps:

- Start in plank position
- Exhale, bring right knee towards chest without raising hips
- Breathe softly in this position, staying here for 3-4 breaths
- Inhale, bring right foot back next to left foot (back to plank position)
- Repeat on the other side

9) Peacock hand balance (Mayurasana)



Benefits

- Improves digestion
- Enhances energy levels
- Strengthens arms, shoulders, and core
- Improves balance

Steps:

- Kneel on the floor, knees wide, and sit on your heels.
- Lean forward and press your palms on the floor with your fingers turned back toward your torso (thumbs pointing out to the sides). Bend your elbows slightly and touch the pinky sides of your hands and the outer forearms (up to the elbows) together.
- Then bend your elbows to a right angle and slide your knees to the outside of your arms and forward of your hands.
- Lean your front torso onto the backs of your upper arms and burrow your elbows deep into your belly at or below the navel.
- Lower your forehead to the floor. Then, straighten your knees and stretch your legs out behind your torso, tops of your feet on the floor. Firm your buttocks and round your shoulders slightly downward. Lift your head off the floor and look forward. Lean your weight slightly forward—if your legs and buttocks are firm and active, this slight shift of weight will lever your feet off the floor. Position your torso and legs approximately parallel to the floor.
- Hold for about 4-6 breaths.
- Relax in child's pose

Preparation Postures

Prep for Peacock Pose



Steps:

- Place your mat on the floor with the short edge against a wall
- Place one block on top of your mat also against the wall
- Place another block on your mat at a distance where your chin would be when you lie flat with the soles of your feet against the wall
- Come on your mat on your hands and knees
- Curl your toes under and place them on the block against the wall (keep your knees on the floor)
- Place your hands on the floor and turn your hands out and back until your fingers are pointing back towards you
- Tuck your elbow in so your elbows are supporting your torso
- Begin to shift your weight forward, placing more weight on your elbows and lift your knees off the floor as you bring your chin to the block in front of you
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly drop your knees back to the floor and raise your chest, coming back to all fours
- Rest in child's pose

10) Lotus Arm Balance (Padma Mayurasana)



Benefits

- Stimulates the digestive organs, improves digestion
- Strengthens core muscles
- Strengthens arm muscles
- Improves hip flexibility
- Improves balance and coordination

Steps:

- Begin sitting in lotus position
- Place hands on the floor and turn your hands out until your fingers are facing towards you
- Squeeze your elbow in towards your belly
- Begin to lean forward as you bend your elbows and place your weight onto your upper arms
- Continue to shift your weight forward until your legs come off the floor
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly lower your knees back to the floor and lean back into seated lotus posture
- Take your legs out of lotus posture and shake your legs out
- Relax in child's pose

Preparation Postures

Lotus



Steps:

- Start sitting in Staff Pose (Dandasana)
- Bring your right heel towards your navel
- Externally rotate your leg and foot and place the top of your right foot on your left thigh at the hip crease (the sole of your right foot faces up towards the ceiling)
- Bring your left heel towards your navel, rotate your leg and foot and place the top of your left foot on your right thigh near the hip crease
- Place your hands on your thighs or at your sides
- Inhale deeply and extend from your low belly up through the top of your head
- Lengthen up through the sides of your body and draw your shoulders back
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath, breathing slowly through your nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Use your hands to gently remove your left foot from your right thigh and then remove your right foot from the left thigh
- Shake out your legs
- Repeat on the other side

Preparation for Arm Balance



11) Two Leg Side Arm Balance (Dwi Pada Koundinyasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens the arms and core
- Tones the legs
- Improves balance and coordination

Steps:

- Squat with your knees touching your chest.
- Lean forward onto the balls of your feet, bringing your palms flat on the floor in front of you, about your shoulders' distance apart.
- Keep your palms in place while turning your knees to the right.
- Lean forward, keeping your head lifted, and place your hips on top of your left arm and your knees on top of your right arm.
- Take one foot off the floor, then the other, balancing with both feet up.
- Come down and repeat, this time with the other side.

Variations

Hummingbird Variation



Steps:

- From Two Leg Side Arm Balance, bend the knee of your top leg
- Place the foot of your top leg on your upper arm
- Stay here for 4-6 breaths. Come down and repeat on the other side.

Extreme Hummingbird



From Hummingbird, you can bring the foot of your bent leg from its position on your opposite leg to crossing it behind your head.

Preparation Posture

Side Arm Balance



Steps:

- Squat and place your hands on the mat to your left side
- Lean towards the left, placing your left thigh next to both upper arms
- Lift your feet off the floor and balance on your upper arms
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Lower feet back to the floor and repeat on the other side

12) Scorpion (Vrschikasana)



Benefits

- Develops core strength and shoulder strength
- Improves balance
- Increases endurance and flexibility

Steps

- Start on all fours, then place your forearms on the floor
- Curl your back toes under and push hips up into dolphin
- Lift your right leg up and then kick your left leg up
- Lift head and look forward
- Keep legs straight or bend your knees bringing your feet towards your head
- Stay in this position for 4-6 slow breaths
- Slowly bring your feet back to the floor, one at a time.
- Rest in Child's pose

Preparation Posture

Dolphin (swimming dolphin)



Steps:

- Start on all fours (hands and knees)
- Place forearms on floor (forearms should be parallel and shoulder width apart and elbows should be directly under shoulders)
- Curl back toes under
- Press hips up and back
- Drop head to look back towards feet
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths, breathing through the nose

Variation:

Swimming Dolphin

From Dolphin Pose, as you exhale, bring head and chest forward as you drop your hips towards the floor – like plank position, but on forearms, instead of on hands. Your body should create one straight line from your neck to your heels. Exhale, press back to dolphin. Continue moving body back and forth, moving with breath. Repeat 5-6 times. Rest in Child's Pose.

13) Yoga Headstand (Sirsasana) with Leg Variations (Lotus or Straddle)



Contra-indications

People suffering from high blood pressure, slipped disc, neck problems, or sinus congestion should not practice headstands.

You can think of yoga style headstands as arm balances because your weight is being supported by your arms, while your head only barely grazes the floor.

Benefits:

- Brings more oxygen rich blood to the brain cells
- Activates the thyroid glands
- Improves circulation
- Improves balance
- Strengthens shoulders and upper back
- Helps relieve varicose veins

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Place forearms on the floor and interlace fingers together
- Keep elbows fairly close (no further than shoulder width apart)
- Place the top of your head on the floor and cup your hands around the back of your head
- Curl your toes under
- Lift your hips and straighten your legs
- Walk your feet towards you as you keep lifting your hips up
- Lift one leg up, then the other leg up
- For lotus posture, from here bend your left knee and place your left foot on your right hip/thigh crease. Bend your right knee and place your right foot on top of your left thigh for full lotus. The challenge of this posture is to

- come into lotus posture while you are in head stand (so you can't use your hands).
- Breathe naturally
 - Stay in this position for about one minute, before slowly coming out of this position
 - Rest in child's pose

Preparatory Postures:

Practice the following postures first before moving onto different variations of headstand:

Headstand/Prep for Headstand

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



14) Pendant Pose (Lolasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens wrists and arms
- Strengthens abdominal muscles and core
- Improves balance
- Tones back muscles

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Exhale, round your back, tuck your tailbone under, pull your belly towards your spine, and spread your shoulder blades apart
- Keep your hands in place on the floor, but squeeze your arms towards each other.
- Begin to lift your hips as you lift your knees off the floor
- Bring your knees in towards your belly and you curl further into a ball
- Bring one foot off the floor as you press your fingers into the floor
- Bring the other foot off the floor and cross your ankles
- Swing your feet back and forth between your arms, keeping them off the floor.
- Swing for 3-4 breaths
- Come back into all fours
- Repeat this pose, crossing your ankles the other way (with the other ankle on top)

Preparation Posture for Pendant:

Use blocks



Come into the posture the same way as listed above but use blocks to give you a higher lift. Once you are able to practice the posture with blocks in the high or middle position, you can place the blocks in their lowest position, and then remove the blocks altogether.

15) Firefly - legs straight (Tittibhasana)



Contra-indications - People with past shoulder injuries or with sensitive wrists should not practice this posture.

Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen and chest muscles
- Increases concentration
- Strengthens the legs and thighs

Steps:

- Start squatting
- Place your hands on the floor between your feet
- Bring your hands back, so your fingertips are in line with your heels
- Lift your bottom up as high as your knees
- Place the backs of your thighs on your upper arms
- Lean back, placing your weight onto your arms
- Gradually lift your feet off the floor
- Slowly begin to extend your legs, straightening your knees, and keeping your legs and bottom off the floor
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Swing your legs out to the opposite sides and around to the back, into a plank position
- Lower onto the floor and rest in child's pose, rotating wrists

Counter pose of Child's Pose



Preparation Postures for Firefly (Tittibhasana)

Spider (Bhujapidasana)



Steps:

- Stand with feet about hip width apart, bend your knees and place fingertips on the floor
- Draw fingertips back, so they are in line with your heels
- Bend elbows slightly and move backs of thighs onto upper arms
- Begin sitting back onto upper arms, as you transfer more weight to your hands
- Lift one foot off the ground at a time
- Bring feet together in front of your chest
- Stay in this position for 3-4 natural breaths, breathing through your nose
- Bring feet back to floor on either sides of your hands
- Counter with Child's Pose. While in this pose, rotate the wrists and allow arms to relax

16) Lotus Lift (Kukkutasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthen arms and abdominal muscles
- Improves balance
- Stretches hips and knees

Steps:

- Start seated in lotus posture
- Place your hands on the floor on either side of the inside of your thighs
- Scoop your belly up and in, as you press down with your hands and lift your bottom off the floor.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly lower yourself back to the floor.
- Recline onto your back and extend your legs, resting in this position for 4-6 breaths.

Preparation Postures for Lotus Lift (Kukkutasana)

Prep for Arm Balance posture (with blocks)



Steps:

- Start in a cross legged seated position
- Place blocks on either side of you
- Begin to put weight into your arms, pressing down on the blocks
- Lift your hips (and maybe your feet) off the floor
- Stay in this position for 3 to 4 breaths.
- Slowly come back to sitting on the floor
- Repeat 6-8 times

17) Cross Leg Arm Balance



Benefits:

- Improves balance and coordination
- Improves digestion
- Builds core strength
- Strengthens the arms and wrists
- Opens the hips

Steps:

- Start in easy seated position.
- Lift your right foot up and place the back of your right knee around your right shoulder.
- Place both hands on the floor (on either side of your left leg)
- Cross your left ankle on top of your right ankle
- Press down with your hands and lift your bottom off the floor with your ankles crossed and feet still lifted up as high as your chest.
- Begin to lean forward and balance your chest on your upper arms with your elbows bent.
- Bring your legs to the right side, keeping your ankles crossed and feet a few inches off the floor.
- Let your head and chest drop, so they are parallel with your belly to the floor.
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Bring your legs forward again as you lift your head and chest and come back to sitting.
- Repeat on the other side.

Preparation Postures

Before practicing the more advanced arm balances, practice the following postures:

Practice the first few steps in the Cross Leg Arm Balance, putting a little more weight into your hands each time.



18) Crane (Bakasana) with Straight Arms



Benefits

- Improves balance and coordination
- Improves digestion
- Builds core strength
- Strengthens the arms and wrists
- Opens the hips

Steps:

- Come into a squat
- Separate your knees and hang your torso between your legs
- Place your hands flat on the floor
- Lift your hips as high as your knees and place your knees against your upper arms
- Begin to lean forward and reach your head forward, transferring your weight from your feet to your hands
- Lift your belly up and in, and lift your feet off the floor
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly lower your feet back to the floor and rest in child's pose
- Rotate wrists, then repeat the posture

Preparation Postures

Crow (Bakasana) – Bent elbows



Steps:

- Stand with feet about hip width apart, bend your knees and place hands flat on the floor
- Look at the floor in front of you
- Bend your elbows and bring your knees and shins to the back of your upper arms
- Come onto your toes, as you begin to transfer more weight to your hands
- Lift one foot off the ground at a time
- Once both feet are off the floor, stay in this position for 3-4 natural breaths, breathing through the nose
- Bring feet back to the floor one at a time
- Counter with Child's Pose. While in this pose, rotate wrists and allow arms to relax

Advanced Side Plank Postures

19) One leg side plank (Visvamitrasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the hips and hamstrings
- Strengthens the arms, core and legs
- Improves balance and coordination

Steps:

- Start standing in a straddle
- Turn your right foot out towards the end of your mat and keep your left foot facing forward
- Bend your right knee and drop your right hand to the floor, bringing your shoulder in line with your bent knee
- Move your right hand behind your right foot and to the outside of your right foot
- Turn towards the floor and hold your right foot with your left hand
- Shift your weight onto your right hand
- Begin to lift your right foot off the floor with your left hand
- Straighten your right leg (still holding with your left hand)
- Turn your chest towards the sky
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Slowly turn towards the floor and drop your right foot back to the floor
- Come into a lunge and relax
- Straighten both legs, coming back into a standing straddle, turn your feet to the left and repeat on the other side.

Preparation Postures:

Before practicing visvamitrasana, practice the following postures:

Janu Sirsasana and Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana



Side Plank



Steps:

- Start in down dog
- Place outside edge of right foot on floor
- Stack left foot on top of right foot (so inside edges of feet are next to each other)
- Inhale, turn to the side as you sweep left arm up overhead
- Press up through hips (hips should be slightly raised so side of body forms a gentle curve)
- Right arm should be at a right angle to torso with wrist directly under shoulder. There should be a straight line from the right hand to the left hand
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths, breathing through the nose
- Turn back towards mat, dropping left hand back to mat
- Come back to down dog
- Repeat side plank on the other side
- After completing the posture on both sides, end with Child's Pose

20) Side Plank with Foot Hold



Benefits:

- Improves balance
- Builds core strength
- Strengthens legs, arms, shoulders and wrists
- Stretches the wrists
- Lengthens the spine
- Improves leg and hip flexibility

Steps:

- Start in plank pose
- Bend knee of top leg (left leg), bringing knee towards chest
- Place left hand around the sole of the foot or hold big toe with first two fingers
- Exhale, begin straightening left leg, pressing up with foot
- Stay in this position for 3-4 slow, deep breaths
- Bend left knee, lowering foot back to floor
- Come back into down dog
- Repeat plank and plank with foot hold on other side
- After completing both sides, end with child's pose

Preparation Posture is again Side Plank or any variation of it.

Advanced Locust Based Postures

21) Double Leg Locust



Benefits:

- Strengthens muscles in the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders and arms
- Opens chest and shoulders
- Tones the abdominal cavity and aids digestion
- Improves posture
- Increases spinal flexibility

Steps:

- Begin lying on belly (prone)
- Place hands at your sides
- Bring your pinkies together (under your belly) with your palms on floor and forehead on the floor (or mat)
- Inhale
- Exhale, press into the floor with your hands, as you lift your legs up as much as possible, keeping your knees fairly straight
- Breathe softly, staying in this position for about 4 breaths
- As you exhale, slowly lower your legs back down and turn your cheek to the side
- Let your body and muscles in your back relax for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat one more time
- Counter with Child's Pose when you are done

22) Full Chest Stand



Steps:

From double leg locust, slowly bring your right foot towards the wall in front of you.

If you can, gently place your right foot on the floor in front of you, then repeat with your left foot.

Preparation Postures

Easy Double Leg Locust



One Leg Locust (hands down)



Steps:

- Begin lying on belly (prone)
- Place hands at your sides
- Bring your pinkies together (under your belly) with your palms on floor and forehead on the floor (or mat)
- Inhale
- Exhale, press into the floor with your hands, as you lift your legs (or leg) up as much as possible, keeping your knees fairly straight
- Breathe softly, staying in this position for about 4 breaths
- As you exhale, slowly lower your legs back down and turn your cheek to the side (or if doing one leg at a time, now change the leg that is lifted).
- Let your body and muscles in your back relax for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat one more time
- Counter with Child's Pose when you are done

You can also begin preparation at home by placing your chest on the floor, while you keep your legs up on a couch behind you. Slowly inch yourself back closer to the couch until you feel a stretch in your spine. Stay in this position for at least a few minutes.

Locust



Steps:

- Begin lying on belly (prone)
- Place hands at your sides, palms next to thighs
- Inhale, lift head and chest
- Exhale, lift arms and legs
- Keep reaching hands up and towards each other, squeezing shoulder blades together
- Focus slightly in front of mat, keeping neck long and relaxed
- Breathe softly, staying in this position for about 4 breaths
- As you exhale, slowly lower down and turn cheek to the side
- Let your body and muscles in your back relax for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat 2-3 times
- Counter with Child's Pose when you are done

23) Toe Hold Bow (Poorna Dhanurasana)



Benefits:

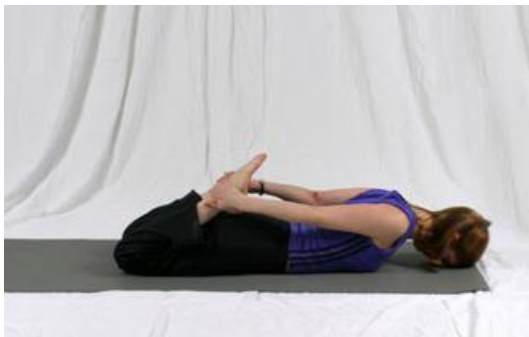
- Stretches the shoulders and front of the body
- Strengthens the spine
- Help develop more spinal flexibility
- Strengthens the hamstrings and gluteal muscles

Steps:

- Start lying on your stomach
- Bend your knees and hold the big toes with thumbs between the big toe and second toe
- Kick your feet up
- Pull one elbow through, then the other, so your arms are next to your ears

Preparation Posture

Bow (Dhanurasana)



You can also prepare by tying straps around your feet, hold onto the straps and then pull your elbows through and forward.

Advanced Seated Postures

24) One Leg Behind Head Posture (Eka Pada Sirsasana)



In forward fold position (Skandasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the hips and hamstrings
- Promotes balance and concentration
- Develops core strength
- Stretches the spine and low back (forward fold position)

Steps:

- Start seated with both legs out in front of you.
- Bring your right foot in next to your chest with your calf parallel to the floor
- You can cradle your right calf by placing your right foot in the inside bend of your left elbow, while holding opposite elbows
- Check in here and notice if you want to go further or if you feel a deep stretch here
- Inhale, slowly lift your right foot higher and bring your right foot back over your head
- Exhale and hook your right foot behind your head
- Lift up through your head and chest to sit up straight
- You can stay here, or begin to fold forward, bringing your chest towards your left leg
- Stay in either position for 4-6 breaths
- Using your hands for support, slowly lift your foot back over to the front of your head and bring your foot to the floor.
- Shake out your leg
- Repeat this posture on the other side
- Counter this posture with sun worshipper (or another posture that extends the upper spine) or a seated twist.

Preparation Posture

Seated One-Leg Forward Fold (Janu Sirsasana)



Steps:

- Start seated with legs extended
- Bend the left knee, placing the sole of the left foot next to the right thigh
- Scoot back, so you are on the front part of sitting bones
- Sit up tall
- Raise arms forward and up to shoulder height
- Exhale, reach forward, as belly drops toward thigh
- Keep reaching forward with head and chin, while pressing back through the hips
- Relax arms, shoulders and neck
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths.
- Inhale, slowly come up to sitting
- Extend left leg next to right leg and shake out legs
- Repeat on the other side

25) Bound Lotus Posture (Baddha Padmasana)



Benefits

- Stretches the arms and front of the chest
- Stretches the hips and knees
- Helps improve sitting posture

Steps:

- Start sitting with your legs out in front of you
- Bend your left knee and place the left foot on top of your right thigh with the sole of your left foot turned up
- Press your left knee gently to the floor. If your left knee easily reaches the floor, then bend your right knee and place your right foot on your left thigh with the sole of your right foot turned up.
- Reach your right arm around behind your back and hold your left foot with your right hand. Then reach your left arm around behind your back and hold your right foot with your left hand.
- Sit up tall and stay in this position for 8-10 breaths, or you can also fold forward in this position.

Preparation Postures

Seated One-Leg Forward Fold (Janu Sirsasana)



Steps:

- Start seated with legs extended
- Bend the left knee, placing the sole of the left foot next to the right thigh
- Scoot back, so you are on the front part of sitting bones
- Sit up tall
- Raise arms forward and up to shoulder height
- Exhale, reach forward, as belly drops toward thigh
- Keep reaching forward with head and chin, while pressing back through the hips
- Relax arms, shoulders and neck
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths.
- Inhale, slowly come up to sitting
- Extend left leg next to right leg and shake out legs
- Repeat on the other side

Seated One Leg Bind (from Janu Sirsasana)



From Janu Sirsasana, come back up. Bring the foot that is next to the thigh, to the space on top of the thigh. Turn towards the bent knee, and reach behind your back with your other hand to hold onto your foot.

26) Splits with back foot to head (Hanumanasana)



Benefits

- Stretches hips
- Stretches hamstrings of front leg
- Stretches quadriceps of back leg, and shoulders (hands to foot version)

Steps:

- Start in a hurdler's position (right leg forward and left knee bent out to the side with left foot against your bottom)
- Begin to turn your hips forward as you begin to straighten out your back leg behind you.
- Square your hips forward, so your knee of your back leg is facing the floor and the knee of your front leg is facing up, and then lower yourself all the way to the floor.
- Begin to bend your back knee, lifting your back foot off the floor.
- Reach back with your left hand for your left foot
- Rotate your shoulder, bringing your elbow forward
- Reach overhead with your right hand to hold onto your left foot
- Lift up through your chest and breath deeply through your nose.
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly come out of this position by leaning to the right and bringing your front leg forward.
- Shake out your legs and repeat on the other side.

Preparation Posture

Splits and Preparation for Splits



Steps:

- Start on all fours (hands and knees)
- Bring right foot forward, placing right foot between the hands
- Press left foot back until left leg is straight (lunge position)
- Flex right foot and slowly begin to press right foot forward, dropping hips towards the floor
- Stop at any point that the stretch becomes uncomfortable
- Stay in this position for 4-6 slow breaths, breathing through the nose and focusing on one point in front of you
- Begin to bend knees and raise hips, coming back to lunge position
- Bring right foot back next to left foot, coming back to all fours
- Repeat splits on the other side

A good way to ease into splits is to practice it with a bolster. Place the bolster across your mat, so that it is under your pelvic floor (bottom) when you begin in either the hurdler's position or the lunge position. Use the bolster to support your weight, so you don't have to go into the full posture.



To modify splits have students bend the front knee to reduce the stretch in the hamstring muscles of the front leg and the hip extensor muscles of the back leg.

Variation:



This variation places more weight over the hips, so students should be careful coming into this position, bringing hands back to the floor at the first sign of strain in their hips or legs.

27) Over Splits – Variations (Hanumanasana)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips
- Stretches the hamstrings
- Improves circulation, tones the legs
- Improves balance

Steps for Over-splits

- Start seated with legs out in front of you
- Bend your left knee and place your left foot on the floor
- Place a block or bolster under your right foot
- Bring your left foot out to the side, so you are in a hurdler's position. Your weight can be shifted to the right.
- Place both hands on the floor on either side of you
- Press down through your hands and shift your hips, so that both hips are facing forward (your torso is facing forward)
- Begin to lower yourself towards the floor.
- If it is painful to lower towards the floor, then use a bolster under your pelvic floor for support.
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Turn slightly to your left and bend your left knee, coming back into the hurdler's position.
- Repeat on the other side.
- To go further, you can begin to arch backward (first bring your arms overhead and lift up through your chest, press your belly forward as you reach back with your arms)

Preparation Postures

The preparation postures for over-splits will again be Splits (Hanumanasana) and Lunge (Anjanasana).

28) Bow and Arrow Pose (Akarna Dhanurasana)



It literally means “towards the ear bow pose)

Benefits:

- Strengthens the arms
- Stretches the hips and knees
- Helpful in relieving neck/upper back pain
- Improves core strength

Steps:

- Start seated with both legs extended out in front of you (dandasana)
- Bend your left knee and bring your left foot towards your chest
- Hold your left big toe with your left fingers (or hold your left foot with your left hand)
- Reach forward and hold your right foot with your right hand
- Sit up as tall as you can and pull your left foot back towards your left ear as you slightly turn your belly towards the left
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly lower your leg, place your hands on the floor behind you and squeeze your shoulder blades together for a counter pose
- Repeat on the other side

Preparatory Postures:

Before practicing Akarna Dhanurasana, first practice the following postures:

Janu Sirsasana



Marichyasana



Rock the Baby



29) Mulabandhasana



Benefits:

- Helps develop more hip flexibility
- Stretches the soles of the feet and toes
- Improves seated posture

Steps

- Start seated in easy seated (cross leg) posture
- Bring the soles of your feet together into butterfly position
- Press the soles of your feet together as you pull your toes back away from each other.
- Lift your heels off the floor and hold the outsides of your feet with your hands
- Keep lifting the heel vertically off the floor as you press your toes into the floor
- Place both hands on the floor behind your hips. Lift your hips up and forward until your feet are vertical.
- Lower your hips and knees to the floor
- Bring your hands to your knees or bring your palms together in prayer position
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Release your hands next to your hips and use your hands to lift your hips and release your feet.

Practice Postures

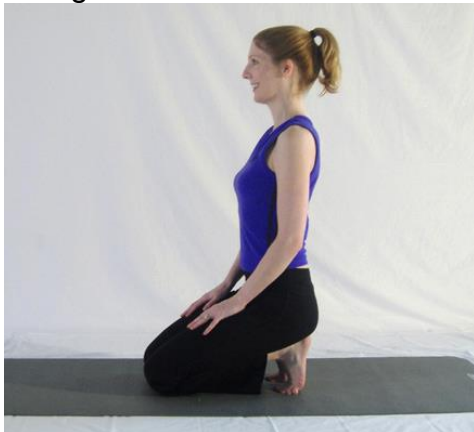
Butterfly



Steps:

- From sitting, bring soles of feet together
- Bring heels in towards your body
- Interlace your fingers and wrap your hands around your feet
- Inhale, pull against your feet and sit up tall
- Exhale, drop your knees towards the floor
- Continue to sit up tall as you inhale, and drop your knees as you exhale for the next 4-5 breaths
- On your next exhale, reach your chest forward and slowly fold forward.
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- On your next inhale, slowly raise head and chest and come back to sitting

Sitting on heels with toes curled under



In this variation the toes are curled under, providing an intense stretch for the toes and arches of the feet.

30) Upward Facing Seated Back Stretch (Urdhva Mukha Paschimottanasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens core and abdominal muscles
- Stretches hamstrings
- Improves balance and coordination

Steps:

- Start seated
- Bend your knees into your chest and place your hands under the soles of your feet
- Inhale, lift up through the top of your head and through your chest to sit up tall
- Exhale and begin to straighten your knees as you hold your feet and press the soles of your feet up towards the ceiling.
- Pull your legs towards you and bring your chin towards your shins
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly release your feet to the floor and counter this posture with table top or inclined plane
- Repeat the posture one more time

Preparation Postures

Boat (in foot hold position)



This variation of Boat helps students to practice flexibility more than strength and can be helpful to prepare for upward facing seated back stretch. To get into this pose, have students place their hands around the soles of their feet rather than place their hands under their thighs. As they exhale, they extend their legs, while still holding their feet.

Seated Forward Fold (Paschimottanasana)



Steps:

- Start sitting with legs extended out in front of you
- Scoot back through the hips, so you are sitting on the front part of your sitting bones
- Place your hands at your sides and flex your feet (this is Dandasana – Staff Pose)
- Inhale, reach arms up to shoulder height (arms are about shoulder width apart with palms facing each other)
- Exhale, reach forward with arms, head and chest, as belly drops towards thighs
- Drop arms to either side of legs, relaxing elbows and shoulders
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Inhale, come back up to sitting
- Repeat one more time

Heron (Krounchasana)



Steps:

- Start sitting with your legs extended in front of you
- Bend your left knee, placing your left foot next to the inside of your right thigh
- Bend your right knee, bringing your right foot in close and wrapping your hands around the sole of your right foot
- Inhale, sit up tall, reaching up through the top of your head to lengthen your spine
- Exhale, extend your right leg, reaching the sole of your right foot up towards the ceiling
- Focus on a point directly in front of you and focus on your breath, making it smooth and even
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Exhale, bend your right knee and place your right foot back on the floor
- Repeat on the other side

Advanced Back Lying and Back Facing Postures

31) Reclined Ankle Wrap/Yoga Sleep Posture (Yoga Nidrasana)



Benefits:

- Provides a deep stretch to the hips and thighs
- Improves concentration and focus

Steps:

- Lie on your back. Inhale as you bring each leg back. Exhale as you bend your legs and place both knees underneath your shoulders. Breathe steadily as you take hold of the left foot with both hands, lift your head, and place the left leg behind your neck. Work it down behind your neck, toward the back of your right shoulder.
- Pull the feet away from each other to spread them so that they form a pillow for the head. Lift your chest up between your legs as you rest your head on your feet. Look up and breathe smoothly and deeply for 8-10 breaths. As you breathe, notice if you are calm or panicked. If you find yourself tensing or panicking, it probably means you're not ready to be in this stage of the pose.
- To come out, release the hands first and then the feet. Rest on your back for 5 breaths and then repeat the pose by taking the right leg behind the back first and then the left leg.
- To end this intense practice, do a few supine twists and then take savasana.

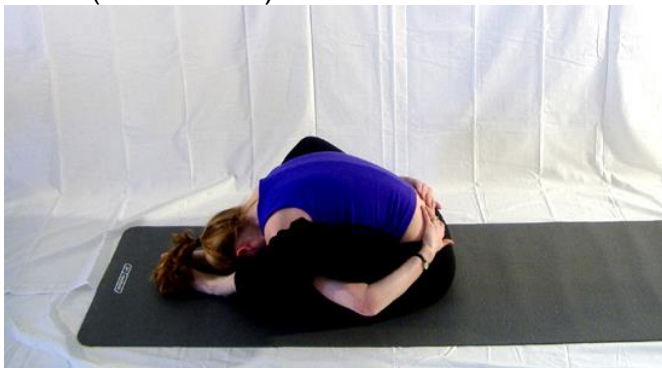
Preparation Postures:

Happy Baby



- Start by lying on your back
- Bring your knees to your chest
- Hold on to the soles of your feet (or you can hold onto your shins or behind your knees)
- Lift your feet towards the ceiling while keeping your knees bent so your shins are in a vertical position.
- Continue pulling your knees towards your armpits
- Breathe into your belly, so your belly presses against your thighs as you inhale
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths
- Slowly release your feet, bringing your knees back to your chest.

Turtle (Kurmasana)



- Start seated with knees bent and feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Bend elbows, bringing hands up next to sides with palms facing out
- Inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, reach head and chest forward, as you drop the tops of the hands to the floor between the legs with your fingertips pointing behind you
- Begin pressing your hands under your legs and behind you with palms up
- Bring hands behind the back, clasping hands behind the back
- Bring feet towards each other and drop head towards feet
- Breathe softly in this position, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths
- To come out of the pose, release hands and press down with hands to come back to sitting

Reclined One leg behind head posture (Supta Eka Pada Sirsasana)



Starting in a reclined position can be an easier way to eventually bring your foot behind your head, as gravity helps you

32) Extended Reclining Hero (Utthita Supta Virasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the hip, knee and ankle joints
- Stretches quadriceps, abdomen, chest and shoulders
- Strengthens low back and buttocks
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start in Hero Pose
- Place hands behind you and slowly lower back to the floor
- Stretch arms overhead, keeping your shoulders down and arching your pelvis slightly to create a curve in low back (photo 1)
- You can stay in this position, or lift up through the abdomen and let head fall back, bringing the top of the head to the floor
- Breathe deeply through the nose and stay in either position for 4-6 breaths
- To come out of the pose, bring your back down to the floor, bring arms back to sides, then bend your elbows and slide them back to help support your body weight, as you raise your torso, coming back to sitting
- Come onto all fours
- Counter with down dog to stretch the backs of the legs

Preparation Posture

Begin by practicing seated hero's pose (virasana). You can slowly begin to lean back by using a bolster for support. You can also use a block under your back to help lift through your belly once you are in the reclined position.

33) King Pigeon Pose (Raja Kapotasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the spine
- Improves shoulder flexibility
- Strengthens the thighs

Steps:

- Kneel upright, with your knees slightly narrower than hip width apart. With your hands, press down against the back of your pelvis.
- On an inhalation, lift your chest, then lean your head and shoulders back.
- Before you arch all the way back and place your head and hands on the floor, bring your palms together in front of your sternum in Anjali Mudra. Then separate your hands and reach them overhead toward the floor behind you.
- Bring your hips forward enough to counterbalance the backward movement of the upper torso and head. Keep pressing your hips forward as you drop back.
- Press your palms, lift your head slightly off the floor and raise your hips. Lift your pelvis as much as possible, lengthen and extend your upper spine and walk your hands to your feet. As you do, lower your forearms to the floor. If possible, grip your ankles (or, if you're very flexible, your calves). Draw your elbows toward each other until they're shoulder width apart, and anchor them firmly on the floor. Extend your neck and place your forehead on the floor.
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths.
- Release your grip, walk your hands away from your feet, and push your torso back to upright with an inhale.
- Rest in Child's Pose for a few breaths.

Preparation Posture

Camel



Steps:

- Start in a kneeling position with knees about hip width apart and your hands on your hips, elbows back
- Point feet straight back with top of the feet on the floor
- Inhale, stretch up through the top of your head
- Exhale, press hips forward as you arch back and head falls back
- If possible, students can place hands one at a time on each heel, but only if they can keep their hips pressed forward (hips directly over knees)
- Allow the chest and throat to fully open
- Take 4-5 deep breaths through the nose in this position.
- Slowly come back up, bringing one hand up at a time
- Sit back on heels and rest in child's pose (chest dropped to thighs) for 3-4 breaths
- Come back to kneeling and repeat on other side

34) Upward Facing Two-Foot Staff Pose (Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the front of the body
- Opens the chest
- Improves arm strength

Steps:

- Begin by preparing as you would for Upward Bow Pose. Lie on your back, feet on the floor, heels under the knees. Bend your arms and place your palms on the floor by your ears, fingertips facing the shoulders, shoulder-width apart.
- Press into the floor and lift your hips, coming into upward bow.
- Bend your arms and place the crown of your head on the floor between your hands and feet, keeping your elbows shoulder-width apart and directly over your wrists. To ensure that your neck does not become compressed, exhale, press your hands into the floor, and again draw your shoulder blades toward your tail bone. Keep your chest open and lifted.
- On your next exhalation, slide one hand past your ear to cup the back of your head, bringing your weight onto your forearm. Repeat the same action with the other arm, interlacing your fingers behind your head (you may be more successful in these arm movements if you lift onto your tiptoes).
- With a powerful exhalation, press down through your inner elbows and wrists and lift your chest to raise your head off the floor. Your head may seem glued to the floor; if that's the case, continue to hold the pose where you are.
- If you do manage to lift your head, the pose may actually become easier, since this movement allows your upper arms to directly support your weight, easing the demand on your muscles. But be careful not to strain the shoulder joints by pushing them beyond your elbows.

- Walk the feet away from your hands until your legs are nearly straight; then plant your inner feet and exhale as you stretch down through your calves and push to straighten the legs completely.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths.
- Come out of this asana with great attention. First, walk your feet back under your knees. Push with your hands to lift the head and tuck your chin and tail bone in as you roll your spine back down to the floor, tail bone touching last.

Preparatory Postures

Use Props



A good way to begin working on this posture is to use props. You can use a chair for support. Start by sitting on a chair facing backwards, with your legs through the back of the chair. Extend your legs onto the floor or onto a block. Hold onto the chair as you begin to lean back and hold onto the back legs of the chair for support. Your head can hang, or use a blanket under your head for support.

Bow Pose (Dhanurasana)



35) Headstand Upward Facing Bow (Sirsasana Urdhva Dhanurasna)



Please note – This posture is not appropriate for anyone with any issues in their neck.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the erector spinae muscles in the midback and lower back
Strengthens muscles between the shoulder blades
- Stretches chest and abdomen
- Improves flexibility of upper back and shoulders
- Counters the effects of sitting for long periods of time

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up
- Bring hands on floor next to ears with fingertips pointing towards shoulders
- Begin to press into the floor (like you are going into Wheel)
- Gently place the crown of your head on the floor (make sure not to turn your head or move your head from this position)
- Begin to reach your right hand down to hold onto your right ankle
- Pause in this position
- If it feels okay, begin to reach your left hand down and hold onto your left ankle
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together and expand through your chest as you breathe deeply.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 long, deep breaths
- Bring your hands back near your head and slowly roll down on your back
- Bring knees to chest and rock side to side to relax the muscles of the back

Preparation Posture
Bridge or Bound Bridge



Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through hands and feet
- Exhale, begin rolling shoulders under, lifting up through chest and bringing hands towards each other and clasp hands together
- Check that knees stay fairly close together and that feet stay parallel
- Stay in this position for 3-4 long, deep breaths
- Slowly roll back down
- Bring knees to chest and rock side to side to relax the muscles of the back

You can also practice bridge in a bound version by first coming into bridge and then bringing your hands to your ankles, and holding onto your ankles as you lift up more through your chest.

36) Bound Upward Bow (Baddha Urdhva Dhanurasana)



Benefits:

- Deeply stretches the spinal column and the front of the body
- Strengthens the legs and the back
- Stretches the shoulders
- Energizes the body

Steps:

- From upward facing bow (wheel) posture, begin to walk your hands and feet towards each other.
- Do your best to keep your feet pointing forward (not turned out)
- Allow your chest to press through your shoulders/arms, so your hands can get closer to your feet
- Continue pressing your hips forward to create more space as you bring your hands towards your feet
- Once your hands reach your feet, press your hips forward more and squeeze your belly, so you can take the weight off your hands
- If you can keep just your fingertips on the floor without any weight in your hands, then hold your right ankle with your right hand, and your left ankle with your left hand.
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Bring your hands back to the floor, and slowly lower your hips as you roll your back onto the floor
- Bring your knees to your chest and rock from side to side to release the muscles along your spine.

Preparation Postures

Wheel (Upward Bow)



Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position), with hands at sides – palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart and parallel – not turned out
- Inhale, lift hips up as you press down through hands and feet
- Bring hands on floor next to ears with fingertips pointing towards shoulders (see picture above)
- On exhale, press down through hands and feet, while lifting hips up
- Bring head in line with arms, looking straight behind
- Stay in this position for 3-4 deep breaths
- Slowly come back down, tucking chin to chest, so head does not bump the floor

Standing Backbend using a wall

Steps:

- Start standing turned away from a wall (about 2 feet away)
- Reach your arms overhead, lift up through your chest and press your hips forward, as you reach your hands back to touch the wall
- Slowly begin to walk your hands down the wall as you walk your feet forward to give yourself more space
- Only go down the wall as far as you feel comfortable and in control
- If you get all the way to the floor, begin to walk your feet back towards the wall
- Press your chest back towards the wall
- After a few breaths, slowly begin to walk your hands back up the wall
- Try to use mostly your legs and core to bring yourself back up, and using your hands and the wall a little less
- Once you are back up to standing, slowly fold forward and relax your head and neck

37) Unsupported Shoulder Stand (Niralamba Sarvangasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches and strengthens the spine and shoulders
- Strengthens core muscles
- Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands

Steps:

- Start by coming into supported shoulder stand
- Anchor evenly through the tops of your shoulders
- Inhale and reach up strongly through your legs
- Reach your right arm over head and place it on the floor next to your ear, then reach your left arm overhead and next to your left ear.
- You can stay in this position, or reach your right hand up towards your feet and then your left hand.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths as you continue to reach the balls of your feet up towards the ceiling.
- Bring your hands to your back and support your hips as you slowly roll down.
- Counter this posture with fish

Note *** This posture should not be done by anyone who has any issues with their neck. And, of course, it is contra-indicated for those with high blood pressure and pregnant women.

Variation – Stack more blankets under your shoulder blades



Preparation Practice

Supported Shoulderstand



Steps:

- From plow, bring hands as high up the back (towards neck/shoulders) as possible, with hands supporting the upper back and thumbs wrapped forward around the ribs. Keep elbows in close to body
- Lift right leg up towards ceiling, then lift left leg up
- Press up through the balls of the feet towards the ceiling

38) Fish in Lotus Posture (Padmasana Matsyasana)



Benefits:

- Opens hips, abdominal cavity, chest and throat
- Stretches hip flexors
- Aids digestions
- Improves posture
- Strengthens the muscles of the upper back and neck

Steps:

- Start in Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Come into lotus posture
- Once in lotus posture, drop elbows to the floor behind you and lean back on your elbows
- Lift up through your chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Drop your head back and hold onto your feet as you continue to lift up through the chest
- Breathe deeply through the nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Lift your head and chest and slowly roll down onto your back
- Release your legs from lotus posture
- Bring your knees to your chest and counter with a reclined spinal twist

Preparation Posture
Fish (Matsyasana)



Steps:

- Start in Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Drop elbows to the floor behind you and lean back on your elbows
- Point your toes forward and place your palms next to your hips
- Lift up through your chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Drop your head back and begin pressing your hands down your legs slightly as you continue to lift up through the chest
- Breathe deeply through the nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Lift your head and chest and slowly roll down onto your back
- Bring your knees to your chest and counter with a reclined spinal twist