



Yoga Teacher Training

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions, and Lying Postures

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Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

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Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Introduction

Many of the postures in this manual are a bit more physically challenging than in our previous manuals. Arm balances take an increasing amount of core strength and coordination to practice effectively. As with all postures, it's important to teach your students in a step by step way, allowing them to stop at the point where they feel challenged, but not overwhelmed, and to incorporate modifications and variations, so that each student can find their best practice.

Arm balances and front lying postures are usually done shortly after standing and kneeling poses, while the muscles are still warm. Prone poses generally work on strengthening the muscles of the back and developing greater spinal flexibility. Some prone poses are quite challenging, so it is best to have students try the modification first, before progressing to the full pose. Arm balances are also often challenging and require a strong core, so again it is best to offer modification and alternatives to some of the postures.

To invert the body means to bring the heart above the head and to bring the hips higher than the heart (i.e. headstand, plow, shoulderstand, etc). Inversions have calming after effects, helping to quiet the body and mind. They also play a role in balancing the hormones. When you are inverted, blood flows more easily to the upper body. Endocrine glands, like the pituitary and the hypothalamus in the brain, and the thyroid and parathyroid at the throat, get bathed in blood, and cerebral function is aided due to this extra nourishment.

For some condition, inversions are not advisable. Those with high blood pressure, neck problems, eye, ear or sinus problems or those who are extremely overweight should not practice traditional inversions, but can try the modifications instead, such as legs in the air or legs up the wall. Women who are pregnant and passed their first trimester should not lie on their backs or do any forms of inversions. Women who are passed their first trimester should practice prenatal yoga or take individual instruction with a qualified instructor. We will be discussing prenatal yoga in a later session.

Back lying and reclined positions are generally done towards the end of a practice. They reduce fatigue, increase mental clarity and open spaces within the body that are generally closed by tension. Pregnant women should not lie on their backs after the first trimester and should instead lie on their side.

The yoga poses in this part of the manual are ordered generally in the way that they may be sequenced in a yoga class. The postures begin with arm balances, then move into forward lying postures and forward facing inversions. This session then moves into back lying or back facing inversions, and ends with back lying postures. Make special note of this ordering when designing your own classes.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Sequencing of Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

When sequencing your arm balances, inversions and lying postures, use this general guide:

- 1) Start with arm balances, if you are including them (i.e. side arm balance, crow, spider).
- 2) Prone postures (i.e. locust, cobra, bow).
- 3) When starting prone postures, start with less challenging postures or with modifications (locust). This way your students can continue to do those postures instead of more challenging ones (such as bow), if necessary.
- 4) Counter the prone postures with postures that gently flex the spine (i.e. child's pose, hare/rabbit), so the muscles that were contracted in the prone postures are then stretched and relaxed.
- 5) Do more active, forward facing (prone) inversions (rabbit, prep for headstand, headstand, handstand, etc.) – starting with the less challenging postures.
- 6) If including seated postures, you can add them at this point.
- 7) Move onto supine (back lying) postures and back lying inversions (i.e. bridge, plow)
- 8) In supine sequence, include both back facing inversions (i.e. bridge, plow) and supine postures (reclined spinal twist).
- 9) Do more relaxing/restorative back lying postures towards the end of the sequence to prepare for savasana.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Prep for Arm Balances



Benefits:

- Strengthens arms and core
- Helps develop balance and strength needed for arm balances

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

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Plank (Chaturanga Dandasana)



Plank is the starting point for many other arm balances.

Benefits:

- Strengthens arms and wrists
- Improves core strength
- Stretches wrists and toes

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees) with hands under shoulders and elbows straight
- Step one leg back and then the other, curling toes under (so you are on the ball of the foot)
- Bring your body into one straight diagonal line from your neck to your heels
- Press back through the heels, lift up through the belly, while keeping the hips in a neutral position (not flexed or extended)
- Stay here for 3-4 soft breaths
- From here, you can do either of the following:
 - 1) Chaturanga – bend your elbows to lower your chest and belly to the floor. Keep your elbows in close to your sides and keep your hips slightly raised, so your chest reaches the floor just before your belly.
 - 2) Press back to Child's Pose – drop your knees to the floor and sit back on your heels as you lower your belly to your thighs and your forehead to the floor

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Modification:



Many students lack the core strength or arm strength to properly practice the full plank pose. Encourage students to try the modification.

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees) with hands under shoulders and hips over knees
- Walk hands forward about 3-5 inches
- Reach forward with head and chest until shoulders are once again directly over the wrists
- Lift up through the abdominal muscles, so the hips don't drop and back stays straight – not swayed
- There should be one straight line from the neck to the tailbone
- From here, you can do either of the following:
 - 1) Chaturanga – bend your elbows to lower your chest and belly to the floor. Keep your elbows in close to your sides and keep your hips slightly raised, so your chest reaches the floor just before your belly.
 - 2) Press back to Child's Pose – drop your knees to the floor and sit back on your heels as you lower your belly to your thighs and your forehead to the floor

Teaching Points:

Students often have a tendency to either drop their hips (creating a sway back) or lift their hips too much (almost coming into down dog). To help students check if they are in one straight line, have them look towards their feet. They should be able to just see their thighs and feet. If they can see their knees, their hips are usually too high. If they can't see their thighs, their hips are usually too low. Bringing their hips to the point where they create one straight line from their neck to their heels (or neck to tailbone for modified plank) will better help develop their core strength.

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Variation:

Plank with Knee to Chest



Benefits:

- Strengthens arms and wrists
- Improves core strength
- Stretches wrists and toes

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

Teaching Points:

Often students find it difficult to bring the knee forward without raising their hip up. Encourage students to bring their knee forward first, then focus on dropping their hips down, backing off when they need to do so, then dropping the hips again.

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Side Plank (Vasisthasana)



Benefits:

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

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

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Variation

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

Modification:

Some students may have difficulty coming into plank position, due to wrist problems or lack of arm or core strength. Encourage students to try modified side plank first (see below). This will help them become familiar with the pose and enjoy many of its benefits without placing so much weight on their arms and wrists.

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Modified Side Plank



Steps:

- Start on all fours (hands under shoulders and knees under hips)
- Kick the right foot out to the side – like a kick stand
- Move the right hand slightly to the left – so it is directly under the neck
- Extend the left foot back on the floor with the toes curled under
- Inhale, turn to the side, sweeping the 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 all fours
- Repeat modified side plank on the other side
- After completing the posture on both sides, end with Child's Pose

Variation



To improve stability, students can bring the lower foot forward slightly to help their balance.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

One Leg Arm Balance



Benefits:

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

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.

Teaching Tips:

Take students into this position step by step, so they can stop at their edge. Reach your chest toward the floor to help lift the back leg up.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

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.

Teaching Tips:

Take students into this position step by step, so they can stop at their edge. Reach your chest toward the floor to help lift the back leg up.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Side Arm Balance



Benefits:

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

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

Teaching Points:

This posture is more about coordination than strength. Encourage students to tip their head towards the floor, so their feet will easily lift off the floor.

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Cross Leg Arm Balance



Benefits:

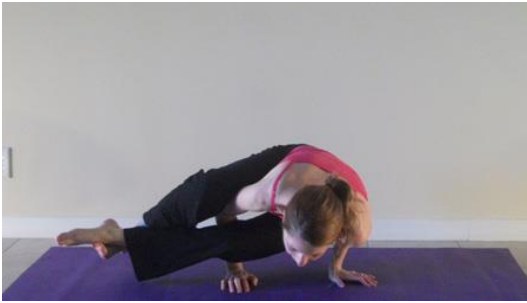
- Improves balance and coordination
- Improves digestion
- Builds core strength
- Strengthens the arms and wrists
- Opens the hips
- Stretches the wrists

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.

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- 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.



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Crow (Bakasana)



Benefits:

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

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

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Counter pose of Child's Pose



Modification

Many students worry about the possibility of falling on their heads in crow pose due to lack of arm strength. It can happen, so with beginning students, it's best to always teach this modification first. Spider has many of the same benefits as crow, but if a student's arms give way, only their bottom will fall a few inches to the floor, not their head.

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Variation:

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

Teaching Points:

If students have problems with their wrists, instruct them not to go into the full position, but to come into the position keeping their feet on the floor and not placing their full body weight on their arms.

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Child's Pose (Balasana)



Benefits:

- Relieves stress and anxiety
- Gently stretches the back
- Alleviates headache
- Stretches the ankles, knees and hips

Steps:

- Sit on heels
- Fold forward, bringing chest towards thighs and forehead towards floor
- Keep hands at sides with palms turned up
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths, breathing into back
- Raise head and chest to come back to sitting

Variation:

Students may also like to extend their arms in front of them. This provides a deeper stretch to the back. To increase the stretch in the upper back or neck, suggest that students tuck their chin towards their chest.

Modification:

Some students may find it uncomfortable to fold forward in this position, finding it more difficult to breathe. Suggest that students spread their knees apart to make more room for their belly, making breathing easier.

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to breathe into the bottom part of their lungs, so that the belly presses against thighs on inhale, and belly relaxes on exhale. This provides a gentle massage to the internal organs and helps to strengthen the diaphragm.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Resting Pigeon (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips, thighs, chest and shoulders
- Stimulates digestion
- Strengthens diaphragm
- Calms the nervous system
- Helps to still the mind

Steps:

- First come into regular Pigeon Pose by doing the following:
- Start in down dog or on all fours
- Bend right knee, sweep right knee forward, placing right knee close to right wrist
- Move right foot forward towards left wrist
- Press left foot back, dropping hips as close to floor as possible
- Draw finger tips back and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Once in Pigeon, walk hands forward and drop chest and forehead towards the floor
- Stay in this position for 6-8 deep breaths, breathing into the belly, so the belly presses against the thigh on inhalation (this helps to activate the relaxation response)

Teaching Points:

Students will often lean onto the same hip as their bent knee due to limited hip flexibility. Encourage students to keep their hips a few inches off the floor and square their hips forward, only dropping down as much as is comfortable for them. This will help to focus the stretch on the hip rotator muscles. Remind students to breath into their belly. This will help their body to relax.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Modification:

For students who have knee problems, have them practiced “reclined hip opener” (see later in this section) instead of pigeon. It will still stretch the hip rotator muscles, but without placing pressure on the knee.

Reclined Hip Opener



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Locust (Salabhasana)



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, 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

Exploration:

To avoid straining the low back, pull the abdominal muscles up. Imagine trying to bring the abdominal muscles towards the spine. This will help keep the entire core stabilized and prevent strain on the low back.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Variation

One Leg Locust (hands down)



Benefits:

- Strengthens muscles in the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders and arms
- Opens chest and hips
- 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, lift right leg up as much as possible, keeping left leg on floor (top of left foot on floor)
- Keep pressing down through hands and left leg, as you lift the right leg up
- Breathe softly, staying in this position for about 4 breaths
- As you exhale, slowly lower your right leg back down and turn cheek to the side
- Let your body and muscles in your back relax for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat on other side
- Counter with Child's Pose when you are done

Child's Pose



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Double Leg Locust



Benefits:

- Strengthens muscles in the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders and arms
- Opens chest
- Improves core strength
- 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

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Cobra (Bhujangasana)



Benefits:

- Improves back and spinal flexibility
- Strengthens triceps
- Stretches chest
- Aids in digestion

Steps:

- Start lying in prone position (belly on floor)
- Place hands under shoulders
- Inhale, lift head and chest
- Exhale, press down through hands, but only so far that low belly remains on floor and elbows are bent
- Keep elbows in next to ribs
- Press shoulders down, away from ears (so shoulders are not hunched)
- Focus on a spot just passed the front of the mat, keeping neck long and relaxed
- Stay in this position for 4-5 soft breaths
- Exhale, slowly roll back down
- Counter with Child's Pose or Down Dog when you are done

Exploration:

Cobra stretches the front of the body, especially the belly, so pay attention to softening the belly and allowing it to stretch forward and upward towards your chest. One way to do this is to keep your legs firmly planted on the floor, gently pressing them down. This downward pressure helps create the upward lift of the pose.

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Teaching Points:

Students often look up and hunch their shoulder, causing strain in their upper back and neck. Remind students to look just in front of their mats and to press their shoulders down and back to lengthen through their neck.

Students also often let their elbows come away from their ribs or press all the way up to straight arms. Remind students that this pose is useful in strengthening the triceps, especially when elbows are kept bent and in close to the body.

Variation:

Cobra with hands behind back



This variation of cobra helps provide a deeper stretch to shoulders and chest and requires more back strength.

Steps:

- Start lying in prone position (belly on floor)
- Clasp hands behind back with fingers interlaced, placing thumbs on tailbone
- Inhale, lift head and chest
- Exhale, press hands towards feet
- Focus slightly in front of mat, keeping neck long
- Breathe softly, staying in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Exhale, slowly lower head and chest back to floor
- Counter with Child's Pose or Down Dog when you are done

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Up Dog (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)



Benefits:

- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, torso, shoulders, arms and wrists
- Opens the chest, improving lung capacity
- Stretches the shoulders and back
- Improves posture
- Aids in digestion

Steps:

- Begin lying on the floor in prone (belly on floor) position
- Place hands on floor on either side of rib cage
- Inhale, press chest forward and up, pressing down through hands
- Come onto the top of feet, so only hands and top of feet are on the floor (the rest of the leg is off the floor)
- Draw shoulders back and down
- Look straight ahead and breathe fully through nose
- Stay in this position for 3-4 deep breaths
- Counter with down dog

Teaching Points:

Many beginning students keep their knees or thighs on the floor. Encourage them to try pressing down through their feet and hands, so that only their feet and hands touch the floor. Also, many students hunch or round their shoulders in this position. Remind students to draw their shoulders back and squeeze their shoulder blades together, so they can better stretch and open their shoulders and chest.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Bow (Dhanurasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the shoulders, thighs and spine
- Strengthens the spine
- Opens the chest and throat
- Aids digestion
- Energizes the body

Steps:

- Start lying in prone position (belly lying)
- Rest your forehead on the floor
- Bend your knees and hold the tops of your feet or ankles
- Inhale, lift your head and chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Exhale, lift your arms and legs
- Try to raise your shoulders and knees the same distance from the floor, so they are parallel to each other.
- Breathe softly through the nose, staying in this position for 3-4 slow breaths
- Slowly lower back to the floor and release ankles
- Counter with Child's Pose

Explorations:

To enhance your sense of lifting in this pose, focus on the top of your sacrum. Press down here to lift up everywhere else. Let your sacrum be stable as the rest of your body flows into the position.

Teaching Points:

One way to help your students in this pose is to remind them to lift up and not just backwards. Describe how the knees and shoulders should move up in a straight line, so they are equal distance from the floor. This helps students avoid overarched either the cervical spine or lumbar spine.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Remind your students to breathe softly in this position, as many people have a tendency to hold their breath in this posture. Also, remind students to bring their focus to a point just in front of their mat. This will help keep their head and neck in a more neutral position, rather than over extending or straining their neck.

Modification

Use Locust as a modification for those who find it difficult to reach their feet for Bow.



Variation

Feet to Head: A variation of bow or cobra is Feet to Head. Start by lying on your belly. Bring your feet as far apart as the mat. Place your hands palms down near the lower part of your ribs. Inhale, press down with your hands as you lift your head and chest until your arms are straight. Squeeze your shoulder blades back and look up towards the ceiling, dropping your head back. Bend your knees, bringing your feet together and towards your head. Stay in this position for 4-5 long breaths. On your next exhale, slowly lower back to the floor.

One Arm/Leg Bow



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Prone Twist



Benefits:

- Relieves tension in upper back and shoulders
- Improves flexibility of the chest and shoulders
- Improves spinal flexibility

Steps:

- Start lying in prone (belly down) position on mat
- Bring arms out to T position with palms down
- Roll onto left side, keeping left arm straight out behind you and bringing right hand next to chest
- Relax head and neck to floor and press down with right hand to twist more
- To go further into the twist, bend right knee, placing right foot on floor just behind left leg
- Let belly go soft and breathe fully, breathing into the twist
- Stay in this position for 3-4 slow deep breaths
- Slowly roll back onto belly, bringing both arms back to T position
- Repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

Many students drop their back arm to their sides. Remind students to keep their back arm straight out behind them and roll less if needed. Keeping their arm straight out behind them, helps alleviate tension in the upper back.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Crocodile



Benefits:

- Relieves headache and anxiety
- Relaxes muscles of neck and upper back
- Stimulates digestion
- Strengthens diaphragm

Steps:

- Start lying on belly (prone) with feet turned out
- Bring arms in front and hold opposite elbows
- Press elbows away, so they are slightly in front of shoulders (not directly underneath)
- Drop forehead to forearms
- Check that neck and shoulders are relaxed and chest is off the floor, while bottom ribs still touch the floor
- Breathe deeply through the nose, breathing into the belly, so belly presses into the floor on inhale and relaxes on exhale
- Stay in this position for 5-6 deep breaths
- Lift head and chest, place hands under shoulders and press back to child's pose

Exploration:

As you exhale, imagine any tension exiting your body. First, allowing your neck and shoulders to relax more with each exhalation, then allowing the hips and legs to let go with each exhalation.

Teaching Points:

Give students time to find the right position for their forearms to help their neck relax most effectively. Remind students to breathe deeply into their belly. This helps provide a gentle massage to internal organs, while also working and strengthening the diaphragm.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Hare/Rabbit Pose



Benefits:

- Stretches the upper back, neck and shoulders
- Strengthens the hips
- Relieves headache and tension

Steps:

- Start in Child's Pose
- Place hands around the soles of the feet
- Inhale, lift hips, while keeping hands on feet, trying to bring knees to a right angle
- Exhale, tuck chin to chest, bringing the top of the head to the floor
- Continue to actively press up through the hips to stretch more through the shoulders and upper back
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Exhale, slowly bring hips down, sitting back on heels – back to Child's Pose

Exploration:

This position provides a strong stretch for the upper back. To enhance this stretch, pause slightly after inhalation, rounding the back a little more while holding the breath in. Only hold the breath in for a second or two, then allow shoulders and hips to relax a little during the exhale.

Teaching Points:

Remind students to strongly tuck the chin to the chest, so the top of the head can be placed on the floor, while fully lifting their hips. If a student finds it difficult to do this while holding the soles of their feet, encourage them to hold their ankles or calves instead. Lifting the hips and tucking the head are more important for stretching the upper back than maintaining the hold of the soles of the feet.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Anchor



Benefits:

- Improves shoulder flexibility
- Opens chest
- Stimulates digestion
- Relieves headache and tension

Steps:

- Start sitting on heels
- Clasp hands behind the back with fingers interlaced
- Exhale, fold forward, reaching head forward as belly drops towards thighs
- Bring forehead towards mat
- Reach hands up and away from tailbone
- Breathe deeply through nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- On next inhale, slowly sit up, dropping hands behind back

Modifications:

If students can not clasp their hands behind their back, give them a strap to hold between their hands, so they can work on bringing their hands closer together.

Teaching Points:

Remind students to reach forward with their head as they fold forward. This will help to lengthen their spine and help them fold from their hips, rather than rounding their back too much.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Thread the Needle



Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders and upper back
- Gently stretches the spine
- Provides a gentle inversion

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Inhale, lift your right hand off the floor
- Exhale, sweep your right hand between your left hand and your knees
- Place your right arm on the floor with your palm up
- Rest your right cheek on the floor
- Gently press down with the left hand to go more deeply into the posture
- Stay in this position for about 1 minute, breathing deeply into your upper back
- Come back to all fours
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Encourage your students to relax fully and allow the floor to fully support the weight of their upper body.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Down Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches palms, chest, back, hamstrings, calves and feet
- Relieves low back discomfort
- Improves digestion
- Strengthens arms, wrists legs and torso
- Energizes the body
- Improves focus and stimulates the mind

Steps:

- Come to all fours, placing hands directly under shoulders, knees and feet hip width apart
- Spread your fingers wide
- Inhale, curl your toes under and draw your shoulder blades back
- Exhale, lift your hips and press back through your heels, drop your head
- Press your tailbone high and open your chest, pressing your chest towards your feet
- Keep your arms straight, press down through your whole hand (including thumb and index finger)
- Look towards your feet, shake your head from side to side then nod forward and back to loosen your neck and shoulders
- Pedal your heels down to the floor one at a time to get more stretch in your calves
- Breathe deeply into your back
- Stay here for 5-10 breaths
- Walk your feet forward between your hands, coming into forward fold
- Slowly roll up, coming to standing

Exploration:

One way to explore down dog is to practice with the heels turned out. In western culture, many people have tight calves because they do not regularly squat. These powerful muscles of propulsion and balance are also tightened by running and jogging. In down dog, turn the heels out and firmly press them down. Notice how much more stretch you feel in the calves.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Modification:



Some students may have problems with their wrists and find it difficult to place weight on the wrists. Have these students try the modification (above) using their forearms instead of their hands (dolphin).

Teaching Points:

Down dog is considered one of the most fundamental of all yoga postures. It is often used between other postures as a transitional posture to keep the flow of the practice going. It is important to check that your students are doing the following:

Hands remain shoulder width apart, not too close or too far away

The distance between the hands and feet is about the same as the distance from the student's heels to their tailbone (the triangle formed is not too narrow or too wide)

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Dolphin



Benefits:

- Stretches and strengthens the shoulders
- Helps prepare the body for headstand
- Stretches the legs, hips and ankles
- Relieves tension in upper back and shoulders

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.

Teaching Points:

Students often keep their head and neck lifted in dolphin, which can create strain in the neck. Remind students to look towards their feet and have them shake their head to help relax the muscles of the neck.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Headstand/Prep for Headstand

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Benefits:

- Strengthens the arms, legs and abdomen
- Improves circulation
- Strengthens the spinal muscles
- Improves digestion
- Reduces varicose veins

Steps:

- Start on all fours (hands and knees)
- Place forearms on the floor, so they are parallel and no wider than shoulder width apart
- Bring hands together on the floor, interlacing fingers
- Bring the top of the head to the floor with hands wrapped around the back of the head (see step 1)
- Check that elbows are still in close (no wider than shoulder width apart)
- Curl toes under
- Inhale, straighten legs and lift hips straight up (see step 2)

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

- Lift one leg up towards the ceiling, then lift the other leg up, coming into headstand
- Breathe slowly and deeply, focusing on your breath for 4-6 breaths
- To come down, drop one foot to the floor and then the other
- Counter with child's pose

Child's Pose



Teaching Points:

Students often bring their elbows too wide before coming into headstand. This makes it more difficult to balance. Have students check that their elbows are close enough by bringing their opposite hand to the opposite elbow before they interlace their fingers in preparation for headstand. Their elbows should be close enough that they can wrap the opposite hand fully around the opposite elbow.

**Note

Headstand is not appropriate for all students. It is critical to teach headstand and preparation for headstand in a way that protects the student's cervical spine. Check with all students before teaching this pose. For any student who has any problems with their neck, it is best for them to practice Dolphin instead of headstand. This will help stretch their shoulders and work their arm muscles in the way that headstand does, while also inverting their torso. But dolphin will not place undue pressure on their neck.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Hand Stand



This posture can be practiced against a wall to help students with their balance. Hand stand should only be practiced with students who have been practicing yoga for some time and who have the arm strength to support their body weight.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the arms, legs and abdomen
- Improves circulation
- Strengthens the spinal muscles
- Improves digestion
- Reduces varicose veins

Steps:

- Stand about 3 feet away from a wall, facing the wall
- Bring one foot forward
- Bend from the hips bringing the hands towards the floor
- As the hands reach the floor, kick the back foot up
- Use the force of that kick to bring both feet overhead, so all the weight is on your hands
- Allow feet to come to the wall for support with balance
- Press down through the hands to stabilize in this position
- Stay in this position for 6-8 deep breaths
- Slowly lower one leg at a time
- Relax in child's pose

**Note

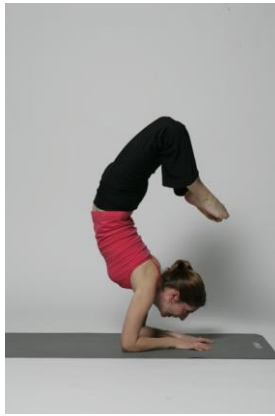
Like headstand, practicing handstand is not appropriate for all students. Students who have high blood pressure, sinus problems or are pregnant should not practice hand stand and can practice down dog instead.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Peacock/Scorpion



Peacock



Scorpion

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

Teaching:

When first teaching this posture to students have them practice it at a wall. As students kick their feet up, the wall will help them stay balanced.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Flip the Dog



Benefits

- Stretches and strengthens legs and hips
- Develops balance and coordination
- Stretches and strengthens spine
- Stretches the chest and shoulders

Steps

- Start in down dog
- Lift right leg in the air
- Bend right knee, bring your heel towards your tailbone and turn towards the right and look under your right arm
- Lift your right arm and bring your right foot to the floor behind you
- Keep right arm lifted as you reach back and lift belly towards ceiling
- Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Turn back towards the left, coming back into down dog

Repeat on the other side

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Reclining Hero (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

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Bridge (Setu Bandhasana)



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 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

Knees to Chest (Counter pose to bridge)



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Teaching Points:

Often when students begin to practice this backbend, they turn their feet out. This happens because of the action of the glutei maximus. These powerful muscles have two actions: hip extension, which facilitates the extension of the hip joint during back bending, and external rotation of the thigh, which causes the feet to turn out. When a student uses the glutei maximus to help in extension, they also get the secondary action of external rotation. When you teach your students to keep the feet parallel and the knees bent over the feet, you are teaching them to stabilize the pelvis in the backbend, because the external rotation of the thighs will no longer interfere with that movement.

Modification



Instead of clasping hands together, students can keep their hands at their sides, if necessary.

Students can also place a block under their sacrum for a supported bridge.



Or use a block between their knees to keep their knees close and engage their core.



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Wheel/Upward Bow Pose (Urdhva Dhanurasana)



Benefits:

- Keeps the spine strong and supple
- Stretches the wrists, forearms, shoulders and spine
- Opens the chest
- Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders and wrists
- Increases stamina
- Increases lung capacity

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

Teaching Points:

Make sure that students are thoroughly warmed-up and have practiced other backbends (bridge, cobra, camel, etc) before practicing wheel pose.

Encourage students to stay relaxed as they lift into the pose. This helps many students use their muscles more efficiently and find the strength to press into the pose.

As with bridge, students often turn their feet out as the muscles that allow hip extension also may cause external rotation. Students can neutralize the external rotation by activating the muscles of the inner thigh.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Counter Pose

Knees to Chest



Lie on back, bringing knees to chest and gently rock from side to side. This helps to relax the back muscles that are contracted in the back bend.

Variation:



From wheel, bring your right knee to your chest, then straighten your leg, reaching your foot towards the ceiling. Stay in this position for 4-5 breaths. Then slowly lower your foot back to the floor and repeat on the other side.

Students can also go into wheel pose from a standing position. To practice going into wheel from standing, students can first try standing a few feet away from a wall (with their backs to the wall). With your feet spread apart about two feet, bend your knees slightly and reach both hands back to the wall behind you. Slowly walk your hands down the wall as far as is comfortable for you. When you're ready, walk your hands back up the wall, coming back to standing.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Plow (Halasana)



Benefits:

- Relieves backache
- Stretches the shoulders and spine
- Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- Strengthens the spine
- Stretches hamstring muscles

Steps:

- Start lying on back with knees close to chest
- Place arms at sides and bend elbows
- Press elbows into floor to lift hips off the floor, keeping hands on hips
- Swing legs over head towards floor behind you
- If feet do not reach floor, continue supporting hips with hands
- If feet reach floor, then drop hands to floor under back, bring hands towards each other, clasping hands together if possible. From here, the student can begin rolling shoulders under, opening chest
- Toes should remain curled under, pressing heels back to stretch calves and hamstrings

Modification:

Legs in the Air or Legs Up the Wall



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Legs in the Air Modification:

- Have students begin with their knees to chest
- Place hands at sides with palms down
- Straighten legs, pressing the soles of the feet up towards the ceiling
- Breathe fully through the nose, staying in this position for 4-6 breaths

Teaching Points

It is critical to protect the student's cervical spine. Check with all students before teaching this pose. For any student who has any problems with their neck, it is best for them to simply extend their legs in the air, without lifting their hips off the floor. This will still give them the benefits of being inverted, without placing undue pressure on their neck.

Legs Up the Wall



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Shoulder Stand/Half Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana)

Plow to Shoulder stand



Benefits:

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

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

Teaching Points:

It is critical to teach Shoulder Stand and its modification in a way that protects the student's cervical spine. Check with all students before teaching this pose. For any student who has any problems with their neck, it is best for them to simply extend their legs in the air, without lifting their hips off the floor. This will still give them the benefits of being inverted, without placing undue pressure on their neck.

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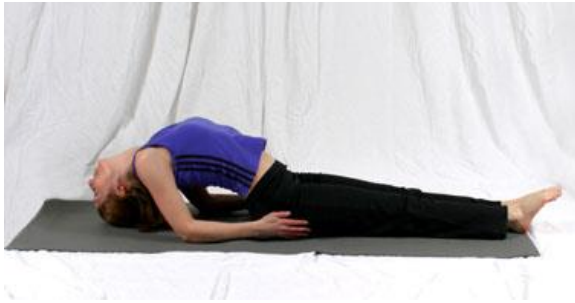
Modified Shoulder Stand



Students can also do a modified shoulder stand by placing hands around the hips, rather than around the upper back. This places less strain on the neck and shoulders and creates a more stable base with the wider elbow position.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Fish (Matsyasana)



Benefits:

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

Steps:

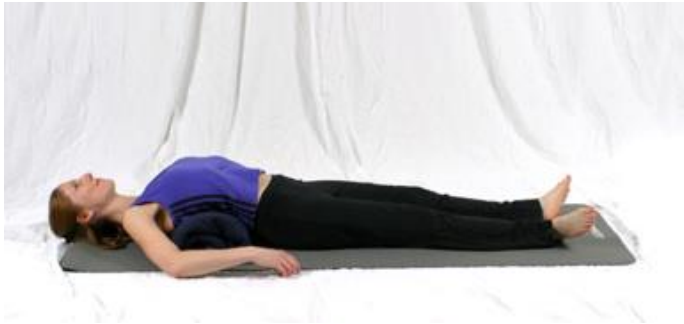
- Start in Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Drop elbows to the floor behind you and lean back on your elbows
- Point your toes forward and place your palms next to your hips
- Lift up through your chest, squeezing your shoulder blades together
- Drop your head back and begin pressing your hands down your 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

Teaching Points:

If a student has problems with their neck, encourage them to not drop their head back, but to keep looking forward, while the continue to squeeze their shoulder blades together and lift up through their chest.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Supported Reclined Back Bend



Benefits:

- Relieves tension in mid back and shoulders
- Gently stretches and opens the chest

Steps:

- Get a rolled blanket
- Place the blanket across your mat (about 2 feet from the back end)
- Sit in front of your blanket (a few inches in front of it)
- Using your hands as support, slowly recline down, bringing your back to the blanket
- Adjust the blanket as necessary, so it is just below your shoulder blades
- Drop your arms to either side of the blanket
- Let your feet relax and flop out to the sides
- Begin slow, abdominal breathing, feeling your belly gently rise as you inhale and relax as you exhale
- Focus on the sensations of your breath and your body
- Stay in this position for 2-4 minutes
- When you are ready to get up, roll onto your side, press the blanket away and come back up to sitting

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Knee to Chest



Benefits

- Stretches hips and knees
- Relaxes the body
- Stretches shoulders

Steps

- Start by lying on your back
- Bring your right knee to your chest
- Wrap both arms around your shin, holding onto opposite elbows
- Continue pulling knee towards your right armpit
- Breathe into your belly, so your belly presses against your thigh as you inhale
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths

Variation:



Bring your knee towards your armpit, but keep the sole of your foot facing the ceiling, and keep your shin vertical to the floor.

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Happy Baby



Benefits

- Stretches hips and knees
- Relaxes the body
- Stretches shoulders

Steps

- 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.

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Reclined Hand to Foot (Supta Padangusthasana)



Benefits:

- Improves digestion
- Stretches hips, hamstrings and psoas muscles
- Relieves sciatica and low backache
- Relaxing – relieves stress

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position)
- Bend knees, placing both feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Bring right knee to chest
- Exhale, extend right leg, placing hands around right thigh, calf, ankle or foot
- Gently pull leg towards head
- Stay in this position for 4-5 slow breaths
- Release left hand, placing left hand on floor out to side in T position
- Still holding right leg with right hand, drop right leg to the right side
- Keep hips square to the ceiling and both shoulder blades on the floor – do not roll onto right side – to allow hips to open more
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- Bring both knees to chest and rock from side to side
- Repeat on the other side

Option: Students can extend the left leg on the floor for a deeper stretch. This can place some strain on the low back, so remind students to notice if they feel any strain and return to the bent knee position, if necessary.

Teaching Points:

Stretching the hamstrings while in a supine position is both safe and effective because the hip joints are not bearing any weight of the body as a whole. Remind students to let gravity help them into the stretch and to simply relax their leg muscles while gently pulling their leg with their arms. Students often want to pull their leg closer to their head and, as they pull harder, their leg muscles tend to tighten in opposition to the stretch. Relaxing the leg muscles lends itself to a

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

more effective stretch. Remind student to breathe slowly and deeply to help their muscles relax.

Reclined Hamstring Stretch (Straight Legs Variation)



You can also have students keep their legs straight and hold on behind their thigh, behind their calf, or around the sole of their foot.

Students can keep their head and neck on the floor, or lift the chest towards the thigh to engage the core.

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Reclined Side Leg Lift (Anatasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the hips and inner thighs
- Opens the hamstring muscles
- Relieves low back discomfort
- Improves digestion

Steps:

- Start lying on your right side
- Place right hand under head for support
- Slightly bend right knee
- Inhale, bring left knee towards chest and place left hand around sole of left foot or ankle
- Exhale, extend left leg and bring leg towards torso
- Be careful to stay on side of body and not roll onto back
- Stay in this position for 4-6 long breaths, breathing through the nose
- Exhale, bend left knee and slowly place left leg on top of right leg
- Roll onto other side and repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Students often have a tendency to roll onto their backs in this position or to turn their knee cap so it fully faces the floor. Remind students to keep working to turn their knee slightly forward. This will help bring the stretch to the inner thigh.

To stretch the front of the thigh, have students drop their leg back down and bend the knee of their top leg (bringing their foot to their bottom). Draw the top shoulder back to open through the chest and press the bent knee (top leg) towards the foot of their extended leg (until they feel a stretch in the front of the thigh).

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Reclined Hip Opener



Benefits:

- Stretches the rotator muscles of the hip
- Improves knee flexibility
- Relieves stress and tension

Steps:

- Start lying on back (supine position)
- Bend knees, placing feet on floor about hip width apart
- Place right ankle on left thigh (just above the left knee)
- Wrap hands around left thigh
- Exhale, gently pull left thigh towards chest
- Use right elbow to press right knee forward (away from body)
- Stay in this position for 5-6 long, slow breaths
- Place left foot back on floor, uncross legs and repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

Encourage students to relax into this position as much as possible. Remind them to relax their head/neck onto the floor and to focus on creating a deep and smooth breath, while relaxing the muscles in their legs. Relaxing the muscles will help make this stretch more effective.

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Reclined Spinal Twist (Jathara Parivartanasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the spine and shoulders
- Improves digestion and circulation
- Relieves lower backache and sciatica
- Opens the hips and chest

Steps:

- Start lying on back, arms out in T position with palms down
- Bend knees, placing feet on the floor about hip width apart
- Lift right leg and cross right leg over left leg
- Drop knees to the left and look towards the right hand
- Keep both shoulder blades down (may need to scoot to the side to keep shoulder blades down)
- Stay in this position, breathing deeply into the open space on the side of the body
- Let the weight of legs pull you deeper into the stretch
- Bring knees back to center and uncross legs
- Repeat on the other side

Variations:

Reclined Spinal Twist (double bent knee)



Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Variations:

Keep One Leg Straight



Start by bringing one knee into the chest with the other leg straight. Hold onto the bent knee with your opposite hand and bring that leg over to the side of your opposite hand. Look to the other side.

Hold the back leg



After crossing the right leg over to your left side, bring your left heel back and hold onto your ankle.

Windshield Wiper Variation:



Start lying on your back with your knees bent and feet placed on the floor as wide as your mat. Drop your knees to the left. Bring your right foot back and hold onto your ankle.

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Sequencing Inverted and Lying Postures

When sequencing your arm balances, inversions and lying postures, use this general guide:

- 1) Start with arm balances, if you are including them (i.e. side arm balance, crow, spider).
- 2) Prone postures (i.e. locust, cobra, bow).
- 3) When starting prone postures, start with less challenging postures or with modifications (locust). This way your students can continue to do those postures instead of more challenging ones (such as bow), if necessary.
- 4) Counter the prone postures with postures that gently flex the spine (i.e. child's pose, hare/rabbit), so the muscles that were contracted in the prone postures are then stretched and relaxed.
- 5) Do more active, forward facing (prone) inversions (rabbit, prep for headstand, headstand, handstand, etc.) – starting with the less challenging postures.
- 6) If including seated postures, you can add them at this point.
- 7) Move onto supine (back lying) postures and back lying inversions (i.e. bridge, plow)
- 8) In supine sequence, include both back facing inversions (i.e. bridge, plow) and supine postures (reclined spinal twist).
- 9) Do more relaxing/restorative back lying postures towards the end of the sequence to prepare for savasana.

Create Your Own Sequence

Create your own sequence of 4 prone postures with counter poses.

Create your own sequence of 4 supine postures, including counter postures

Teaching and Practicing Arm Balances, Inversions and Lying Postures

Review Questions

1. Pick five lying postures and list their sanskrit and english names.
2. Who should not practice inversions and why?
3. What are the benefits of Locust (Salabhasana) Pose? How can you avoid straining the low back in Locust Pose?
4. What are some mistakes that students often make when practicing Up Dog (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)?
5. How can you modify Child's Pose (Balasana) if student's find it difficult to breathe in this position?
6. If students find it difficult to hold their ankles in Bow Pose (Dhanurasana), what posture could they do instead?
7. Name three prone postures that help to open or stretch the chest and shoulders.
8. List the benefits of Boat Pose (Navasana). What is one mistake students tend to make in this posture? What is the counter pose to Boat Pose and why?
9. Create a flowing sequence of 6-9 prone, seated and reclined postures (including counter poses).
10. Why is it important for students to bend forward from the pelvis (hips) in Seated Straddle/Open Angle (Upavistha Konasana), as well as in other forward bends, and not round forward from the lower back?
11. How does turning the knee caps towards the ceiling in Seated Straddle (Upavistha Konasana) help students maintain proper alignment?
12. What is the counter pose for Bridge (Setu Bandhasana) or Upward Bow?
13. Select one lying posture. Practice this posture everyday for one week. Write down your observations of the posture and your experience practicing the posture. Did your experience change over the week's time? How did you go deeper into the posture?