

Yogapoint Guide to Yoga Practices

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Beginners

Movement & Series

Hasta Sanchalan - Arm Movements – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5



Type 1 - From the supine position, turn the palms up and lift the arms slightly off the ground. Inhale and move them along the floor, initiating the movement from the shoulders until the hands meet each other behind the head. Put the right palm on top of the left and stretch the arms upwards and the toes downwards on an inhalation. Release the stretch on an exhalation. Repeat this stretch a few times. Exhale and slowly move the arms back down to the sides of the body to supine position.

Variations –

- Use the floor as support.
- Practice only the movement but not the stretching.



Type 2 - From the supine position, raise the arms upwards vertically. Place the palms down onto the floor behind the head. The elbows may need to be bent a little for this. Stretch the arms upwards and the toes downwards on an inhalation. Release the stretch on an exhalation. Repeat this stretch a few times. Exhale and slowly lower the arms over the head and back down to the sides of the body to supine position.

Variations –

- Practice only the movement but not the stretching.



Type 3- From the supine position turn the palms up and lift the arms slightly off the ground. Inhale and move them along the floor, initiating the movement from the shoulders until the hands meet each other behind the head. From here, cross the arms over and as they cross over more, bring them down over the head, chest and abdomen. Then start to uncross the arms and bring the arms down by the sides of the body. Repeat the movement in the reverse order, starting by crossing the arms over the abdomen, then chest, then head and then uncross the arms and move them above the floor, making a big circle along the floor until the arms are back at the sides of the body in supine position.



Type 4 - From the supine position turn the palms up and lift the arms slightly off the ground. Inhale and move them along the floor, initiating the movement from the shoulders until the hands meet each other behind the head, continue the circles with each arm, crossing the arms over the body. Practice 3-5 rotations and then repeat in the opposite direction.



Type 5 – From the supine position raise the arms so that they are vertical. Let the hands be relaxed or in gentle fists and slowly rotate the shoulders, making very small circles with awareness. Repeat in the other direction.

** These movements can be done from supine, tadagasan, sitting or standing.*

Standing variations -

- Inhale and raise the arms from the side, exhaling down
- Inhale and raise the arms parallel to the ground and up, exhaling down
- Rotating the arms with a breath per rotation, slowly make circles with the arms towards each other and then away from each other.
- Rotating the arms with a breath per rotation, slowly make circles with both arms forwards and then backwards.
- Rotate the arms alternately forward and then backwards.

Benefits

- Loosens the joints in the shoulders
- Aligns the ligaments, tendons and muscles in the arms, shoulders and back.
- Opens and creates space in the chest
- Helps to open the lungs and improve respiration
- Preparation for pranayam
- Relaxing and calming effect with the breath
- Lengthens the spine and helps to prevent compression
- Helps to remove upper back pain
- Stretches out the legs and ankles which can be helpful for fluid retention and cramps.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Those suffering from stiff shoulders should not strain to move the arms beyond their limits. The range of movement of the arms will gradually increase with regular conscientious practice. If needed, the movements can be done with a few breaths. The floor can be used as a support if the arms get tired being above the ground. If it is uncomfortable for the back to lie on the ground then the knees can be bent in tadagasan. In the later months of pregnancy it is better to practice these movements in sitting or standing position.

Variations & Tips

To get a stronger effect on the back and more of an opening effect on the chest practice these movements in sitting or standing position. If one is feeling tired, has back pain or is bed ridden then practicing from supine is the best option.

Pada Sanchalan – Leg Movements

1. Bend leg and bring to body
2. Leg Rotation
3. Supine spinal twist
4. Cycling



Type 1 – From supine position slowly bring the arms over the head, holding the elbows or relaxing the arms to a comfortable level. Slowly bend one leg, bringing the foot near the buttock. The floor may be used as support otherwise keep the foot a few inches away from the ground. Rest for a moment and then slowly straighten the leg, bringing it to the floor. Repeat the movement a few more times and then repeat on the other side.

Variations –

- Can be practiced from sitting position with body upright and fingertips pointing forwards or backwards.
- Both legs can be used in supine or sitting. The floor may be used as support. This should be practiced with care as it is much more stressful on the back.



Type 2 – From supine position slowly raise one leg to 45 degrees or as high as is comfortable. Slowly start to make a circle with the leg. Start with a small circle and slowly enlarge it, maintaining comfort. The focus should be on loosening of the hip joint. If keeping the leg straight is uncomfortable the other leg can be bent. Also there is a variation of bending the rotating leg and, if needed the other leg can remain bent. Breathing can be incorporated, one breath for each rotation, the slower the movement the more the benefit. Practice as many rotations as is comfortable. Repeat on the other side.

Variations -

- Hands under buttocks
- Practice with large circles and also small circles, noticing the difference and how much the rest of the body is working for the variations in size.
- Bend stationary leg, rotate straight leg
- Bend stationary leg, rotate bent leg

- Straight stationary leg , rotate bent leg
- Straight stationary leg, bend and straighten rotating leg
- Double leg – straight legs and bent legs
- Sitting in chair –with leg bent and with straight leg



Type 3 - From supine position bring the arms away from the body, palms facing down or up if that is more comfortable. Inhale and slowly raise the left leg up to 90 degrees or as high as the leg comfortably goes. Exhale bringing the leg down to the right side, keeping it straight. Turn the head to look to the left. The left foot may be on the ground or slightly above the ground. The right leg remains straight. Repeat on the other side.

Variations –

- Can give cushion support under the foot
- The leg being raised and crossed over can be kept bent to relieve pressure on the back.
- The stationary leg can be bent to allow more of a relaxed twist in the spine
- The foot can be adjusted and moved closer to the other foot if needed. The closer the foot to the hand the more twist in the spine. If comfortable the hand can hold the foot but the back should remain relaxed.



Type 4 – From supine position slowly raise one leg, keeping it bent and then extending as if cycling on a bike. The other leg remains straight or can be bent with the foot on the ground if there is too much pressure on the back. Continue the movement a few times and then go the opposite direction. Repeat on the other side.

Variations/additions –

- After single leg cycles both legs can be used, first alternating and then, if comfortable, together.

Benefits

- Strengthens the abdominal, lower back and leg muscles.
- Lubricates and improves blood circulation in the hip and knee joints which prepares one for the stronger hip opening asanas such as squatting.
- Opens the pelvic region, upper back and chest
- Obesity
- Improves digestion

Precautions & Contra-indications

Some of these movements can be a little straining on the lower back and abdominal region so care should be taken and if necessary variations should be used and/or less movements practiced. Knees and hips can sometimes click and crack with these movements. If there is pain then they should be avoided, however if there is no pain then the movements may slowly cause the clicking to decrease.

Variations & Tips

If there is too much stress on the lower back or abdominal region then keep the other leg bent. Take rests as needed in between rotations or repetitions of movement.

Janu Sanchalan – Knee Movements

1. Bent leg pressed to thigh
2. Bend both legs to side, legs together
3. Bend one knee to ankle and other leg pressed against
4. Bend both legs to side, legs apart
5. Cross leg twist
6. Needle and thread
7. Half butterfly



Type 1 – From supine position raise the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Slowly bend one leg and place the foot near the buttock. Inhale and exhaling press the leg towards the opposite thigh. Inhale releasing and exhale lower the leg. Repeat on the other side.

Variation – Can be practiced from sitting position.



Type 2 - From supine position raise the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Bend both the knees and place the feet near the buttocks and feet together. Inhale and exhaling bend the knees to one side, turning the neck to the opposite side. Breathe normally and maintain the position. Exhale and inhaling raise the knees back to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.

Variations –

- Arms relaxed and knees to side, as a movement.
- With palms under head
- Varying the position of the legs before bending to vary the effect on the back
- Can practice in a relaxed sitting position



Type 3 - From supine position raise the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Bend both the knees and place the feet near the buttocks. Separate the feet so they are at least hip width apart. Slowly bring the left knee down towards the right ankle. The knee may touch or there may be some

distance. Press the right leg against the left leg. There will be a subtle stretch in the lower abdomen and thigh. Release and repeat with opposite legs.

Variation -

- Can practice in a relaxed sitting position



Type 4 - From supine position raise the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Bend both the knees and place the feet near the buttocks and feet hip width apart. Inhale and exhaling bend the knees to one side, turning the neck to the opposite side. Breathe normally and maintain the position. Exhale and inhaling raise the knees back to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.

Variation -

- Place lower foot on upper knee and press down



Type 5 – From supine position raise the arms to the sides, palms can be facing up or down, depending on comfort. Bend both the knees bringing the feet near the buttocks. Cross the left leg over the right leg. Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the knees towards the right side, turn the head to the left side. Breathe normally and maintain the position. The knees may be touching the ground or there may be some distance from the ground. Try to keep both shoulders on the floor. Exhale and inhaling raise the knees up, change the legs over and repeat on the other side.



Type 6 – From supine position bend both the knees bringing the feet near the buttocks. Take some distance between the legs and then raise the right leg, placing the ankle on the left thigh, just above the knee. Bring the hands around the left thigh. If in the early months of pregnancy you may be able to hold the left calf also. Slowly pull the thigh towards the chest gently and maintain the position, breathing normally. Repeat on the other side.



Type 7 – From supine position raise the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Bend both the knees and place the feet near the buttocks and feet together. Inhale and exhaling slowly lower one leg to the side, as far as it will comfortably go. Breathe normally and maintain the position. Exhale and inhaling raise the leg back to the starting position. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Relieves tension and pain in the back muscles and spine.
- Loosens and improves flexibility of the spine.
- Helps to realign spine and release compression on sciatic nerve (especially type 6)
- Stretches the piriformis muscle (type 6)
- Opens the hips and pelvic region.
- Gives a gentle massage to the lower abdomen, improving digestion.
- Prevents constipation
- Relieves tension in the buttocks and thighs
- Creates space in the pelvic region and relieves congestion.

Precautions & Contra-indications

It is not necessary to practice all these types. Some may be more suited to you than others and give the benefits needed. If there is any pain whilst doing any of the movements then avoid them. Avoid type 3 in pregnancy.

Variations & Tips

If it is uncomfortable to hold the elbows in some of the positions then just raise the arms as high as is comfortable. Some movements can be adapted in a sitting position if needed.

Skandha Sanchalan – Shoulder Movements

1. Raise and lower shoulders
2. Shoulder rotations
3. Move one arm across chest and stretch
4. Tennis elbow movement
5. Arm movement forward and to sides
6. Scapula Hug
7. Ardha Chandrasan
8. Garudasan movement



Type 1 – Inhale and raise the shoulders up, keeping the neck relaxed. Exhale and press the shoulder downward, keeping the arms relaxed. Continue the movement with the breath.



- **Type 2** – Bring the fingertips to the shoulders. Inhale and bring the elbows together and upward. Exhaling bring the elbows backward and down. Continue the movement with the breath and then practice in the opposite direction.



- **Type 3** - Move the left arm across chest and support it with the right arm. Stretch and repeat with the right arm.



- **Type 4** – Raise the arms from the sides, palms facing down. Slowly rotate the arms until the palms are facing upwards and if possible, a little to the back. Repeat in the other direction.



- **Type 5** – Bring the fingertips on the shoulders, elbows facing out to the sides. Inhale straightening the arms to the sides and exhaling bring the fingertips back to the shoulders. Continue the movement with the breath. Next keep the fingertips on the shoulders and the elbows facing forwards. Inhale straightening the arms in front, exhaling bring the fingertips back to the shoulders. Continue the movement with the breath.



- **Type 6** – Wrap the arms around the body and if possible slide the fingertips behind the shoulder blades. Breathing normally try to push the shoulder blades away from each other, stretching the upper back. Repeat with opposite arms.



- **Type 7**- Inhale and slowly raise the left arm up from the side, resting the fingertips of the right hand on the ground. Exhaling slowly bend to the right side, bring the left arm over and extending the right hand away from the body. Repeat on the other side.



- **Type 8** – Raise one arm in front of the body with the forearm vertical. Raise the other arm and wrap it from underneath, keep the elbows close and bring the palms together or as close as they can comfortably go. Maintain this position or raise the elbows slightly. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Opens the chest.
- Relieves pain and tension in the upper back, neck, chest and shoulders.
- Stretches the arms and elbows.
- Relieves stiffness in the shoulders and upper back.

- Expands the lungs and encourages deeper breathing
- Good for tennis elbow

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid any movements that cause pain.

Variations & Tips

These movements can be done in any sitting position or a chair, plus standing and to some extent lying down.

Kantha Sanchalan – Neck Movements

1. Neck movements forward, backwards and sideways
2. Neck rotations
3. Datta mudra



- From sitting position sit in vajrasan or any other comfortable sitting pose. Try to keep awareness of the neck at all times during the movements.
- **Type 1** – Slowly bend the head forward, keeping the length in the spine and keeping the shoulders in the same position. Slowly lift the head up and tilt the head backwards as far as is comfortable. Lift the head and then tilt the head to the left side, straighten and then to the right, and straighten. These movements can also be done with the breath.
- **Type 2** – Bend the head forwards and slowly rotate the neck to the left, to the back, to the right, to the front, then back again. This movement can be done with the breath, taking one breath to make one rotation.
- **Type 3** – Slowly turn the head to the left side, keeping the chin parallel with the shoulder. Straighten the neck and repeat on the right side.
- Practice as many times as is comfortable.

Benefits

- Relieves pain in the neck and upper back.
- Improves flexibility in the neck.
- Can help prevent tension headaches.
- Tones the nerves passing through the neck.
- Relieves stiffness and heaviness.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid making very large circles with the neck and take care that it is always comfortable. If there is cervical spondylitis then avoid the forward bending or any movement that causes pain. Keep the movements very slow. If there is dizziness then avoid the movements.

Variations & Tips

Can be practiced sitting in a chair, standing and to some extent lying down.

Individual Toe Bending



- In sitting position bend one leg and hold the foot. Hold the big toe with one hand and the second toe with the other hand. Gently press the big toe downward and at the same time bring the second toe towards the body. Then press the second toe downward and the big toe towards the body. Continue this movement ten times. Next hold the second toe and third toe, repeat the process. Continue this with all the toes and repeat with the other foot.

Benefits

- Stretches the feet and toes
- Improves flexibility of the toes
- Relieves tension in the feet
- Gives a feeling of lightness in the feet
- Improves circulation to the toes
- Helps prevent arthritis in the toes
- Creates more awareness in the feet which helps with standing poses

Precautions & Contraindications

Extra care should be taken if any toes have previously been broken. If there is any pain then avoid.

Variations & Tips

This can be practiced sitting in a chair or on the ground.

For a bed ridden person someone can do this for them.

Rocking the Baby Movement



- From sitting position bend the right leg and place it on the thigh. Raise the leg up and wrap the arms around the leg, as if holding a baby. If it is uncomfortable to cradle the arm around the knee then hold the right knee with the right hand and right foot with the left hand. Inhale rock the leg to one side and exhale rock the leg to the other side. Continue the movement with the breath. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Loosens the hips and pelvic region.
- Good preparation for meditative asanas and squatting.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Take care if there is hip pain.

Variations & Tips

Adjust the positioning of the arms if needed.

Manibandha Sanchalan – Wrist Movements

1. Wrist rotation - supported
2. Wrist movements up and down
3. Wrist rotations without support
4. Fingertip pressing
5. Finger pressing
6. Palm pressing
7. Hand rotation – flower style



- Sit in any comfortable sitting position such as vajrasana.

Type 1 – Hold the right wrist with the left hand. Make a fist with the right hand and slowly rotate the hand, keeping the wrist stable. Repeat in the other direction and with the other hand. Can incorporate breathing if desired. This will slow the movement and increase awareness. Practice one rotation for one breath.



Type 2 – Raise the arms in front of the body. Inhale bringing the backs of the hands towards the body. Exhale and bring the fingers downward. Continue the movement with the breath.



Type 3 – Raise the arms in front of the body. Make fists with the hands and slowly start rotating, keeping the arms stable. Rotate the hands in both directions, with the breath if desired.



Type 4 – Press the fingertips together firmly, then release. Repeat as many times as desired.

Type 5 - Press the fingers together firmly, then release. Repeat as many times as desired.

Type 6 - Press the palms together firmly, then release. Repeat as many times as desired.



Type 7 – Press the fingertips together and the slowly rotate the wrist, pushing the palms away from the body, separating the fingertips, apart from the thumbs and index fingers. Keep rotating until the backs of the fingers press against each other and then continue to the starting point. Repeat in the opposite direction.

Benefits

- Strengthens and removes tension in the wrists, forearms, hands and fingers.
- Helps remove and prevent fluid retention.
- Helps with carpal tunnel syndrome, common in pregnancy.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid any movements that cause pain.

Variations & Tips

Can be done in any sitting position, standing or lying down.

Standing Joint Freeing Movements

These movements are helpful before doing stronger warm ups. They work well in combination with the previous arm movements. They loosen the shoulders, spine, hips, knees and ankle



Arm circles – Inhale slowly raising one arm up and exhaling lower it down and behind. Continue the movement with the breath a few times and repeat in the opposite direction. Repeat with the other arm. They can also be practiced with both arms in the same direction, then alternating and for a brain challenge, opposites.



Rag doll movement – Raise the arms up from the sides and then slowly start rotating to the sides in a fluid relaxed movement. Start by keeping the arms at shoulder level and then slowly start lowering the arms down until they wrap around the waist. Keep the arms loose.



Hip Rotations – Keep the hands on the hips and slowly rotate making small circles and gradually making them larger. Make sure not to hunch the back.



Knee rotations – Bend the knees, placing the hands on them, knees together. Slowly rotate in one direction a few times and then the opposite direction. Next take hip width distance between the knees, still keeping the hands on the knees. Slowly rotate the knees towards each other and then away.

Preparatory Movements 1-12 and variations

These movements are designed to loosen the joints and align the ligaments, tendons and muscles to prepare the body for the practice of asanas. They should be practiced in a slow and controlled manner, correlated with the breath.

Preposition of Preparatory Movements:

From standing position step the legs shoulder width apart.

Preparatory Movement Type 1:



- While inhaling raise both the arms over the head from the front. Exhaling slowly bend forward at the waist, lowering the head towards the knees, bringing the palms to the floor. Inhaling, straighten up and keep the arms over the head. Exhaling, slowly lowering the arms down from the sides and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- Instead of placing the hands on the ground place the fingertips on the ground or place the hands on the shins or knees. The arms can also be relaxed and left loose or the elbows can be held.
- This position can be maintained with normal breathing.



Preparatory Movement Type 2:

- While inhaling raise both arms from the sides until they are parallel with the floor. Exhaling bend forward and twisting slightly place the left hand on the right foot, grabbing the big toe. Keeping the right arm straight above and the gaze to the right hand. Inhaling, straighten up and keep the arms parallel to the ground. Exhaling bend forward and twisting slightly place the right hand on the left foot, grabbing the big toe. Keeping the left arm straight above and the gaze on the left hand. Inhaling, straighten up and keep the arms parallel to the ground. Exhaling slowly lower the arms down from the sides and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- If the foot cannot be reached then the shin or knee can be held.
- If it is uncomfortable to raise the arm upward then it can be wrapped behind the back.



Preparatory Movement Type 3:

- While inhaling raise both arms from the sides until they are parallel with the floor. Exhaling slowly twist to the left side in the waist, keeping the arms parallel to the floor. Inhaling return to the front. Exhaling slowly twist to the right side in the waist. Inhaling return to the front. Exhaling slowly lower the arms down from the sides and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- If the arms cannot be raised parallel then they can be raised as high as is comfortable and then the twist can be done.



Preparatory Movement Type 4:

- While inhaling bring both hands on to the waist. Exhaling bend forward at the waist, trying to bring the head towards the knees. Inhaling straighten the back, keeping the hands on the waist. Exhaling, release the hands and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- If there are back problems one can avoid the forward bending and just do the back bending.



Preparatory Movement Type 5:

- While inhaling bring both the hands on to the waist. Exhaling bend the body towards the left side from the waist. Inhaling straightening up. Exhaling bend the body towards the right side from the waist. Inhaling straightening up. Exhaling, release the hands and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- Instead of having the hands on the waist the arms can remain relaxed by the sides.

Preparatory Movement Type 6:



- While inhaling bring both hands to the waist. Exhaling bend forward from the waist. Inhaling begin rotating to the left. Continue inhaling and rotate to the back. Begin exhaling, rotating towards the right. Continue exhaling and bringing the head back in front of the knees. Inhaling rotate to the right side. Continue inhaling and rotate to the back. Begin exhaling and rotate to the left. Continue exhalation and bringing the head back in front of the knees. Inhaling straightening the back. Exhaling, release the hands and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- If it is difficult to balance the legs can be spread further apart.

Preparatory Movement Type 7:



- Bring both the hands on the waist. Bend the neck forward towards the chest. Straighten the neck. Bend the neck backwards. Straighten the neck. Bend the neck towards the left side without raising the shoulders. Straighten the neck. Bend the neck to the right side without raising the shoulders. Straighten the neck. Release the hands and come back into the preposition.

Variations –

Can be done from sitting or supine positions also. Breathing can be incorporated.

Preparatory Movement Type 8:



- Bring both the hands on the waist. Bend the neck forward towards the chest. Rotate the neck towards the left side, then to the back, the right side and to the front, chin towards the chest. Repeat in the other direction. Straighten the neck. Release the hands and come back into the preposition.

Variations –

Can be done from sitting or supine positions also. Breathing can be incorporated.

Preparatory Movement Type 9:



- While inhaling raise the arms up above the head from the front. Exhaling bend forward from the waist bringing the palms together. Inhaling begin rotating to the left, making sure that the head is between the arms. Continue inhaling and rotate to the back. Begin exhaling, rotating towards the right. Continue exhaling and bringing the arms towards the ground in front of the body. Inhaling rotate to the right side. Continue inhaling and rotate to the back. Begin exhaling and rotate to the left. Continue exhalation and bringing the arms towards the ground in front of the body. Inhaling straightening the back, bringing the palms apart and keeping the arms over the head. Exhaling, lower the arms down from the sides and return to the preposition.

Variations –

- If it is difficult to balance the legs can be spread further apart.



Preparatory Movement Type 10:

- While inhaling raise the heels and the arms in front of the body, parallel to the ground. Exhaling bend the knees, balancing on the toes and bringing the buttocks towards the heels. Inhaling straighten the knees, keep the arms parallel and still balancing on the toes. Exhaling bring the heels to the ground and lower the arms down from the front.

Variations –

- Vary the height that the heels are raised. Higher the heels the more difficult to balance.
- Use support of a wall or chair if needed.



Preparatory Movement Type 11:

- Bend the left elbow to 90 degrees. Grab hold of the left wrist with the right hand. Make a fist with the left hand and rotate the hand clockwise and anti-clockwise. Release the right hand. Straighten the left arm, bringing it to the side. Repeat on the opposite side.

Variations –

- Can be done in supine or sitting positions also.



Preparatory Movement Type 12:

- Bend the left knee and raise the thigh to a 90 degree angle with the body. Grab hold of the thigh with both of the hands. Rotate the left foot clockwise and anti-clockwise. Release the hands. Lower the left leg back down, returning to the preposition. Repeat on the opposite side.

Variations –

- This movement can be practiced in supine or sitting but the balance element and benefits will not be there.
- A wall or chair can be helpful, one hand can support the thigh whilst the other hand is on the wall or the leg can be raised, as high as is comfortable, without using the hands.

Benefits:

- Warms up and prepares the body before the practice of asanas.
- Loosens the joints
- Aligns the ligaments, tendons and muscles.
- Opens the hips
- Stretches and strengthens the back
- Helps decrease fat around the waist
- Improves functioning of kidneys and adrenals

Precautions:

- Severe spinal problems or recent abdominal surgery, abdominal problems or pregnancy should not practice Preparatory Movement Types 4, 5, 6 and 9.
- Neck problems should not practice Preparatory Movement Types 7 and 8.
- Weak knee joints should practice Preparatory Movement Type 10 with caution.
- Severe spinal problems should practice Preparatory Movement Types 2 and 3 carefully.
- Avoid Prep Mvt 1, 6 and 9 in case of sciatica, slipped disc, vertigo/dizziness, low BP
- Avoid Prep Mvt 7,8 in case of arthritis, cervical spondilits, inflammation
- Avoid Prep Mvt 10 in case of knee or ankle problem
- Avoid Prep mvt 11 in case of any wrist problem, inflammation

Vajrasan Series with Variations

The vajrasan series is a very useful series that was formulated by Guruji and is part of his Yoga Sopan course. It is particularly beneficial for back problems. There are many variations that can be added for those who can practice them comfortably.



Vajrasan – Thunderbolt Pose – Starting position with hands on the knees. Relax the face and take some time to centre and focus.



Januhastasan – Slowly place the hands on the ground directly in front of the knees. The arms are straight and the belly is pushed downwards towards the thighs. The chest is opened and the head tilted back. The shoulders should remain relaxed. Relax the whole body in this pose, breathing naturally.

- **Variations** - slowly bend to the side slightly by turning the head to look over the left shoulder towards the left hip. Repeat on the other side. A stronger variation is to bring the right forearm with the palm facing upwards onto the ground either in front of the left knee, just past it or if that is not comfortable, then in front of the right knee. Slowly raise the left arm vertical, looking upward.



Hastashirasan – Slowly bring the elbows to the ground. They may be together or apart. Walk the elbows a comfortable distance away from the knees, lengthening and creating space in the spine. This is a nice pose to maintain for longer when there is back pain. It can be practiced separately as well as part of this series.

- **Variation** – separate the knees apart. This can be made the position easier for some people and is useful during pregnancy, menstruation and for gynaecological problems.



Ek Pad Sahajahasta Bhujangasan – Slowly bring one leg back, straightening the leg and relaxing the foot. The elbows remain in the same position. If needed, the hands can be placed on the ground to come into the position. Walk the elbows further away to keep the length.



- **Variations** – From this position the hands can be placed on the ground next to the knee and the arms straightened. Press the hips down, open the chest and tilt the head back. If this is comfortable one can arch a little more in the back and coming up onto the fingertips. If that is also comfortable and the body is stable then the hands can be placed at the chest or raised above the head with palms together or apart. Remember there is much more stress on the back with this last variation.



- **Pigeon variations** – from here one can bring the leg into pigeon by placing the foot in front of the hip, if one is more flexible they can bring the foot further away from the hip so that the calf is parallel with the hip. Alternatively the heel can remain under the thigh. In simple pigeon sit upright and support the body with the fingertips. From here the head can be tilted back and the chest open. If this is comfortable a gentle twist to either side can be done with hands placed on the body or ground as support. Another variation that can be done after is to slowly bend forward placing the forehead on the ground or as far as it is comfortable to go, arms relaxed on the ground.



Move back to **ek pad sahajahastabhujangasan** and bring the knee of the bent leg out to the side, placing the foot on the inner thigh, knee or calf. Press the hips downward.



SahajahastaBhujangasan – Straighten the leg so that both legs are together, feet relaxed. The elbows may be together or separate. Adjust the elbows to where you want to get maximum benefit. If it's the lower back then bring the elbows close to the body and if it's the upper back bring the elbows further away. This pose is a good one to practice as part of the

series or separate for longer periods of time.



Variation - Sphinx - bring the forearms on the ground with the elbows directly under the shoulders. Look forward, keep the shoulders relaxed and chest open. An addition to this is to slowly bend to the side slightly by turning the head to look over the left shoulder towards the left hip. Repeat on the other side.

Relaxation asana if needed – Adhvasan (Reverse Corpse Pose) – Lower the body to the ground, forehead on the ground, arms outstretched and relax. OR

Makarasan (Crocodile) – Lower the body to the ground and fold the arms. Place the head on the arms or ground in any way that is most comfortable and leads to the greatest amount of relaxation. Separate the legs at least a foot apart with the toes pointing outwards. Relax.

After the relaxation one can go back in the opposite way, either with all the variations or with the simple positions.

Benefits

- Generalised back pain
- Lumbar spondylitis
- Sciatica and slipped disc
- Cervical spondylitis
- Menstrual problems
- Mild period pain
- Pelvic congestion
- Poor digestion
- High blood pressure
- Stretches and opens hips
- Creates space between vertebrae
- Tones spinal nerves

Precautions & Contraindications

Though this series is for back pain care should be taken and comfort in each asana should always be there. If someone has severe back pain rest and other practices may be advised until they can practice this series in comfort.

Avoid if there is knee or ankle pain. Avoid from second trimester of pregnancy (certain asanas can be done but none with compression of belly)

Time

Minimum 15 seconds for each position and ideally holding for as long as it feels comfortable for each position, which may be up to 5 minutes.

Breath

Natural or deep breathing should be used throughout the series.

Tips

- Here we have given many variations but it is not necessary that they are all practiced. To begin with the original series can be practiced and only if comfortable the additional variations can be included if wanted. Variations are given to create interest for the student and to give more stretch to the back.
- Some people may find vajrasana is not a very comfortable pose. If this is the case pillows or folded blankets may be used behind the knees and/or under the ankles. As many pillows as is needed should be used. Over time these can be decreased. For each pose the pillows can be adjusted.

Pawanmuktasan Series 1 – Anti-Rheumatic Group

1. Padanguli Naman – Toe Bending
2. Goolf Naman - Ankle Bending
3. Goolf Chakra - Ankle Rotation
4. Goolf Ghoornan - Ankle Crank
5. Janufalak Akarshan - Kneecap Contraction
6. Janu Naman - Knee Bending
7. Janu Chakra - Knee Crank
8. Ardha Titali Asana – Half Butterfly
9. Poorna Titali Asana – Full Butterfly
10. Shroni Chakra – Hip Rotation
11. Mushtika Bandhana - Hand Clenching
12. Manibandha Naman - Wrist Bending – see Manibandha Sanchalan – Wrist Movement 2
13. Manibandha Chakra - Wrist rotation – see Manibandha Sanchalan – Wrist Movement 3
14. Kehuni Naman - Elbow bending – see Skandha Sanchalan – Shoulder Movement 5
15. Kehuni Chakra - Elbow rotation
16. Skandha Chakra - Shoulder Rotation – see Skandha Sanchalan – Shoulder Movement 2
17. Greeva Sanchalan - Neck movements – see Kantha Sanchalan – Neck Movements

- Useful to remove stiffness in the joints, improve flexibility, remove pranic blockages, stretch the small, less used muscles and ligaments, improve co-ordination and increase awareness.
- Helpful for arthritis, high blood pressure, pregnancy, when recovering from surgery or major illness, heart problems, obesity
- Can be practiced in sitting position but also in supine which is helpful if one is weak or has back pain.

Padanguli Naman Toe Bending

- From sitting position place the hands a little away from the body, fingertips pointing backwards so that the body is comfortable and relaxed. Inhale bringing the toes towards the body, exhaling scrunch the toes up. Continue the movement with the breath, making sure that the ankles are not moving, only the toes.



Benefits

- Stretches and relieves tension in the toes and feet.
- Helps prevent and decrease fluid retention in the feet.
- Relieves tightness and pressure that may accumulate in the feet from the excess weight being carried.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if pain in the toes.

Variations & Tips

Can be practiced from supine position or standing. In standing position one can scrunch the toes with the help of the ground, pressing the toes towards the foot and then away or one can lift the leg and practice.

Goolf Naman – Ankle Bending, Goolf Chakra – Ankle Rotations, Goolf Ghoornan - Ankle crank

1. Ankle Bending
2. Ankle Rotations
3. Ankle Crank



- **Type 1** – In sitting position place the hands by the hips with fingers facing forwards or backwards, depending on what feels most comfortable. Focus on the ankles and start with bending one ankle at a time. Inhale bringing the toes towards you and push the heel away. Exhale pointing the toes. Continue the movement, correlated with the breath, then repeat on the other side. Next practice the movement with both feet together, forward and backwards with the breath. Next practice with one foot pointed and the other the heel forward and continue the opposite movements. Try to keep the awareness on the ankles and on moving with the breath.
- **Type 2** – In sitting position inhale bringing the toes of one foot towards you. Exhaling slowly rotate the ankle bringing the foot downwards so the toes are pointed. Inhale and continue the rotation bringing the toes towards you. Continue the movement, correlated with the breath, then repeating the opposite direction and then repeat with the other foot. Next practice with both feet together, clockwise and anti-clockwise with the breath. Next take some distance between the feet and rotate the feet towards each other and then away from each other.
- **Type 3** - Bend the right leg and place the ankle just over the left thigh. Hold the foot right with the left hand, relax the ankle and slowly start rotating, with the breath. Repeat in the other direction and then with the other foot.

Benefits

- Loosens the ankle joints.
- Relieves fluid retention and improves circulation.
- Prevents leg cramps and restless legs.
- Stretches the calf muscles.
- Relieves tiredness in the legs.



Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is pain.

Variations & Tips

Can practice these movements lying down, when in bed or even sitting in a chair.

JanufalakAkarshan – Kneecap Contraction



- From sitting position inhale and contract the knees, pressing the knees downwards towards the floor and a little upwards towards the thighs. Exhale and relax the knees. Repeat up to ten times.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ligaments around the knees.
- Relieves knee pain.
- Can help to rebuild the knees.
- Strengthens the thighs and calves
- Helps prevent fluid retention and improves circulation.
- Relieves the extra pressure that is placed on the knees from the extra weight that is being carried during pregnancy.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if it causes pain.

Variations & Tips

Can practice both knees together or individually.

Janu Chakra – Knee Rotation



- From sitting position bend the right leg bringing the foot near the buttock. Wrap the arms under the thigh and lift the foot from the ground. Slowly start to rotate the lower leg, drawing a circle with the foot. Remember that the knee cannot rotate in a complete circle but will rotate in more of an oval shape. Start with a small circle and slowly increase it, keeping comfort. Make sure the back remains erect. Correlate the movement with the breath, one breath to one rotation. Repeat in the other direction and then with the left leg.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ligaments around the knees.
- Can relieve knee pain.
- Can help to rebuild the knees.
- Strengthens the thighs.
- Helps prevent fluid retention and improves circulation.
- Relieves the extra pressure that is placed on the knees from the extra weight that is being carried during pregnancy.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if it causes pain.

Variations & Tips

This movement can be practiced from standing position. A chair or wall may be needed for support. It can also be practiced sitting in a chair.

JanuNaman – Knee Bending



- From sitting position bend the right leg bringing the foot near the buttock. Wrap the arms under the thigh, interlock the fingers and lift the foot from the ground. Inhaling slowly straighten the leg without putting it on the ground. Exhale and bend the knee bringing the thigh close to the body. Continue the movement with the breath. Repeat on the other side. Keep the spine erect.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ligaments around the knees.
- Can relieve knee pain.
- Can help to rebuild the knees.
- Strengthens the thighs.
- Helps prevent fluid retention and improves circulation.
- Relieves the extra pressure that is placed on the knees from the extra weight that is being carried during pregnancy.
- Gives a gentle pressure to the side of the abdomen which can help relieve gases.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if it causes pain. Avoid compression of the belly and bring the thigh a little to the side instead of pressing the belly.

Variations & Tips

This movement can be practiced sitting in a chair.

Titaliasan, ArdhaTitaliasan – Butterfly Pose, Half Butterfly Pose



- **Titaliasan**- From sitting position bend both the legs and place the soles of the feet against each other, bringing the heels as close to the body as is comfortable. Hold the feet with the hands and keep the spine erect and lengthened. Breathe normally. If this is comfortable inhale, lengthening the spine and exhaling bend forward slightly, keeping the length and pressing the forearms onto the legs if comfortable, keeping the chest open and looking forward. Inhale and straighten, Repeat as many times as desired.
- **ArdhaTitaliasan** – Bend the right leg and place the sole of the foot on the left thigh. Place the left hand on the right foot, right hand on the right knee. Inhale bringing the right knee up towards the chest, bringing it slightly out to the right to prevent compression on the belly. Exhale and bring the knee to the ground or towards the ground, wherever it comfortably reaches. Do not push the knee. Continue the movement with the breath and then repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Opens the hips and pelvic region
- Loosens and strengthens the knees
- Stretches the inner thighs
- Creates space in the pelvic region
- Prepares one to sit in meditative asanas and squatting poses
- Loosens the legs and removes tension and tightness

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if hip or knee pain. Avoid if there is strong back pain or pelvic pain.

Variations & Tips

Titaliasan can also be practiced comfortably in supine pose.

Shroni Chakra – Hip Rotation



- From sitting position bend the right leg and hold the right foot with the left hand and the right knee with the right hand. Slowly start rotating the hip, making a circle with the knee and supporting the foot. The right foot may remain on the left thigh or it may be raised above. The focus is on the movement of the hip. Practice one rotation with one breath and continue the movement as many times as desired and then repeat in the opposite direction. Repeat with the left leg.

Benefits

- Loosens the hips and pelvic region.
- Prepares one for meditative asanas and squatting.

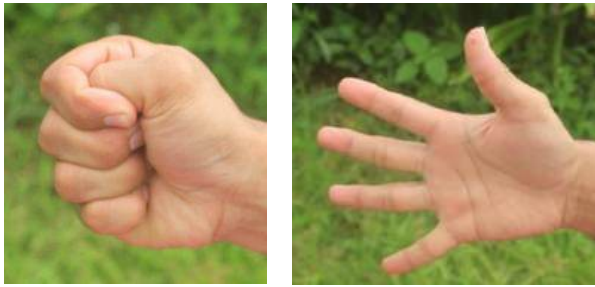
Precautions & Contra-indications

Take care if there is any hip pain.

Variations & Tips

This movement can also be done in supine position and also in standing.

Mushtika Bandhan – Hand Clenching



- From a sitting position raise the arms in front of the chest. Inhaling open the hands as much as you can, separating the fingers. Exhale and clench the hands together, making fists. Continue the movement with the breath as many times as desired.

Benefits

- Stretches the hands, wrists and forearms.
- Removes tension in the hands.
- Can help to remove and prevent fluid retention.
- Helps prevent carpal tunnel syndrome, common in pregnancy.
- Good for shaky hands
- MS
- Parkinsons Disease

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if pain in the wrists or hands.

Variations & Tips

Can be practiced sitting, supine or standing.

Kehuni Chakra – Elbow Rotation



- Stretch the left arm out in front of the body. Bend the arm, supporting the elbow with the right hand. Let the left hand be in a gentle fist or open. Slowly start rotating the lower part of the arm by rotating the elbow joint. The upper arm remains stable. Rotate clockwise and then anticlockwise, inhaling as the arm moves up and exhaling as the arm moves downward. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Loosens the elbow joint.
- Beneficial for tennis elbow.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if it causes any pain.

Variations & Tips

Instead of supporting the elbow the hand can support the upper arm if there is a tendency to move the upper arm. If it remains difficult the elbow can be supported on a chair in front of the person.

Pawanmuktasan Series 2 – Digestive/Abdominal Group

1. Padotthanasana – Raised Legs Pose – see therapeutic asanas (Uttanpadasan)
 2. Padachakrasana – Leg Rotations – see Pada Sanchalan – Leg Movements
 3. Pada Sanchalanasana - Cycling – see Pada Sanchalan – Leg Movements
 4. Supta Pawanmuktasana – Leg Lock Pose/Gas Release Pose – see therapeutic asanas (Pawanmuktasan)
 5. Jhulana Lurhakanasana - Rocking and Rolling
 6. Supta Udarakarshanasana – Sleeping Abdominal Stretch Pose – see Janu Sanchalan – Knee Movement 2
 7. Shava Udarakarshanasana - Universal Spinal Twist
 8. Naukasana –Boat Pose
- Useful to strengthen the digestion, improve metabolism, stimulate the digestive fire, strengthen the lower back and abdominal muscles.
 - Helpful for gases, poor digestion or absorption, constipation, acidity, diabetes, sluggishness of the digestive organs, reproductive system, appetite, varicose veins, leg cramps, restless legs and energy blockages.
 - These practices can be quite difficult for many due to the strong effect on the core muscles. One should take care not to overdo it, there should be comfort and breaks as needed.
 - These practices also stir up the emotions and can help to release anger and frustration. They work on Manipur chakra.

Jhulana Lurhakanasana - Rocking and Rolling



- From pawanmuktasan inhale and exhaling roll to the side. Inhale up and exhale to the other side. Continue a few rounds. Then inhale and exhale lifting the body up and forward, inhaling back. Continue a few rounds. Let the movement be controlled with the breath.

Benefits

- Loosens and massages the back
- Massages the buttocks and hips
- Refreshes and awakens the body
- Good warm up for the spine

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if it causes any pain. Practice with awareness.

Variations & Tips

Place the hands behind the knees if it's difficult to roll up as this allows the legs to straighten slightly which helps with the momentum.

Shava Udakarshanasana - Universal Spinal Twist



- From supine position bring the arms away from the body, shoulder level and with the palms facing down. Bend the left leg and place the foot on the knee. Place the right hand on the left knee and slowly bring the left knee downwards the ground, if possible, resting the knee on the ground. Turn the head to the left side. Breathe normally. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits

- Tones the spinal nerves
- Removes back pain
- Gentle stretch to the abdominal region, improving digestion
- Removes gases
- Tones reproductive organs
- Revitalises the back

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is severe back pain, recent abdominal surgery or pregnancy.

Variations & Tips

If one finds it uncomfortable to have the palm facing down keep it up.
Cushions or pillows can be used under the knee to make it more comfortable.
Try to keep the shoulders on the ground to increase the twist.

Naukasana –Boat Pose



- From supine position hold the breath and lift the legs, head, shoulders, arms and upper back off the ground. Try not to raise too high. The palms face down, the gaze is on the toes. Exhale and release the body back to the ground. Practice a few more times.

Benefits

- Strengthens the core muscles and lower back.
- Revitalises the body and removes tension.
- Is helpful to do after difficult positions or when the body is tired, especially followed by shvasan.
- Increases deeper relaxation when done before shvasan.
-

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is back pain, pregnancy, recent abdominal surgery or hernia.

Variations & Tips

There are many variations to this position. See Naukasana in intermediate asanas for more information.

Pawanmuktasana Series 3 – Shakti Bandhas – Energy Blocks

1. Raju Karshanasana – Pulling the Rope
 2. Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasana - Dynamic Spinal Twist
 3. Chakki Chalanasana – Churning the Mill
 4. Nauka Sanchalanasana – Rowing the Boat
 5. Kashtha Takshanasana – Chopping Wood
 6. Namaskarasana – Salutation Pose
 7. Vayu Nishkasana – Wind Releasing Pose
 8. Kauva Chalasana – Crow Walking
 9. Udarakarshanasana – Abdominal Stretch Pose
- Useful to strengthen and release tension in the upper back, spine, chest and pelvic region. It improves the prana flow, removing blockages. Gives a massaging effect on the heart and lungs, tones the reproductive organs and helps to balance the endocrine system.
 - Helpful for menstrual disorders, poor posture, upper back and neck tension, post natal toning and conception preparation.
 - Some of these practices are fairly strong on the hips, knees and ankles so extra care should be taken.

RajjuKarshanasana – Pulling the Rope



- From sitting position separate the legs slightly to a comfortable distance. Place the hands on the knees and have the thumbs facing upwards. Imagine there is a rope hanging down in front of you. Inhale slowly raise the right arm up, as if trying to reach for the rope and exhaling slowly bring the rope back down, keeping some tension in the arm as you do so. Practice with the left arm and repeat as many times as desired. Also incorporate the eyes by following the hand with the eyes but keeping the head in the same position.

Benefits

- Loosens the upper back, shoulders and chest which is helpful during breastfeeding.
- Strengthens the arms and shoulders
- Strengthens the eyes
- Removes upper back tension

Precautions & Contra-indications

Take care that sitting in this position is comfortable and not stressful for the lower back.

Variations & Tips

- Sit against the wall if needed or even in a chair.
- Bend the knees if needed or sit in a cross leg position.

Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasan – Dynamic Spinal Twist



- From sitting position spread the legs a few feet apart, you may have to adjust the legs later. Inhale raising the arms from the sides and exhale bringing the right hand to the left foot or shin. Try to keep the arms in a straight line with the chest open. If the arms are not in a straight line then adjust the legs, bringing them closer together. Inhale turning back to the front with the arms up by the side then exhale to the right side. Continue the movement, correlated with the breath, as many times as is comfortable.

Benefits

- Stretches, twists and loosens the spine.
- Creates space in the pelvic region and loosens the area.
- Opens the hips.
- Stretches the inner thighs, hamstrings and calves, Can help to relieve mild back pain for some people, particularly between the shoulder blades.
- Opens the chest which is helpful during breastfeeding.

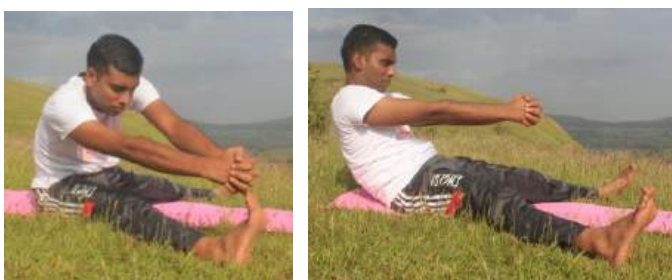
Precautions & Contra-indications

If there is strong back pain, pelvic pain or sciatica then take care and see if this pose is helpful. If it is uncomfortable then avoid. Avoid after 6 months of pregnancy when it can get a little stressful and the belly may start to get compressed.

Variations & Tips

Vary the positioning of the legs to maximise the twist in the spine and the opening of the chest. Vary the speed.

ChakkiChalan – Grinding the Mill



- From sitting position spread the legs apart as far as is comfortable. Interlock the fingers in front of the chest with the arms straight. Inhale and exhaling bend forward as far as is comfortable. Slowly bend towards the

right foot and then, inhaling bring the body back. As you exhale continue moving towards the left foot and then back to the front. Continue the circular movement with the breath, making one rotation with each breath. Make the circle as large as you feel comfortable with. Try to keep the chest open, avoiding bending the back. The arms remain straight and the legs remain fixed and stable on the mat. Practice a few rounds in the opposite direction.

Benefits

- Helps to strengthen the lower back and abdominal muscles.
- Creates space in the pelvic region and loosens the area.
- Opens the hips.
- Stretches the inner thighs and legs.
- Helpful in postnatal recovery to tone the whole area.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is back or pelvic pain. Extra care should be taken in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Variations & Tips

Adjust the amount of space between the legs for a slightly different effect. Experiment with very small rotations that can be more comfortable and loosening than the larger circles. Bend the knees slightly or place a cushion below the buttock to support the back.

Naukasanchalan – Rowing the Boat



- From sitting position imagine you are about to row a boat. Clench the hands as if you are holding the oars. Inhale and whilst exhaling bend forward towards the toes, straightening the arms. Inhale bringing the hands back towards the chest and tilting back slightly. Continue the circular movement with the breath and then repeat in the opposite direction.

Benefits

- Helps to strengthen the lower back and abdominal muscles.
- Loosens the pelvis
- Opens the hips.
- Tones the spinal nerves and removes stiffness.
- Helps remove congestion – blood, energy, lymph.
- Helps remove trapped gases.
- Helpful for constipation and digestive problems.
- Helps with menstrual problems.
- Helpful in postnatal recovery to tone the whole area.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been recent abdominal surgery, during pregnancy, hernia, back pain or sciatica.

Variations & Tips

Bend the legs to relieve the pressure on the back.

Kashtha Takshanasana – Chopping Wood



- Come to a squatting position with the feet apart and flat on the ground. Interlock the fingers together and have the arms straight between the knees. Inhale raising the arms up, stretching the spine and exhaling make the sound on “ha” and bring the arms down fairly fast, taking care not to hit the floor. Whilst doing this visualize that you are chopping wood and feel that with each movement you are removing any mental tensions.

Benefits

- Releases upper back tension, especially between the shoulder blades.
- Strengthens the pelvic region.
- Prepares one for meditative asanas.
- Strengthens and loosens the shoulders.
- Makes the body feel light and also lightens the mood, removing tensions in the mind.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been recent abdominal surgery, during pregnancy, hernia, back pain or sciatica. Avoid if there is pain in the knees, hips or ankles.

Variations & Tips

Bend the legs to relieve the pressure on the back.

Namaskarasan – Salutation Pose



- From sitting position bend both the knees, supporting the body with the fingertips and come onto the toes. Spread the legs apart and come into a squatting position. Take as much distance as needed to bring the feet onto the ground. Turn the toes out if it is more comfortable to squat in this way. If needed roll up a blanket to place under the heels so the position can be maintained. Bring the palms together in

namaskar. Inhale, looking up, opening the chest and pressing the upper arms against the inner sides of the knees. Exhale and round the upper back, looking down and pressing the knees against the upper arms but avoiding compressing the belly. Continue the movement with the breath as many times as is comfortable.

Benefits

- Opens and creates space in the pelvic region.
- Helpful for indigestion, flatulence and constipation.
- Stretches, strengthens and loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Stretches the calf muscles and thighs, preventing cramps and restless legs.
- Prepares the body for birth and is a useful position for labour and birth.
- Helps to put the baby into the correct position for birth.
- Loosens the upper back, shoulders and neck and removes tension.

Precautions & Contra-indications

This pose can be very strong and stressful for many people, especially those not used to squatting or sitting on the ground. If there is pain in the hips, knees or ankles then avoid this position. Instead practice more simple movements to loosen the hips and knees for some time before attempting this pose. Avoid in the first trimester of pregnancy. Extra care should be taken in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Variations & Tips

- Squatting stools can be used as an alternative to the full position. Also using the wall to support the back can be helpful or holding onto something in front of the body, such as a bed, can be beneficial.
- Remember that some people can naturally squat but many people cannot. It can take years of practice to be able to squat comfortably, don't put pressure on yourself to be able to squat, just take it easy and do variations. Listen to your body.

Vayu Nishkasan –Wind Releasing Pose



- From standing position bring the feet hip width distance apart, or a little more if needed, with the toes pointing slightly outward. Exhaling bend forward and place the fingertips under the arches of the feet. Inhaling come into a squatting position, pressing the upper arms against the knees, opening the chest and looking upward. Exhaling come back into the standing forward bend. Continue the movement with the breath as many times as desired.

Benefits

- Opens and creates space in the pelvic region
- Stretches, strengthens and loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Stretches the calf muscles and thighs, preventing cramps and restless legs.
- Prepares the body for birth and squatting for longer periods of time.
- Helps to put the baby into the correct position for birth.
- Loosens the upper back, shoulders and neck and removes tension.
- Stretches the spine.
- Helps to relieve gases and constipation.

Precautions & Contra-indications

This pose can be very strong and stressful for many people, especially those not used to squatting. If there is pain in the hips, knees, pelvis or ankles then avoid this position. Instead practice more simple movements to loosen the hips and knees for some time before attempting this movement. Avoid if there is strong back pain, sciatica, high or low blood pressure. Extra care should be taken in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Variations & Tips

- If difficult to straighten the legs with the hands under the feet then keep the legs slightly bent or hold the shins. If you cannot squat with the heels on the ground then keep the heels slightly up or practice on a rolled up blanket.

Kauva Chalasana – Crow Walking



- Come to a squatting position with the feet apart. Place the palms on the knees and take a small step with one leg, keeping the buttock close to the heel. One can lift the heels so one can walk on the toes. There should be a gentle pressure of the lower abdomen against the thigh. Continue the walking.

Benefits

- Opens and creates space in the pelvic region
- Stretches, strengthens and loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Stretches the calf muscles and thighs, preventing cramps and restless legs.
- Helps to relieve gases and constipation.
- Improves circulation to the legs.
- Tones the reproductive organs.
- Preparation for meditative asanas.
- Helps remove constipation.
- This is one of the asanas used in Shankarprakashan, the master cleanse.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is pain in the back, hips, knees or ankles.

Variations & Tips

- If one has knee pain the variation for this, if practicing the master cleanse, is to do the half gas release pose with the head on the ground, practicing repetitions, like a movement.

Udarakarshanasana – Abdominal Stretch Pose



- Come to a squatting position with the feet well apart. Place the palms on the knees, inhale and whilst exhaling bring the left knee down towards the right foot and press the right leg against the left. Look over the right shoulder to maximize the twist. Inhale release the legs back up and exhale repeat on the left side. Continue to repeat.

Benefits

- Stretches, strengthens and loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Stretches the calf muscles and thighs, preventing cramps and restless legs.
- Helps to relieve gases and constipation.
- Improves circulation to the legs.
- Tones the reproductive organs.
- Preparation for meditative asanas.
- Helps improve the digestive organs due to the compression and stretching which improves circulation and removes toxins.
- Removes constipation.
- Loosens the spine.
- This is one of the asanas used in Shankarprakashalan, the master cleanse.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is pain in the back, hips, knees or ankles.

Variations & Tips

- The variation for this is to practice knee movement type 2 in supine position. It takes the pressure off the back and joints.
- Can be practiced against a wall.

Supine

Anantasan – Lord Vishnu Pose

Anant – Vishnu

1. Legs together
2. Upper leg bent, foot on thigh
3. Holding foot/leg with hand
4. Bent leg and arm wrapped
5. Raised leg without support
6. Raised Leg and arm



From supine position slowly roll to the left side.

Type 1 - Bend the left arm and support the head. Place the legs together. Support and maintain balance of the body with the help on the right arm placed in front of the chest. Relax and try to keep the body in one line without bending forwards or backwards.



Type 2 – Slowly bend the upper leg and place it on the lower thigh, inner knee or calf, depending where it is comfortable. Maintain balance and focus on relaxing.



Type 3 – Bend the upper leg and hold the toes or ankle. Maintaining balance slowly extend the leg until it is straight. If you cannot hold the toes with the leg straight then hold the calf.



Type 4 – Bend the upper leg and wrap the arm around the leg, gently bringing the leg towards the upper body.



Type 5 – Slowly raise the upper leg as high as it is comfortable. You may maintain the position or practice it as a movement, inhaling as you raise the leg, exhaling lowering.



Type 6 –As you inhale slowly raise the upper arm and leg as high as is comfortable whilst trying to lengthen the arm and leg, exhaling lower the leg and arm. This can be repeated a few times if comfortable.

Anatomical focus

Varies depending on the type but on all should focus on the lower back and abdominal muscles.

Awareness

Maintaining balance and keeping the body in one line.

Do's

Balance the body on one side.

Don'ts.

Tilt forward or backwards

Raise the legs so that there is trembling.

Benefits

- Helps to strengthen the core muscles of the abdomen and the lower back.
- Gives a nice stretch to the neck.
- Types 2 and 4 in particular are helpful when there is pain in the lower back, especially from nerve compression. Type 2 is especially helpful to maintain for longer periods of time.
- Types 3, 5 and 6 stretch the inner thigh, tone and strengthen the legs
- Type 6 strengthens and tones the arms.

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region on a physical and pranic level.
- Removes pressure that can build up in the pelvis.
- Leg strengthening is preparation for labour
- Menstrual back pain
- Pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain (Types 1, 2)
- Neck Pain (Types 1, 2)
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications

It is not necessary to practice all of them and later types are not better or more advanced than the earlier types. They all have their own individual benefits. Start with type 1. If that feels good and balance is not difficult then practice type 2 as well. Remember that stability and comfort should always be there. If one type is too strong then take another option.

If there is back pain then be especially careful and practice 1, 2 and, if comfortable, type 4.

Duration

Can be held for up to a minute over time, on each side.

Variations and tips

If there is discomfort in the stretch to the neck then keep the head on the lower arm.

If balance is difficult then keep the lower leg bent.

Type 3 is more difficult and can be considered an intermediate asana.

Preparatory Poses

Type 1 Anantasan is preparation for the others.

Moon Pose

Leg Movements

Follow Up Poses

Vashishtasan

Side plank

Ardha Chakrasana Type 1, 2, 3 – Half Wheel Pose

Ardha – Half

Chakra – Wheel

1. Hips raised
2. One leg straight
3. One leg straight and heel raised



- From supine position bend both the legs bringing the heels near the buttocks. Keep the feet hip width distance to start. Bring the arms over the head and hold the elbows. Alternatively rest the arms over the head or keep the arms down by the sides.

Type 1 - Exhale and inhaling slowly raise the hips so that there is a straight line from the shoulders to the knees. If this is the only type to be done then one can raise the hips higher if desired. Stay in this position, breathing normally or exhale and lower the hips down gently.



If type 1 was comfortable you can move to type 2.

Type 2 – Keep the feet closer together. After lifting the hips slowly extend one leg and point the toes. Try to keep a straight line from the shoulder to the toes. Keep the knees together for support. Breathe normally and maintain for as long as it is comfortable. Repeat on the other leg.



Type 3 – to be practiced only if type 2 was comfortable. From type 2 slowly lift the heel. Maintain balance and breathe normally. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Back, hips, pelvis, buttocks, legs, toes.

Awareness

On the stretch from the shoulders to the toes and on keeping the face, arms and breath relaxed.

Do's

Lift the waist to make a straight line.

Keep the knees together

Relax the face and arms.

Don'ts.

Drop the waist or lift the waist up too high

Raise the leg too far, separating the knees.

Come into the full position unless the body is comfortable.

Benefits

- Strengthens and tones the pelvic, hip and buttock region plus the calves, thighs, lower back, abdomen and ankles.
- Reduces lower back pain
- Increases flexibility in the back
- Strengthens spine and helps to realign the spine, which can be beneficial if there is sciatica.
- Massages and stretches the colon and abdominal organs which improves digestion.

Benefits for Women

- Useful post natally to tone the entire pelvic region.
- Can help to prevent miscarriage
- Removes pelvic congestion
- The muscles of the pelvis are strengthened due to the strain due of the gravitational force and all the organs are toned.
- Tones the female reproductive organs and can be useful for menstrual disorders

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain
- Obesity
- Digestive problems
- Menstrual problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Extra care should be taken if there is back pain. It is preferable to practice type 1 only if there is pain as this will help to relieve it. Practicing a few repetitions will be of greatest benefit.

It is not necessary to practice all types but to remain stable and comfortable.

If the blood pressure is high this asana should be avoided.

This asana is best practiced up to the 6th month of pregnancy, if comfortable. After that extra care should be taken and particular awareness on making sure there is no dizziness. It is best to avoid type 2 and 3 after the first 6 months. Avoid all types in the 9th month when the baby is positioning itself for birth as this is a partial inversion. If there is heartburn at the time of practicing then avoid this pose as it may exacerbate the effect. Avoid if there are heart problems, recent abdominal surgery or headache at the time.

Duration

Up to one minute over time.

Variations and tips

Remember the stages and go with the flow.

A nice addition to this asana is to incorporate the pelvic floor exercises. So when raising the hips apply moola bandha and release on exhalation.

Preparatory Poses

Type one is preparation for 2 and 3

Leg and knee movements

Follow Up Poses

Kandharasan

Chakrasan

Matsya Kreedasan – Flapping Fish Pose



Taking the position

From supine position slowly roll to one side. Bring the arms up near the head and bend the upper leg so the knee is comfortably resting on the ground. Curve the back slightly so the elbow nearest the upper leg is close to the knee. It is not necessary that the elbow be touching, there may be 1-2 feet distance.

The Asana position

This is a relaxation pose so position the body to how it feels most comfortable. The head can rest on the hands or on the ground. Close the eyes and relax. Shavasana type instructions may be practiced.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the hands back down by the sides and the legs together in the prone position.

Anatomical focus

On every body part, particularly any stressed parts such as the lower back.

Awareness

On the whole body and normal breathing

Do

- Keep the mind focused on relaxing. If thoughts come do not stress about them but let them pass.
- Keep the spine in a straight line.
- Avoid moving the body parts as even the slightest movement will use many muscles and increase the nerve impulses.
- Keep the eyes closed.

Don't

- Go to sleep, let the mind wander or move the body.

Benefits

- Full body relaxation.
- Helps relieve back pain, particular sciatica.
- Brings the respiration and heart rate to normal.

- Relaxation of entire nervous system, body and mind.
- Relieves stress on the body and mind.
- Removes disturbing thoughts and tensions.
- Relaxes the muscles which lead to a decrease in the demand for blood and oxygen, giving the circulatory and respiratory systems a break.
- Rejuvenates the body and mind.
- Removes stress and fatigue.
- Improves the functioning of the brain.

Benefits for Women

- This asana is a close as a pregnant women can get to resting on her belly and may be the natural position that she sleeps in.
- Good alternative to shavasan, when lying on the back is uncomfortable during pregnancy or in the second half of pregnancy when shavasan is not recommended.
- A nice position in which to practice yoga nidra when pregnant.
- Useful as a sleeping position for pregnancy and if there is strong menstrual pain.
- Relieves menstrual back pain.

Therapeutic Applications

- Beneficial for all stress related ailments
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Sciatica and slipped disc
- Lower back pain
- Menstrual pain

Precautions & Contra-indications

Alternate the side so that there will be benefit on both sides of the back.

Variations & Tips

Use pillows as needed. One may need a pillow under the chest, head or knee.

Preparatory Poses

Generally this pose is practiced after prone position asanas as it is in the prone position but it can be practiced at any time.

Follow Up Poses

None needed.

Shavasana - Corpse Pose

This asana is known as Shavasana or Corpse Pose as it looks like a dead body. This asana is one of the easiest asanas to get into but the most difficult to practice. It is one of the best relaxation poses and if practiced correctly and with full efforts, can relax every body part, relaxing not only the body but also the mind.



Taking the asana position

Spread the legs one to two feet apart, the toes are turned outwards, the heels facing each other, a comfortable distance apart. Bring the arms a little away from the body, palms turned upward. Relax the neck and allow it to turn to the side if it is more comfortable. Close the eyes and focus the attention on the body, breathing normally. Begin focusing each body part and relaxing it, then moving on. Keep the mind focused on relaxation, the breath should be normal. Relax the whole body.

The asana position

This asana looks very simple to practice but is actually highly difficult. To keep the body in a corpse like state is the external position and is not so important. What is important, and lies in the success of this asana is keeping the mind focused on relaxing every body part. To be able to do this the body needs to be in a comfortable, soothing position and state. In each position of the body there is a kind of strain or pressure on every muscle, called tone. The aim of this asana is to reduce this strain and give the muscles the real rest and relaxation that they need. All the muscles cannot be relaxed immediately after taking the shavasana position, therefore one has to relax each muscle with great deliberation. One has to pacify and relax the mind, freeing it from thoughts, worries and ideas. One has to think of each and every body part (the amount of detail will depend on the time available) and relax it, from the crown of the head to the toes. The direction of relaxation can vary from crown to toes or from the right hand, to right foot and then left hand to left foot, finishing with the back and head. The mind and body are deeply connected. If the mind is occupied by thoughts and worries then the shavasana will be unsuccessful. Therefore one has to acquire the stability of the mind along with the stability of the body.

When one first goes into the asana the motor neurons that innervate the skeletal muscles are still firing nerve impulses. As the breath becomes more regular and relaxed the nerve impulses slowly begin to drop. The rhythmical movement of the respiratory diaphragm leads to deeper relaxation and eventually even the nerve impulses to the deep postural muscles of the torso are minimised.

After taking the position first attempt to free the mind from thoughts and worries and concentrate on the body. Then concentrate on each body part, relaxing it. After relaxing the whole body turn the mind to the direction of the breath. Do not allow the mind to control the breath but let it be slow and relaxed. The more the body relaxes, the slower the breath will become. In the final position the whole body is completely relaxed, the breath is very slow and the mind is stable and quiet.

Releasing the asana position

First one should prepare one's mind for releasing the asana. Make small movements of the fingers and toes. Straighten the neck. Bring the arms back next to the sides. Bring the legs together and open the eyes.

Anatomical focus

On every body part.

Awareness

On relaxing every body part, relaxed breathing.

Do's

- Keep the mind focused on relaxing. If thoughts come do not stress about them but let them pass.
- Keep the spine in a straight line.
- Avoid moving the body parts as even the slightest movement will use many muscles and increase the nerve impulses.
- Keep the eyes closed.

Don'ts

- Go to sleep, let the mind wander or move the body.
- Wear tight fitting clothing.

Benefits

- Right from the time of conception to the time of death innumerable processes continue operating incessantly inside the human body. Even when the body seems quiet or asleep these processes do not stop. It can be said that the relaxation of the body depends upon the scale of slowness of these operations, therefore an attempt is made to slow down these internal operations.
- Every activity inside the body needs oxygen, supplied through blood circulation. When we need more oxygen the circulation is increased which leads to an increase in respiration. In Shavasana an attempt is made to break this cycle by slowing down the speed of activities in the body. By practicing this asana the internal operations slow down, slowing the breath and therefore pacifying the mind. A new cycle is formed.
- Leads to a relaxed mind which allows you to see and relate to the world in a more realistic light, be more efficient in work and bring more happiness into life.
- Integrates the feeling of relaxation into the conscious and unconscious awareness.
- Relaxation of entire nervous system, body and mind.
- Relieves stress on the body and mind.
- Removes disturbing thoughts and tensions.
- Relaxes the muscles which lead to a decrease in the demand for blood and oxygen, giving the circulatory and respiratory systems a break.
- Beneficial for all stress related ailments.
- Rejuvenates the body and mind.
- Removes stress and fatigue.
- Improves the functioning of the brain.
- Decreases high blood pressure.
- Useful for preventing and improving heart complaints.
- When the body is relaxed the awareness of the mind increases and this leads to the development of pratyahara.
- Can be used for insomnia.

Benefits for Women

The benefits of shavasana cover the whole body but there are also some benefits especially for women.

- Shavasana can be very useful during menstruation as it gives a deep relaxation to the muscles and also to the mind. If a woman is feeling tearful, angry, irritable, tired or just plain stressed Shavasana will help. It will give the peace and calm needed by relaxing the muscles, focusing the mind and getting rid of any anxieties or worries. Shavasana can also help if there is any lower back or pelvic pain. By focusing on the stressed parts the women can relax the area and relieve the pain.
- During pregnancy it is a great practice to do at any time of the day, especially if feeling tired or emotional.
- Irregularities in the menstrual cycle are often indicative of a larger problem. Shavasana helps to rebalance the body and relaxes every body system.
- It is beneficial for emotional disturbances, stress, anger, depression and frustration, redirecting the energy and giving a feeling of calmness and freshness.

Therapeutic applications

- All stress related diseases
- Fatigue
- High blood pressure
- Heart complaints
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Insomnia

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid going to sleep as this will prevent the decrease in nerve impulses as well as the deep relaxation.

Duration

There is no time duration as it is a relaxation pose. It should be practiced whenever the body becomes tired, before and after asanas it is necessary and also between asanas when required. It is especially necessary after dynamic asana series like surya namaskar. It may also be practiced separately during the day, when needed, after a hard days work or before going to sleep.

Variations and tips

- There should be some padding under the body and if necessary a little under the head, however the mat should not be soft as this will induce sleep. If the ground is slanted then let the head be lower, this prevents a drop in blood circulation to the brain and other vital organs. For those with lower back pain a light cushion can be placed under the lower back. Some may need a small cushion under their knees also.
- Lengthen the body a little as when the muscles relax they also lengthen. If the body is relaxed without a little stretch then the body may feel cramped a bit after the practice.
- If you are prone to low blood pressure then very slowly move from shavasana by first turning to the left side and then sitting up. This will increase the blood flow through the heart and prevent dizziness.
- If you are prone to falling asleep then keep the legs a little closer together. This will give a mild moola bandha which will prevent sleep. Either this or bring the upper extremities closer together which will give a small amount of tension. If this is not enough then focus on the breath, giving a simple inhale and exhale focus.

- For those who are not accustomed to relaxing the muscles and body many issues may arise, such as mental or psychological issues. If you cannot come to terms with these issues then you may try to avoid or be uncomfortable in this asana. To overcome this a wholistic yoga practice of asanas is needed, ideally with other yogic techniques.
- If it is consistently difficult to relax then try a sequence of tensing and then relaxing the muscles. First the arms, then the legs, then the pelvis, lower back and abdomen, followed by the chest and upper back, then the facial muscles. Finish by tensing the whole body and then relaxing. By doing this the Golgi tendon receptors stimulate relaxation.

Preparatory Poses

None required

Follow Up Poses

None required

Pawanmuktasana – Gas Release Pose

1. Ardha Sulabh Pawanmuktasan
2. Ardha Pawanmuktasan
3. Sulabh Pawanmuktasan
4. Poorna Pawanmuktasan

Pawan – Gas

Mukta – Freedom

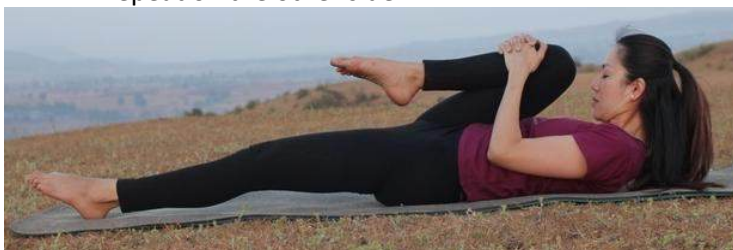
Ardha – Half

Sulabh – Easy

Poorna – Full



1. **Ardha Sulabh Pawanmuktasan** - From supine position slowly bend the right leg, hold the leg with the hands and bring it towards the chest and abdomen. Let the head remain on the ground. Breathe normally. From here one can move to the next stage or release. To release the pose release the hands and bring them down by the sides. Lower the leg back down. Repeat on the other side.



2. **Ardha Pawanmuktasan** – From ardha sulabh pawanmuktasan inhale and whilst exhaling slowly lift the head towards the knee. Breathe normally in the pose. To release inhale and whilst exhaling lower the head. Release the hands and lower the leg. Repeat on the other side.



3. **Sulabh Pawanmuktasan** – From supine position slowly bend both legs. Claps the knees with the hands and pull the thighs towards the abdomen and chest. Breathe normally. To release the pose lower the arms down and bring the legs back to the floor.



4. **Poorna Pawanmuktasan** – From sulabh pawanmuktasan inhale and whilst exhaling slowly raise the head towards the knees. Breathe normally. To release inhale and exhaling lower the head. Release the arms and lower the legs.

Anatomical focus:

Abdomen, thighs, hips, buttocks, neck, back

Awareness:

On relaxing the abdomen, thighs, hips, buttocks.
Normal breath.

Do:

Relax the body and breathe normally in the pose.

Don't:

Overstretch, trying to pull the thighs too close and causing strain.

Benefits:

- The abdominal muscles are tensed and the internal organs are compressed which increases the blood circulation and stimulates the nerves, increasing the efficiency of the internal organs.
- The pressure on the abdomen releases any trapped gases in the large intestine.
- Blood circulation is increased to all the internal organs.
- Digestive system is improved.
- Relieves constipation.
- Strengthens the lower back muscles and loosens the spinal vertebrae.
- It is good to practice this pose on waking as it stimulates bowel movements.

Benefits for Women

- Massages the pelvic muscles and reproductive organs and is beneficial for menstrual problems

Therapeutic applications:

Flatulence
Constipation
Menstrual disorders
Sterility
Impotence

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Must be avoided if there is recent abdominal surgery as there is a lot of pressure on the abdomen. Anyone suffering from hernia or piles should avoid this asana. Pregnant women should not practice this asana but can do a variation with legs apart and the head should stay on the ground.

Duration:

Up to one minute

Variations and tips:

Pregnancy variation with legs apart

Preparatory poses:

Ardha Sulabh Pawanmuktasan prepares one for Sulabh Pawanmuktasan
Sulabh Pawanmuktasan prepares one for poorna pawanmuktasan

Follow up poses:

Knee movement 2
Shashankasan

Supta Pawanmuktasan – Reclining Gas Release Pose

Supta – Sleeping
Pawan – Gas
Mukta – Freedom



Taking the asana position

Bring the mat close to the wall and then shuffle the body as close as possible to the wall. Bring the buttocks next to the wall and raise the legs up so that the wall supports them. Bend the knees and place the feet on the wall. Relax the arms by the side and breathe normally

The asana position

Maintain the pose for as long as is comfortable. Here there is a gentle pressure of the thighs against the abdomen. How much pressure will depend on flexibility.

Releasing the asana position

From the position one can slowly roll to the side and with the support of the hands come back to the sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, thighs, hips, lower back.

Awareness

The gentle pressure on the abdomen.

Do's

Place the feet on the wall close to the buttocks if possible.
Relax the arms by the sides.

Don'ts.

Keep the body far away from the wall. Make sure you are as close as possible before raising the legs up.

Benefits

- Benefits are the same as with the normal pawanmuktasan but at a more relaxed level. One may find they can maintain this pose for a little bit longer comfortably. It is a more gentle version with less pressure being put onto the body.
- Trapped gases are relieved which can increase during pregnancy when digestion is not always as efficient.
- Blood circulation is increased to all the internal organs which in turn benefits the baby.
- Relieves constipation.
- Strengthens the lower back muscles and loosens the spinal vertebrae.
- Helpful for relieving back pain.
- Opens the hips.

Benefits for Women

- Massages the pelvic muscles and opens the pelvic region.
- Useful asana for pregnancy.
- Helpful for menstrual back pain, especially with the legs apart.

Therapeutic Applications

Back pain
Digestive problems

Precautions & Contra-indications

If pregnant and lying on the back is uncomfortable or there is dizziness then avoid this asana. Avoid if recent abdominal surgery.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable, up to 5 or even 10 minutes.

Variations & Tips

Many other positions can be practiced from here. Make sure the buttocks are as close to the wall as possible before raising the legs.

Can be practiced when pregnant with some distance between the feet so that there is no compression on the belly

Preparatory Poses

Supta Uttanpadasan

Follow Up Poses

Supta Ugrasan

Supta Titaliasan

Supta Ugrasan – Reclining Ferocious Pose

Supta – Sleeping

Ugra – Ferocious



Taking the asana position

Bring the mat close to the wall and then shuffle the body as close as possible to the wall. Bring the buttocks next to the wall and raise the legs up so that the wall supports them. Bring the mat close to the wall and then shuffle the body as close as possible to the wall. Slowly separate the legs as far apart as is comfortable. Rest the arms by the side or bring the arms up over the head. Breathe normally and maintain the position for as long as is comfortable.

The asana position

Maintain the pose for as long as is comfortable. Here there is a gentle opening of the hips and a stretch in the inner thighs.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly bring the legs together again and gently roll to the side and using the support of the hands come back up to a sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Inner thighs, hips, lower back.

Awareness

Gentle opening of the pelvis.

Do's

Spread the legs apart only as far as is comfortable.

Relax the arms by the sides.

Don'ts.

Keep the body far away from the wall. Make sure you are as close as possible before raising the legs up.

Benefits

- Creates more space in the abdominal region.
- Opens the hips.
- Drains impure blood from the legs and improves circulation.
- Helps to prevent leg cramps and restless legs.
- Stretches the inner thighs and groin region.
- Gives a rest to the heart.
- Restores energy.
- Can help to relieve nausea.

Benefits for Women

- Massages the pelvic muscles and opens the pelvic region.
- Useful asana for pregnancy.
- Removes congestion.
- Helps prevent water retention in the ankles during pregnancy.
- Good alternative to inversions during menstruation.

Therapeutic Applications

Menstrual problems

Leg cramps

Precautions & Contra-indications

If lying on the back is uncomfortable or there is dizziness then avoid this asana. Avoid if there is sciatica, symphysis pubis pain, sacro iliac pain or any pelvic pain. This pose puts a little bit of stress on the knees when held for a long time. So experiment and keep releasing the pose to check that there is no strain to the knees.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable, up to 5 or even 10 minutes over time.

Variations & Tips

Many other positions can be practiced from here. Make sure the buttocks are as close to the wall as possible before raising the legs.

Preparatory Poses

Supta Uttanpadasan

Follow Up Poses

Supta Pawanmuktasan

Supta Titaliasan

Supta Titaliasan – Reclining Butterfly Pose

Supta – Sleeping

Titali – Butterfly



Taking the asana position

From supine position slowly bend the legs and place the soles of the feet together, bringing the heels as close to the body as is comfortable. Rest the arms over the head or if preferred, down by the side. Breathe normally and maintain the position for as long as is comfortable.

Alternatively bring the mat close to the wall and then shuffle the body as close as possible to the wall. Bring the buttocks next to the wall and raise the legs up so that the wall supports them. From there place the soles of the feet together and relax.

The asana position

Maintain the pose for as long as is comfortable. This position puts less stress on the back and not such a strong stretch into the pelvic region.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly straighten the legs. If doing the wall one slowly roll to the side and with the support of the hands come back up to a sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Inner thighs, hips, lower back.

Awareness

Gentle opening of the pelvis.

Do's

Place the soles of the feet together.

The heels are as close to the body as is comfortable.

Relax the arms.

Don'ts.

Keep the body far away from the wall. Make sure you are as close as possible before raising the legs up if doing that variation.

Benefits

- Opens the hips.
- Stretches the inner thighs and groin region.
- Prepares one for the stronger asanas such as squatting.
- Relaxing, soothing and energising.

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region and removes congestion.
- Creates more space in the abdominal region.
- Good alternative to contraindicated asanas during menstruation.
- Helpful for menstrual pain when practiced gently.

Therapeutic Applications

Menstrual problems

Menstrual pain

Precautions & Contra-indications

If lying on the back is uncomfortable or there is dizziness then avoid this asana. Instead it can be practiced from sitting position.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable, up to 5 or even 10 minutes over time.

Variations & Tips

Pillows and/or bolsters can be used for this position, especially if lying on the back is uncomfortable. One or two bolsters can be used to lift the upper body up to a 45 degree angle. This can create a more relaxed position that can be maintained for longer. Adjust the heels closer or away from the groin, depending on how much stretch is desired.

From the alternate position many other positions can be practiced. Make sure the buttocks are as close to the wall as possible before raising the legs.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Titaliasan

Titaliasan

Supta Uttanpadasan

Follow Up Poses

Supta Pawanmuktasan

Supta Ugrasan

Supta Vajrasan

Supta Uttanpadasan – Reclining Raised Leg Pose

Supta – Sleeping

Uttan – Raised

Pada – Legs



Taking the asana position

Bring the mat close to the wall and then shuffle the body as close as possible to the wall. Bring the buttocks next to the wall and raise the legs up so that the wall supports them. Let the legs be together or slightly apart. Rest the arms by the side or bring the arms up over the head.

The asana position

Breathe normally and maintain the position for as long as is comfortable.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly roll to the side and using the support of the hands come back up to a sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, legs.

Awareness

Relaxing the legs.

Do's

Relax the legs.

Relax the arms by the sides.

Don'ts.

Keep the body far away from the wall. Make sure you are as close as possible before raising the legs up.

Benefits

- Restores energy.
- Drains impure blood from the legs and improves circulation.
- Helps to prevent leg cramps and restless legs.
- Gives a rest to the heart.
- Relaxing, soothing and energising.

Benefits for Women

- Useful asana for pregnancy when inversions are not recommended.
- Helps prevent water retention in the ankles during pregnancy.
- Good alternative to inversions during menstruation.

Therapeutic Applications

Varicose veins
Leg cramps
Restless legs

Precautions & Contra-indications

If lying on the back is uncomfortable or there is dizziness then avoid this asana.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable, up to 5 or even 10 minutes over time.

Variations & Tips

Many other positions can be practiced from here. Make sure the buttocks are as close to the wall as possible before raising the legs.

Preparatory Poses

Supta Uttanpadasan

Follow Up Poses

Supta Pawanmuktasan
Supta Titaliasan

Tadagasana – Pond Pose

Tadag – pond

In this position the abdomen is relaxed and falls slightly making a pond shape.



Taking the asana position

Bend both the legs bringing the heels near the buttocks, as close as is comfortable with the feet separated hip width apart. Bring the arms over the head, forearms upwards and clasp the elbows if it is comfortable. Close the eyes and relax.

The asana position

In this position the whole body should be relaxed. There should be no stress or strain on any body part. The legs are bent and at a comfortable distance near the buttocks. The arms are above the head but without strain. The abdomen is relaxed and the breath is normal.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the arms back down next to the body.
Straighten the legs and bring the legs together.

Anatomical focus:

Lower back, abdomen, chest.

Awareness:

On relaxing the whole body, particularly the back, abdomen and chest.
On relaxed breathing.

Do

- Keep the knees apart.
- Keep the arms relaxed above the head.
- Keep the abdomen relaxed.

Don't

- Try to clasp the elbows if it is difficult.

Benefits

- When the legs are bent near the buttocks all the pressure from the back is reduced and the abdomen becomes soft and relaxed.
- Relaxation and similar benefits to shavasana.
- To practice deep breathing or meditation when it is difficult to sit or there is back pain.
- Relieves back pain.

Benefits for Women

- Good relaxation position during menstruation when shavasana can be uncomfortable.
- Helps to relieve menstrual pain.

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain
- Sciatica and slipped disc

Precautions and Contra-indications

None

Duration

There is no time duration as it is a relaxation pose.

Variations and tips

- Raise the arms above the head only as much as is comfortable. If the muscles of the shoulders are tight then it may cause discomfort. If this is the case then let the arms be by the sides.

Preparatory poses

Shavasan

Follow up poses

Ardha Chakrasan or sitting breathing exercises.

Uttanpadasana – Raised Leg Pose

1. Ek Pad Uttanpadasan – One Leg Raised Pose
2. Dwi Pad Uttanpadasan – Two Legs Raised Pose

Ek – one

Dwi - two

Pada – leg

Uttan – raised



1. **Ek pad uttanpadasan** - Exhale and while inhaling slowly raise the left leg to a 90 degree angle from the floor. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally. In this asana one leg is at a 90 degree angle to the floor. The upper body should remain relaxed. The leg should be straight. Pressure is placed on the abdomen and legs here. Efforts should be made to keep the upper body and face relaxed and the breathing normal. When raising and lowering the leg the abdominal muscles must be used, not the arms, and the lower back should be pressed towards the ground with the help of the abdominal muscles. The leg on the ground should remain relaxed and stay in the same position. To release inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the leg back to the supine position. Repeat with the right leg.



2. **Dwi Pad Uttanpadasan**- Exhale and while inhaling slowly raise the legs to a 90 degree angle from the floor. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally. In this asana the legs are at a 90 degree angle to the floor. The upper body should remain relaxed. The legs and feet remain together with the legs straight. Pressure is placed on the abdomen and legs here. Efforts should be made to keep the upper body and face relaxed and the breathing normal. When raising and lowering the legs the abdominal muscles must be used, not the arms, and the lower back should be pressed towards the ground with the help of the abdominal muscles. To release, inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the legs back to the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Abdomen, lower back, legs.

Awareness:

Keeping the face, upper body and arms relaxed.

Relaxing the abdomen and legs with efforts.

Do:

Try and keep the leg straight and steady, toes pointed to the ceiling.

Try not to raise the shoulders from the ground. The upper body including arms should be as relaxed as possible.

The leg on the floor should remain relaxed in the first type.

Raise the legs slowly, without any jerks.

Don't:

Bend the knees.

Tense the leg on the floor or lift it in the first type.

Allow the body to tremble.

Lift the lower back or buttocks from the floor.

Benefits:

- Improves the tone and strength of the abdominal muscles and thigh muscles.
- Contraction of abdominal muscles produces a pressure on the abdominal organs thereby improving their function.
- Helps in the production of digestive juices and the process of excretion.
- Helps the drainage of deoxygenated blood from the leg region towards the heart under the influence of the gravitational force.
- Due to only one leg being raised in the first one there is mutually opposing strain in the legs which gives different stretch to the legs and pelvic region.
- Strengthens the lower back, pelvic and perineal muscles.
- Beneficial for lower back pain due to the strengthening of the abdominal muscles.
- Removes flatulence and constipation.
- Strengthens the hamstrings.

Benefits for Women

- Improves the tone of the muscles and ligaments of the uterus and the pelvic muscles.

Therapeutic applications:

- Lower back pain
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Must be avoided if there is recent abdominal surgery as there is a lot of pressure on the abdomen.

Duration:

This pose is a little difficult to maintain to begin with. To start with it can be held for 5 seconds and practiced with repetitions. After some time this can be increased to 30 seconds for good benefits. With practice it can be maintained for up to 3 minutes.

Variations and tips:

If it is difficult to raise the leg straight then the leg can be slightly bent to release the pressure on the back, however the aim should, ideally, be to be able to raise the leg straight, when comfortable.

If it is difficult to raise the leg to 90 degrees or if there is trembling in the leg then lower the leg slightly, until a comfortable position has been achieved.

Preparatory poses:

Leg movement 2

Follow up poses:

Dwi Pada Uttanpadasana for Ek Pad Uttanpadasana

Viparit Karni

Sarvangasana

Prone

Adhvasana – Downward Face Pose

In this asana one has the attitude of submission, of surrendering the ego.



Taking the asana position

Stretch both the arms above the head with the palms pressed together in namaskar. The forehead rests on the floor. Stretch the hands forward and the toes backwards.

The asana position

In this position the body remains on the floor, palms together and feet on the ground. The whole body gets a stretch from the fingers to the toes. As the body is being stretched in one direction there is greater relaxation when the body relaxes. The forehead should be touching the floor and the breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the arms back to the sides of the body, chin on the floor.

Anatomical focus

The complete body.

Awareness

On the stretch from the fingers all the way to the toes.

Surrendering of the ego.

Do

- Keep the palms together.
- Keep the forehead on the floor and the rest of the body.
- Stretch both the fingers and toes.

Don't

- Raise the head or legs.
- Have the chin on the floor.

Benefits

- Gives a gentle stretch to the whole body.
- Induces relaxation.
- Removes stiffness from the body.
- Induces humility.
- Re-energises the body.
- Useful to remove tension and stress from other asanas, prior to a relaxation asana or after it to wake and stimulate the body.

Benefits for Women

- Can be helpful to balance the emotions, allowing introversion, especially before menstruation.

Therapeutic applications

- Slipped disc
- Rounded shoulders
- Neck stiffness
- Stress and anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

None

Duration

This is a relaxation asana so can be practiced for a short time and then another relaxation asana can be done or only adhasana can be practiced.

Variations and tips

If it is difficult to breathe a pillow may be placed under the chest.

Preparatory poses

None needed but it can be practiced after prone position asanas. It can also be used after a relaxation asana to re-energise the body.

Follow up poses

It is a good pose to practice just prior to shavasana or makarasana as it gives complete relaxation and can be useful for removing the tiredness from other asanas

Ardha Naukasan (Half Boat Pose)

Ardha – half

Nauk – boat



Taking the asana position

From the prone position bend the left arm and place it on behind the back. Stretch the right hand above the head. Inhale and raise the right hand, head, chest and right leg above the ground. Gaze forward. Breathe normally.

The asana position

In this position raise the arm and leg as high as possible. Use the left leg on the ground as a support. Try to stretch the arm and leg away from the body to lengthen the spine.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling release the asana by lowering the chest, head, arm and leg. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, spine, lower back

Awareness

Lengthening the back, balance

Do's

- Raise the arm and leg as high as is comfortable.
- Keep the leg and arm straight

Don'ts

- Cause shaking of the body.
- Loose balance
- Bend the leg

Benefits

- Good for beginners who have a weak back.
- Tones the back muscles and improves flexibility.
- It stimulates the spinal nerves,
- Stretches the abdominal region and improves efficiency of digestive organs
- Strengthens the back.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic region
- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Mild back pain
- Digestive problems
- Diabetes
- Menstrual problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Proceed with caution if you have any strong back pain. Do not perform if you've undergone recent abdominal operations. Avoid in pregnancy.

Duration

Hold the asana for 10-30 seconds or as long as is comfortable

Variations and tips

- If difficult keep the other arm on the ground in front of the body.

Preparatory Poses

- Ardha shalabhasan
- Sahajahasta bhujangasan

Follow Up Poses

- Tiryak Naukasan
- Ardha Dhanurasan
- Tiryak Dhanurasan
- Dhanurasan

Jyestikasan – Superior Pose



Taking the position

From prone position bring the forehead onto the ground and place the hands behind the head or the neck. Let the elbows rest on the ground.

The Asana position

This is a relaxation pose so let the eyes be closed and relax. Shavasan type instructions may be practiced.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the hands back down by the sides and the chin back on the ground.

Anatomical focus

On every body part, particularly any stressed parts such as the spine and neck.

Awareness

On the whole body, normal breathing and the pressure of the hands against the head or neck.

Do

- Keep the mind focused on relaxing. If thoughts come do not stress about them but let them pass.
- Keep the spine in a straight line.
- Avoid moving the body parts as even the slightest movement will use many muscles and increase the nerve impulses.
- Keep the eyes closed.

Don't

- Go to sleep, let the mind wander or move the body.

Benefits

- The benefits of the relaxation poses is there but there is the added benefit of it being very helpful for people with back and neck problems.

- Relieves pain in the back and neck.
- Increases prana to the neck and head region.

Benefits for Women

- Can help to relieve tension headaches which may arise from built up emotions.

Therapeutic Applications

- Cervical spondylitis and stiffness in the neck
- General spinal complaints
- Tension headaches
- Upper back pain
- Neck pain

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid going to sleep.

Variations & Tips

The hands can be placed under the forehead with the palms facing upwards if there is headache.

Preparatory Poses

Generally this pose is practiced after prone position asanas as it is in the prone position but it can be practiced at any time.

Follow Up Poses

None needed.

Makarasana – Crocodile Pose

Makara –crocodile

This is the main relaxation asana practiced from the prone position.



Taking the asana position

Fold the arms in front of the head and place the head either on the arms or the floor, turning the head to the side if it is comfortable. Spread the legs apart 1 ½ to 2 feet apart with the toes pointing outwards, heels in.

The asana position

This position is easy to acquire physically but again, like Shavasana, an attempt must be made to relax the whole body through the power of the mind. In the position the legs are apart with enough distance so that the legs are relaxed and the heels inwards with the toes pointing outwards. The

arms are folded into a comfortable position with the head either resting on the arms or on the floor. The aim of this asana is to release the strain caused by other asanas. The breathing should be relaxed and as the body relaxes more the breathing will become slower.

One has to pacify and relax the mind, freeing it from thoughts, worries and ideas. One has to think of each and every body part (the amount of detail will depend on the time available) and relax it, from the crown of the head to the toes, though the direction of relaxation can vary. The mind and body are deeply connected. If the mind is occupied by thoughts and worries then the Makarasana will be unsuccessful. Therefore one has to acquire the stability of the mind along with the stability of the body.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the legs back together. Return the arms back down by the sides and the chin on the mat.

Anatomical focus

On every body part, particularly any stressed parts such as the lower back.

Awareness

On the whole body and normal breathing

Do

- Keep the mind focused on relaxing. If thoughts come do not stress about them but let them pass.
- Keep the spine in a straight line.
- Avoid moving the body parts as even the slightest movement will use many muscles and increase the nerve impulses.
- Keep the eyes closed.

Don't

- Go to sleep, let the mind wander or move the body.

Benefits

- Relaxation of entire nervous system, body and mind.
- Gives extra relaxation to the back region.
- Relieves stress on the body and mind.
- Removes disturbing thoughts and tensions.
- Relaxes the muscles which lead to a decrease in the demand for blood and oxygen, giving the circulatory and respiratory systems a break.
- Beneficial for all stress related ailments.
- Relieves stress and fatigue
- Decreases blood pressure
- When there is pain in the sacral and coccyx region this asana is preferred over shavasan as it takes away the pressure from that area.

Benefits for Women

- Relieves menstrual back pain.
- Can be soothing for some women to have the gentle pressure on the lower abdominal area.

Therapeutic applications

- All stress related diseases
- Fatigue
- High blood pressure

- Heart complaints
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Insomnia

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid going to sleep

Duration

There is no time duration as it is a relaxation pose. It will depend on what asanas are practiced and the state of the individual as to how long they should stay in the position. Generally one to three minutes is sufficient. One should remain in this asana until the whole body is relaxed and the breath is normal. One should take this position whenever there is increased strain in the body, increased heart or breathing rate, when it is easy to come into. It is usually practiced after or between asanas from the prone position.

Variations and tips

The position of the arms and head should be placed to suit the individual.

Preparatory poses

Makarāsana is generally practiced after the practice of asanas from the prone position as it is itself an asana from the prone position. Therefore it is easier to come into if one is already in the prone position.

Follow up poses

None are necessary.

Sahaj Shalabhasan (Easy Locust Pose)

Sahaj – easy

Shalabh – Locust



Taking the asana position

From the prone position raise the right leg up with an inhale. With support from the left foot, gently raise the leg further while resting the left thigh on the floor. The right leg rests on the sole of the left foot. Position the left foot where it is most comfortable.

The asana position

In this position the thigh is supported so the back can relax, unlike the regular locust pose where the

back muscles need to hold the leg up. For a more simple stretch have the foot on the shin, to deepen the stretch place the foot on the thigh. The chin is kept on the floor. Hands and palms are on both sides of body. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

To release lower the left leg and right leg slowly to the floor on an exhale. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

On the lower back, abdomen and legs.

Awareness

On normal breathing and keeping the body relaxed.

Do's

- Keep the leg.
- Relax the back
- Place the foot where the bend is most comfortable.

Don'ts

- Bend the knees.
- Overstretch

Benefits

- Great for stretching the lower back and renewing the blood flow to this area.
- Abdominal muscles are massaged, good for digestion.
- Strengthens back muscles.
- Improves flexibility and allows back to relax at the same time.
- Good preparation for advanced back bends.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic region
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Menstrual problems
- Digestive problems
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Proceed with caution if you have spinal problems, hernia, ulcers or high blood pressure. Avoid if there is strong back pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for 15-30 seconds or longer if comfortable.

Variations and tips

Place forearms on the ground and raise the head and chest up to give a further stretch into the back, supporting the head with the hands. Or, rest head in the hands with bent arms.

Preparatory Poses

- Sahajahasta Bhujangasan
- Ardha shalabhasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shalabhasan
- Saralhasta Bhujangasan
- Stronger back bends

Sahajahasta Bhujangasan – Easy Arm Cobra Pose

Sahaj – Easy

Hasta – Arm

Bhujanga – Cobra



Taking the asana position

From the prone position bring both elbows under the shoulders, raising the upper body up and let the hands support the face.

The asana position

The elbows may be together or separate. If one wants more of a stretch onto the lower back one can bring the elbows closer to the body. If one wants more stretch onto the neck and upper back then the elbows can be moved further away. Let the feet be together and legs relaxed. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly lower the hands down, lowering the body and bring the arms by the sides.



Variation – Bring the elbows under the shoulders and hold the elbows with the hands. The upper body is arched. Slowly bend the head down towards the chest gently, stretching the spine.

Anatomical focus

The spine.

Awareness

The arch of the back, relaxing the lower back and normal breathing.

Do's

- Position the elbows in the most suitable and comfortable place.
- Try and keep the knees and ankles together, toes pointed.

- Relax the shoulders and back.

Don'ts

- Have any distance between the legs.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- Helps to remove backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.
- This is a gentle back bend that is most suitable for those who are less flexible or who are having back pain.
- A good position to hold for longer periods of time for back health, eg whilst watching TV “television pose” or whilst reading before bed.
- The variation is helpful for those with neck or back pain.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.

Therapeutic applications

- Backache
- Sciatica, slipped disc
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid during pregnancy, recent abdominal surgery or hernia.

Duration

30 seconds, up to 10-15 minutes over time.

Preparatory Poses

Shirohastha Bhujangasana

Follow Up Poses

Bhujangasan series

Saralhastha Bhujangasan

Vakrahastha Bhujangasana

Niralamba Bhujangasana

Shalabhasana

Naukasana

Dhanurasana.

Ardha Shalabhasana – Half Locust Pose

Ardha – Half
Shalabh -Locust



Taking the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling raise the left leg from the waist, keeping the leg straight. Keep the toes stretched and continue normally breathing. The right leg should remain on the floor, relaxed.

The asana position

In this position the raised leg is straight and stable and the rest of the body is relaxed on the floor. If the raised leg is bent then there is less strain on the abdomen and therefore there are less benefits on the abdominal region and internal organs. The chin should remain on the ground and the head, face, shoulders, chest and other leg should remain relaxed. The leg on the floor should remain in the same position and not be turned to the side. The raised leg should be raised directly above and should not be tilted to the side and over the other leg. The palms should face down and stay in the same position. The raised leg should not shake or tremble.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the leg back down to the ground and return to the prone position. Repeat with the right leg.

Anatomical focus

The lower back, abdomen, raised leg and hip

Awareness

On normal breathing and keeping the body relaxed

Do's

- Keep both the raised leg straight.
- Chin on the ground.
- Palms pressing on the ground.
- Toes pointing backwards.

Don'ts

- Bend the knees.
- Touch the forehead on the ground.
- Hold the breath.

Benefits

- Stimulates the parasympathetic nerves in the lower spinal region. Removes the pressure on the sciatic nerve and gives relief from backache and slipped disc (however it should be practiced with caution for those suffering from slipped disc).
- Improves the function of the abdominal organs especially the lower abdomen by improving peristalsis in the large intestine and especially in the large portion of the colon. Improves appetite.
- Improves the strength of the thigh and abdominal muscles and improves blood supply to the lower back and neck muscles, relieving stiffness in this region.
- There is less stretch and strain on the body compared to the full Shalabhasana however due to one leg being raised there is mutually opposing strain, affecting the lower back and pelvic region.

Benefits for Women

- Opens pelvic region
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Mild sciatica
- Mild slipped disc
- Constipation
- Anorexia
- Backache

Precautions and Contra-indications

Practice with caution if there is slipped disc or any other severe spinal problems. Any recent abdominal surgery, hernia, prolapsed, stomach ulcer. Pregnancy or menstruation.

Duration

The position should be maintained for just a few seconds to begin with and slowly it can be increased up to 30 seconds. With more practice it can be increased to 1 minute.

Variations and tips

- Only raise the leg as far as it is comfortable. If there is trembling then the leg should be lowered a little.
- Pressure on the arms against the floor can help to lift the leg up.

Preparatory Poses

Sahaja Shalabhasan

Follow Up Poses

Shalabhasana
Naukasana
Dhanurasana.

Sphinx Pose

The body looks like the Egyptian Sphinx



Taking the asana position

From the prone position bring both elbows under the shoulders, raising the upper body up. Place the forearms on the ground.

The asana position

The elbows are under the shoulders if possible. The chest is open, shoulders are relaxed and the gaze is forward. Let the feet be together and legs relaxed. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly lower the body down and bring the arms by the sides.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, chest.

Awareness

The arch of the back, relaxing the lower back and normal breathing.

Do's

- Position the elbows in the most suitable and comfortable place.
- Try and keep the knees and ankles together, toes pointed.
- Relax the shoulders and back.

Don'ts

- Have any distance between the legs.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- Helps to remove backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.
- This is a gentle back bend that is most suitable for those who are less flexible or who are having back pain.

- This pose is slightly more intense than sahajahasta bhujangasan but is easier to perform than saralhasta bhujangasan so can be maintained longer.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.

Therapeutic applications

- Backache
- Sciatica, slipped disc
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid during pregnancy, recent abdominal surgery or hernia.

Duration

30 seconds, up to 5 minutes over time.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasana
Bhujangasan series

Follow Up Poses

Saralhasta Bhujangasan
Vakrahasta Bhujangasana
Niralamba Bhujangasana
Shalabhasana
Naukasana
Dhanurasana.

Sitting

Marjarian - Cat Pose

Marjari - Cat



Taking and releasing the asana position

From vajrasana come on to the hands and knees. Separate the knees so that they are hip width apart. Let the hands be directly under the shoulders and let the spine be neutral, this is often called table top cat. In this position the spine is long and the tailbone is slightly tucked under. Try to avoid dropping the spine down. From here inhale and open the chest, tilting the head back and pressing the belly down slightly so there is a gentle arch in the lower back. Exhale and slowly arch the spine, pulling the belly up towards the spine and engaging the pelvic floor muscles. Bring the chin towards the chest. Continue the movement with the breath, keeping awareness of the movement of the spine.

Anatomical focus

Spine, abdomen, neck

Awareness

The movement of the spine, synchronized with the breath.

Do's

- Let the hands be under the shoulders, knees under hips for stability.
- Arch the spine in both directions

Don'ts

- Practice without the breath.

Benefits

- Increases flexibility of the whole spine
- Relieves back pain
- Opens the chest region and upper back
- Stretches and strengthens the shoulders

Benefits for Women

- Can be a helpful position during labour and for birth
- Opens the pelvic region
- Tones reproductive system

- Relieves menstrual cramps

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain
- Leucorrhoea
- Reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid the inhaling dropping belly down part if there is an excessive curve in the lower back as it may exacerbate the curve, making the lower back unstable and overstretching the ligaments and spine. Instead keep the spine neutral. Avoid the inhalation cat after 6 months of pregnancy. If there is knee pain place a folded blanket under the knees.

Duration

Practice 5-10 repetitions, or as per comfort.

Variations & Tips

Place a pillow under the knees if there is any pain in the knees.

- ॐ **Forearm cat** - From cat pose bring the forearms onto the ground. This pose can be maintained, it gives a slight back bend. Look slightly forward. If desired inhale and raise the left arm vertical to open the chest and give a twist to the spine. Breathe normally. Inhale and exhale lower the arm back to the ground. Repeat on the other side.
- ॐ **Side Twist** – From cat pose inhale and exhaling slowly look over the left shoulder towards the left hip and bringing the left hip slightly to the left so that there is a curve in the spine. Avoid dropping the spine down. Inhale back to cat and exhale to the other side. Repeat as many times as desired, with the breath.
- ॐ **Hip rotations in cat** – From cat pose slowly start to rotate the hips, making as large a circle as is comfortable, incorporating a breath with each rotation. Practice a few rotations in each direction.
- ॐ **With Moola Bandha** – On exhalation of cat apply moola bandha.

Preparatory Poses

Tabletop cat

Follow Up Poses

Vyaghrasan

Shashankasan

Parvatasan – Mountain Pose

Parvat - Mountain



Taking the asana position

From sitting position sit in any comfortable meditative pose. Take both hands in front of the body and interlock the fingers. Raise the arms over the head, turning the hands so the palms face outwards.

The asana position

Stretch the body upwards, from the base of the spine to the hands. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally. If desired look up at the hands.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly bring the hands down in front of the chest, turning the palms to face the body. Lower the arms to the sides and release the legs.

Anatomical focus

Spine, arms, shoulders

Awareness

Stretching from the base of the spine to the hands

Do's

- Stretch upward
- Relax the shoulders

Don'ts

- Hunch forward
- Tilt the head down

Benefits

- Stretches the arms, back and abdomen
- Stretches and realigns the spine

- Re-energises the body
- Removes tension that can have accumulated from asana practice
- Removes tension in the shoulders and back.
- Helpful for carpal tunnel syndrome
- Removes neck tension
- Can help prevent tension headaches
- Helpful at the end of a yoga practice, after pranayama and meditation, when the back may feel a bit uncomfortable, to stretch and remove any accumulated tensions.
- Good to practice on waking.

Benefits for Women

- Relieves and reenergizes which can be helpful before and during menstruation.

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain
- Bad posture
- Carpal tunnel
- Headaches
- Shoulder pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Make sure the sitting position is comfortable and does not cause any knee pain.

Duration

Stretch up as many times as needed.

Variations and tips

- Can be practiced sitting in a chair and also variations can be done standing and lying down.
- One can stretch to the sides after and look up to stretch the neck.

Preparatory Poses

Meditative asanas

Arm movements

Follow Up Poses

Sharanagat mudra

Saithalyasan – Animal Relaxation Pose



Taking the asana position

From sitting position come into vajrasan. Slowly bring the legs to the left side so that the sole of the right foot is against the left thigh and the left foot is near the left hip. Place the hands on the knees.

The asana position

Breathe normally. Keep the spine erect. Swap the legs if wanted. This pose can be used as a meditative position. One can then deepen the pose by inhaling raising the arms and exhaling turning towards the right side and bringing the hands on the ground over the right knee, bringing the forehead onto the ground.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale raising the arms and body up, exhaling lowering the arms down by the sides. Slowly straighten the legs or bring the legs back to vajrasan. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Spine, pelvis, hips

Awareness

On a stable base and erect spine as well as the compression of the abdomen.

Do's

- Sit upright
- Bend from the hips

Don'ts

- Round the back

Benefits

- Stretches and relieves pain in the lower back and buttocks.
- Opens the hips and pelvic floor.
- Preparation for meditative asanas and an alternative for those who find it difficult to maintain meditative asanas for longer periods of time.
- Loosens the spine.
- Stretches the side muscles and creates more space.
- Gives a gentle massage to the abdominal organs

Benefits for Women

- Relieves rib pain during pregnancy

- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems
- Rib pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

It is not necessary to do all the variations. Avoid if there is pain in the hip or knee.

Duration

Up to one minute or as long as it is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Use a small pillow to sit on if needed.
- **Hip Movements** – As a variation from Saithalyasan, the meditation pose, place the left hand on the left hip and the right hand supporting on the ground. Inhale raising the left hip upward, exhaling lower the hip down. Repeat the movement a few more times and then repeat on the opposite side.
- **Twist** – As a variation from Saithalyasan, the meditation pose, inhale and bring the left hand to the right knee and right hand behind, supporting on the ground. Exhale and twist to the right side. Breathe normally and maintain the twist. Inhale and exhaling turn back to the front. Repeat on the left side and then with opposite legs.
- **Forward Bend** – As a variation if one cannot put the head on the ground they can place the forearms on the ground. If preferred bring the hands into easy cobra. Walk the elbows further away to lengthen the spine. Breathe normally.
- **Side Stretch** – As a variation from Saithalyasan, the meditation pose, inhale raising the left arm up. The right arm remains by the side. Exhale and slowly bend to the right side, keeping the left hip down and stretching the whole left side. As you stretch to the right side the right arm can be moved further away from the body. Inhale and raise the left arm and exhale lower the arm. Repeat on the right side and then repeat with opposite legs.

Preparatory Poses

Vajrasan

Sukhasan

Shashankasan

Follow Up Poses

Swastikasan

Paschimottanasan

Shashankasan – Child’s Pose, Hare Pose

Shashank – moon or hare



Taking the asana position

Sit in vajrasana, inhale raising the arms and exhaling slowly extend the hands further away, trying to lengthen the spine. Bring the forehead to the ground, arms stretched in front of the body, palms resting on the floor.

The asana position

Make sure the buttocks are not raised. Breathe normally and relax.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale slowly raising the arms and body up, exhaling bring the arms down by the sides.

Anatomical focus

Back, abdomen, pelvis.

Awareness

Relaxing and lengthening the back.

Do's

- Lengthen the spine.
- Relax the back and arms.

Don'ts

- Lift the buttocks.
- Keep tension in the body.

Benefits

- Opens the pelvic region and hips.
- Removes tension and pain in the lower back.
- Helps to realign the spine.
- Soothing and energising.

Benefits for Women

- Relieves nausea for some women during pregnancy.
- In pregnancy helps the baby move into an anterior position and creates space around the belly.

Therapeutic applications

- Pregnancy
- Digestive problems
- Stress

Precautions and Contra-indications

During pregnancy avoid compression of the belly and keep the knees apart. Use pillows under the head and chest if needed. If there is pain in the knees bring a cushion behind the knees and, if needed, under the buttocks. Avoid if there is strong knee or ankle pain.

Duration

For as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- This position is a nice one to maintain for longer periods of time, especially with the support of pillows where the head and chest are resting on the pillows.
- You can bring the arms into easy cobra or relax on bolsters or pillows.
- As a variation you can hold the elbows, lift the buttocks so the thighs are vertical and arch the spine so that the chest is pressed towards the floor.

Preparatory Poses

Vajrasan

Follow Up Poses

Ardha paschimottanasan

Paschimottanasan

Sukhasan - Cross Leg Position

Sukha - comfortable



Taking the asana position

From sitting position bend the right leg bringing the right foot under the left leg. Bend the left leg and place it under the right leg.

The asana position

Adjust the legs as necessary to give maximum comfort. Bring the hands into a mudra of your choice. Breathe normally. Sit upright.

Releasing the asana position

Straighten the left leg and then straighten the right leg. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Legs, spine

Awareness

Stable foundation with the legs and spine.

Do's

- Sit upright
- Relax the legs

Don'ts

- Hunch over

Benefits

- Good preparation for meditative positions, especially for those who are not used to sitting on the floor.
- Opens the hips and pelvic floor.
- Loosens the knees.
- Twisting loosens the spine and relieves tension in the back.
- One of the more simple sitting positions for meditation and breathing practices.

Benefits for Women

- Useful sitting pose for pregnancy

Therapeutic applications

- Stress and anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Take care if there is pain in the hip, knee or ankle.

Duration

As long as it is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Can use pillows under the buttocks if needed or under the thighs and knees.
- A wall can be used as support if needed.
- To twist bring the left hand on the right knee. Inhale and exhaling twist to the right side, supporting the body with the right hand on the ground. Inhale turning back to the front and exhaling bring the right hand to the left knee, left hand on the ground, looking over the left shoulder. Inhale back to the front. Helpful for relieving tension in the back.

Preparatory Poses

Hip, knee and ankle movements

Follow Up Poses

Swastikasan

Swastikasana – Auspicious Pose

Swastik – Auspicious symbol



Taking the asana position

Spread both the legs apart 1 to 1 ½ feet apart. Bend the left leg and place the sole of the left foot against the right inner thigh. Bend the right leg and place the sole of the foot against the left inner thigh, a little between the calf and thigh. Place the hands into dhyana mudra.

The asana position

In this asana the position of the body is stabilised. The backbone should be erect and the sight ahead or eyes closed. With practice this position can easily be maintained and used for pranayama, concentration and meditation techniques. Ideally in this position the knees are touching the floor. The upper foot can be placed in between the thigh and calf muscle and the lower foot below can be pulled up between the other thigh and calf muscle, making a more stable position.

Releasing the asana position

Place the hands back on the floor next to the hips. Straighten the right leg. Straighten the left leg. Bring both legs back together.

Anatomical focus

Spine, legs

Awareness

Stable foundation of the legs and spine

Do's

- Keep the spine erect.
- Have the backs of the hands on the knees, not off the knees.

Don'ts

- Strain the knees or ankles.
- Press the heel against the perineum.

Benefits

- Strengthens the spine.
- Reduces stress on the muscles of the body which leads to decreased strain on the heart, decreased respiration rate and increased concentration of the mind.
- Stretches the hips, knees and ankles, preparing the body for other meditative positions.
- Dhyan mudra stabilizes the pulse.

Benefits for Women

- Improves prana in pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Stress and anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Care should be taken if one has hip, knee or ankle pain.

Duration

Over time this asana can be increased up to 10 minutes and then up to 2 or 3 hours, depending on what is being practiced.

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult instead of placing the second leg on top place the foot on the floor, sole against the shin.
- It is important that the hip joints be slightly above the knees, otherwise the pelvis tilts posteriorly, the spine flexes and tightens and many of the surrounding muscles try to compensate working against gravity which causes fatigue. Therefore if one cannot sit with the hips higher than the knees a small cushion or folded blanket should be used to restore the normal spinal curves, and allow the body and head to be properly supported.

Preparatory Poses

Sukhasan

Padmasan Preparatory Exercises.

Follow Up Poses

Parvatasan

Sharanagat Mudra

Ardha Padmasan

Padmasan

Siddhasan

Utthan Pristhasan – Lizard Pose



Taking the asana position

Start in the cat pose, marjariasan. The hands are shoulder width apart, the knees hip width apart. Place the elbows on the ground and hold the elbows with the hands. Inhale. Whilst exhaling slowly bring the chin and chest downward towards the floor, arching the back.

The asana position

Here some people may touch the floor with the chest, others will have some distance. The elbows remain in the same position. This can be practiced as a movement or normal breathing can be there if the pose is maintained.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale lifting the chin and chest. Continue as a movement or release placing the hands back on the ground and coming back into marjariasan.

Anatomical focus

Back, chest

Awareness

Creating a gentle arch.

Do's

- Try to bring the chest down towards the ground

Don'ts

- Overstretch
- Lower the buttocks

Benefits

- Gives a gentle stretch to the back and shoulders.
- Strengthens the chest
- Improves posture
- Relieves pain

Benefits for Women

- Nausea during pregnancy
- During labour when the labour is progressing very fast it can help slow it down.
- Menstrual pain

Therapeutic applications

- Upper back tension
- Haemorrhoids

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if pain in the knees.

Duration

As a movement 5 to 10 repetitions. If held up to a minute.

Variations and tips

- Use pillows if needed under the knees.

Preparatory Poses

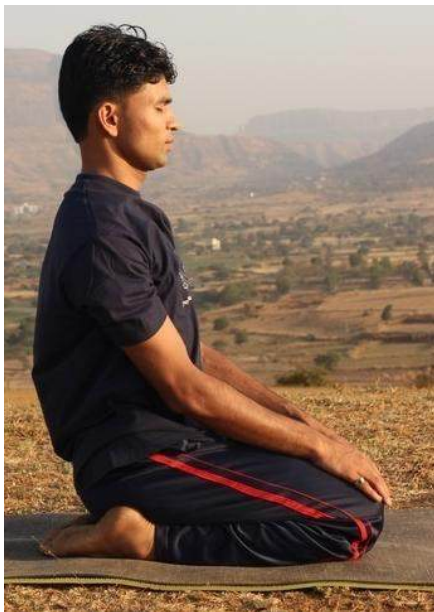
Marjariasan

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasan

Vajrasan – Thunderbolt Pose

Vajra – thunderbolt, vajra nadi



Taking the asana position

Bend the left leg in the knee and place the foot near the left thigh. Bend the right leg in the knee and place it by the left foot, shifting the weight on to both feet. Rest the knees on the ground, toes together, heels apart and sit between the heels. Place the palms of the hands on the knees.

The asana position

In this position it is important to keep the spine, the neck and the head upright in one straight line. The eyes should be closed or fixed on one point. There should not be any pressure on the hands. The breathing should be smooth.

Releasing the asana position

Remove the hands from the knees and return them to the side. Raise the knees and shift the weight to the toes of the feet. Straighten the left leg. Straighten the right leg and return to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

blabla

Awareness

Manipur, depends on practice being done.

Do's

- Fold the legs in knees and place them on the ground.
- Keep the knees together.
- Touch both the big toes together, let the heels fall outside.
- Sit with buttocks resting between both the heels.
- Keep the hands on the knees, palms facing downwards.
- Keep the back and neck straight, shoulders relaxed, gaze forward.
- Open the chest.

Don'ts

- Lift the buttocks.
- Sit on the heels.
- Bend the back or neck.
- Overstrain the knees.

Benefits

- Alters the flow of blood and nervous impulses in the pelvic region and strengthens the pelvic muscles.
- Increases efficiency of the entire digestive system, useful if there is indigestion or heartburn.
- It aids in digestion immediately after eating. This is the only asana that can be practiced after a meal, ideally for ten minutes.
- It is an important meditation posture because the body becomes upright and straight with little effort.
- The mind and body becomes stabilised and hence it is one of the recommended asanas for pranayam and meditation.
- Stimulates the vajra nadi and redirects sexual energy.
- The special fold of the legs forms a bandha. This bandha controls the blood circulation from the waist downwards and increases blood circulation in the abdominal area.

Benefits for Women

- Concentrates prana in pelvic region.

Therapeutic applications

- Indigestion
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

If there is pain in the thighs practice with care and separate the knees slightly. Those with weak knee joints should practice with caution. If there is any discomfort a pillow can be placed between the buttocks and the heels.

Duration

The asana should be held for 5 minutes for benefits but this can be increased up to 2 or 3 hours for the practices of pranayam, concentration and meditation.

Variations and tips

- Some people find Vajrasana a difficult pose to sit in. If needed place a pillow behind the knees so there is less pressure on the knees and thighs. One may also like to place a small pillow under the ankles if there is too much pressure.
- If practicing for the benefits after eating then sit for ten minutes in this position.
- **Variation - Simple twist** – Inhale and exhaling slowly turn towards the right side, bringing the left hand onto the right knee, the right hand fingertips behind and on the floor, looking over the right shoulder. Inhale back to the front and exhale to the left side.
- **Variation -Sitting on floor between the heels-** From vajrasana slowly bring the feet further apart and sit between the heels with the buttocks on the ground or on a cushion. Bring the knees slightly apart if needed. Bring the hands onto the knees, keep the spine erect and breathe normally.
- **Variation -Toes tucked under**– From vajrasana make the toes erect and bring the hands onto the knees or in namaskar.

Preparatory Poses

Simple cross legged position, Swastikasana, Padmasana Preparatory movements.

Follow Up Poses

Vajrasana Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2.

Vyaghrasan - Tiger Pose

Vyaghra - Tiger



The asana position

From sitting position come onto the hands and knees in neutral cat pose. Inhaling bring the left leg back, toes pointing towards the head, opening the chest and tilting the head back. Exhaling slowly round the back, bringing the knee towards the forehead. Continue the movement with breath, keeping awareness of the spine. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Spine, abdomen, chest

Awareness

Movement of the spine with the breath

Do's

- Move the spine only as much as is comfortable

Don'ts

- Move too fast or overstretch

Benefits

- Loosens and realigns the spine, removing tension and pain.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles.
- Opens the chest and expands the lungs, helpful if there is breathlessness.
- Strengthens and stretches the legs, preventing fluid retention and cramps.
- Improves posture and rounded shoulders
- Improves balance and co-ordination.
- Loosens the legs and hips.
- Reduces weight from the buttocks and thighs.
- Improves blood circulation.
- Creates lightness in the body.
- Can relieve sciatica.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic region
- Useful for toning after childbirth.

Therapeutic applications

- Post natal
- Obesity
- Mild back pain
- Menstrual problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if strong back pain or knee pain, recent abdominal surgery. Avoid in the third trimester.

Duration

As many repetitions as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Use a folded blanket under the knees if needed. Maintain balance and go very slowly and carefully.
- **Variation - Lifting one leg** – Bring the left leg back, keeping the toes erect and stretch the calf muscle. From here, if comfortable slowly lift the leg up so that the leg is parallel. Stretch the toes away and try to keep a straight line with the back, breathing normally. Try to lengthen the spine.
- **Variation - Lifting one leg and one arm** – Bring the left leg back, keeping the left toes erect to start with. Then slowly raise the left leg till it is parallel to the ground. From here slowly

raise the right arm, focusing on a point and maintaining balance. Try to have a straight line from the hand to the foot and keep the length in the spine, avoiding dropping the belly. Breathe normally..

- **Variation - Bow pose** – Bend and raise the left leg up and slowly lift the right arm. Hold the left foot with the right hand and inhaling, lift the foot up as high as is comfortable, maintaining balance. Breathe normally. Release on an exhale and repeat on the other side.

Preparatory Poses

Marjariasan

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasan

Standing

Ardha Chandrasan – Half Moon Pose

Ardha – half
Chandra – moon



Taking the asana position

From standing position take the feet hip width apart. Exhale and inhale raise the left arm from the side above the head. Exhale stretching the arm over the head to the right side.

The asana position

In this position one can maintain the asana, breathing normally, or one can do it as a movement. Here the left hip will slightly move to the left side but it should not be too much. There is a nice stretch along the left side of the body. The body should not be tilted forwards or backwards. The right arm should be relaxed.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale raise the left arm up above the head and exhaling lower the arm down by the side. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Side of the abdomen, waist

Awareness

Stretching the side of the body

Do's

- Keep the legs stable
- Stretch to the side only
- Let the neck relax

Don'ts

- Overstretch and push the hip out
- Keep tension in the body

Benefits

- Stretches the sides of the abdomen and waist
- Gentle hip stretch
- Massages kidney and adrenals
- Tones waist area
- Nice to add after sun salutations as a warm up for the side muscles

Benefits for Women

- Good stretch for pregnant women

Therapeutic applications

- Weight loss
- Pregnancy

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is very strong pain in the side.

Duration

Up to a minute if practiced as an asana.

Variations and tips

- Can be done from sitting

Preparatory Poses

- Preparatory movement 5

Follow Up Poses

- Trikonasan

Ek Pad Vrikshasan – One Leg Tree Pose

Ek – one

Pad – leg

Vriksha - tree



Taking the asana position

From standing position find a point to focus on. Put pressure onto the right foot and slowly lift up the left leg. Place the left foot on the inner thigh, shin or on top of the thigh. Turn the left knee out to the left side and keep the pelvic region open. Bring the hands into namaskar.

The asana position

Keep the spine erect, head upright and relax the shoulders. Keep the body stable and still. Breathe normally. The leg should remain firm and stable with awareness on using the whole foot for stability.

Releasing the asana position

Release the hands and slowly bring the foot back down to the ground. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Spine, leg

Awareness

On maintaining balance, focus on a point in front and concentrate. Leg and foot stability.

Do's

- Pull the shoulders back, open the chest.
- Keep focused on a point.
- Use the whole foot for balance.

Don'ts

- Bend forward or sideways.

Benefits

- Strengthens the legs, ankles and knees.
- Improves balance and co-ordination between the brain and body.
- Strengthens nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region.

- Improves balance during pregnancy.
- Brings lightness to the body during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Parkinsons
- MS
- Stress and anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Take care that the ankle is stable. If there is ankle pain then avoid this pose.

Duration

From a few seconds to a minute, depending on comfort and stability.

Variations and tips

- Use the wall or a chair as support if needed.
- Can raise the arms above the head in namsakar.

Preparatory Poses

Vrikshasan

Tadasan

Follow Up Poses

Patangasan

Kati Chakrasan – Waist Rotating Pose

Kati – Waist

Chakra – Rotate, circle, wheel



Taking the asana position

From standing position take the feet hip width distance. Inhale raising the arms from the sides so that the arms are parallel with the floor. Exhaling slowly twist to the left side, placing the right hand on the left shoulder, wrapping and left arm around the waist

The asana position

Looking over the left shoulder, there is a twist in the whole spine and the hips are turned towards the left. The right elbow can be slightly raised up for a stronger effect on the upper back.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale turn back to the front with the arms straight, exhaling repeat on the right side. Continue the movement with the breath, as many times as desired.

Anatomical focus

Spine, abdomen

Awareness

Smooth movements with the breath

Do

- Keep the arms parallel to the floor
- Keep the spine upright

Don't

- Move too fast
- Forget the breath

Benefits

- Loosens and relieves tension in the spine and back.
- Opens the chest.
- Improves flexibility in the spine.
- Improves digestion and can help relieve constipation.
- Strengthens the legs and knees.
- Stretches the side abdominal muscles.
- Improves posture.
- This asana is used during shankarprakashalan, the master cleanse.

Benefits for Women

- Creates lightness in the body, especially good during pregnancy and when there is heaviness.
- Helpful during breastfeeding to release tension in the upper back and chest.

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid fast movements, especially if there is pain or dizziness.

Duration

Practice 3-10 rounds

Variations and tips

- Can increase the speed of the movement, starting slow and slowly increasing the speed
- Can loosen the arms and swing the arms from side to side like a rag doll, slowly lowering the arms till they are wrapping around the waist.

Preparatory Poses

Tadasan

Tiryak tadasan

Follow Up Poses

Tiryak bhujangasan

Vakrasan

Parivarta Trikonasan

Right Angle Stretch



Taking the asana position

From standing position turn to face the wall and place the hands at hip height and width on the wall. Walk the feet away from the wall till the back is straight and lengthened.

The asana position

Keep the feet facing forward and have the feet about hip width apart. Push the hips backwards and pushing the upper body slightly downward. Breathe normally and maintain for as long as is comfortable.

Releasing the asana position

Walk the feet back towards the wall and release the hands.

Anatomical focus

Spine, buttocks, legs

Awareness

Lengthening the spine and stretching the calves.

Do's

- Bring the hands to hip height on the wall.
- Walk the feet back enough to make a right angle.

Don'ts

- Push the chest to far downward, creating more of a back bend instead of the lengthening effect.

Benefits

- Stretches and realigns the spine, relieving tension and pain.
- Stretches the shoulders, arms and wrists.
- Stretches the hamstrings and calves, especially helpful for squatting.

Benefits for Women

- A useful back stretch during pregnancy
- Helps to prevent leg cramps and fluid retention during pregnancy.
- A nice alternative to downward dog during menstruation.

Therapeutic applications

- Leg cramps
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Make sure there is enough distance between the feet and wall so that the spine can be lengthened but avoid taking so much distance that the back arches.

Duration

For as long as it is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- If one wants a deeper stretch one can hold onto something solid and stable and pull the hips away, moving more to a 45 degree angle instead.

Preparatory Poses

Vrukshasana

Follow Up Poses

Adho mukha shwanasana

Sahaja Veerasan – Easy Warrior

Sahaj – Easy

Veera – Brave, warrior



Taking the asana position

From standing position take a big step forward with the left leg. Turn the right foot out to the side, between 45 to a 90 degree angle, depending on what is most comfortable for the ankle. Inhale, keeping the arms relaxed by the side, and exhale bending the left leg, making sure the knee does not pass the ankle. Inhale and raise the left arm from the side, up over the head and keep the right hand on the right thigh.

The asana position

Keep the pelvis facing the right side and keep the gaze on the left fingertips. Press the right foot into the mat and keep the pelvis open, preventing the right hip from turning forward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale lowering the arm down, straightening the back and leg. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Core muscles, back, legs

Awareness

Creating a gentle back bend whilst maintaining balance and stability through the legs

Do's

- Make sure your foot is at the correct angle for you.
- Keep awareness of the feet to help maintain stability
- Keep the pelvis open

Don'ts

- Try to twist the body

Benefits

- Strengthens and tones the legs
- Tones the abdominal region.
- Strengthens the lower back.
- Tones and strengthens the arms and shoulders.
- Improves concentration and balance.
- Strengthens the nervous system.
- Strengthens the knees and ankles.
- Opens the hips
- Stretches the sides of the body and opens the chest.

Benefits for Women

- Helps to prevent fluid retention, cramps and restlessness of legs during pregnancy.
- Helps relieve rib pain.
- Strengthens and tones the pelvic region.

Therapeutic applications

- Mild back pain
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee, pelvic or ankle pain.

Duration

Up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- During pregnancy if it is uncomfortable to raise the arm over the head keep it relaxed by the side.

Preparatory Poses

Sulabh Veerasana

Follow Up Poses

Veerasana

Veerabhadrasana

Sulabh Trikonasan – Simple Triangle Pose

Sulabh – Simple

Trikon - Triangle



Taking the asana position

From standing position take at least 3 feet distance between the legs. Turn the left foot to the left side and keep the right foot facing forward so that it is comfortable and stable. Inhale raising the arms up from the sides so that they are parallel to the floor. Exhale and slowly bring the left hand to the left foot, shin or knee. Raise the right arm vertical, making a straight line with the arms.

The asana position

Look upward and breathe normally. Keep the chest open and the legs stable.

Releasing the asana position

Inhaling slowly raise the body up, bringing the arms parallel to the ground. Exhale lowering the arms and turning the left foot back to the front. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Core muscles, legs, waist

Awareness

Maintaining balance and keeping the body open

Do's

- Place the hand in the most comfortable position
- Take enough distance between the feet

Don'ts

- Overstretch and lose balance

Benefits

- Strengthens the leg muscles.
- Strengthens and loosens the hips and knees.
- Improves balance.
- Gives a gentle twist to the spine, relieving tension, particularly in the upper back.
- Strengthens the nervous system.
- Stretches the inner thighs.
- Opens the chest and upper back.
- Relieves back pain, particularly in the upper back.
- Improves posture

Benefits for Women

- Tones and opens the pelvic region.
- Stretches the sides of the abdomen and chest, helpful if there is rib pain and creates more space during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Constipation
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is strong back pain, pelvic or knee pain. Maintain balance.

Duration

Up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- If preferred place the hand on the hip instead of pointing the arm upwards.

Preparatory Poses

Tiryak Tadasan

Preparatory Movement 5

Follow Up Poses

Trikonasan

Sulabh Parivarta Trikonasan

Parivarta Trikonasan

Sulabh Veerasan – Simple Warrior Pose

Sulabh – Simple

Veera – Brave, warrior



Taking the asana position

From standing position take a big step forward with the left leg. Turn the right foot out to the side, between 45 to a 90 degree angle, depending on what is most comfortable for the ankle. Inhale, raising the arms from the side, keeping the pelvis facing the right side, and exhaling slowly bend the knee, making sure the knee does not pass the ankle.

The asana position

Keep the arms parallel to the floor and keep the gaze on the left fingertips. Press the right foot into the mat and keep the pelvis open, preventing the right hip from turning forward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale slowly straightening the leg and exhaling lower the arms down. Bring the legs together. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Core muscles, lower back, arms, legs

Awareness

Maintaining stability, especially in the legs.

Do's

- Keep the pelvis facing towards the side.
- Keep the arms parallel to the ground

Don'ts

- Let the knee pass over the ankle
- Try to twist the pelvis

Benefits

- Strengthens and tones the legs
- Tones the abdominal region.
- Strengthens the lower back.
- Tones and strengthens the arms and shoulders.
- Improves concentration and balance.
- Strengthens the nervous system.
- Strengthens the knees and ankles.
- Opens the hips
- Grounding.
- Gives confidence

Benefits for Women

- Helps to prevent fluid retention, cramps and restless legs during pregnancy
- Tones and strengthens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Leg cramps
- Obesity
- Reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee, pelvic or ankle pain.

Duration

Up to one minute over time

Variations and tips

- If stressful on the shoulders or arms then keep the arms relaxed by the sides or on the hips.

Preparatory Poses

Sulabh Trikonasan

Follow Up Poses

Sahaja Veerasan

Veerasan

Trikonasan

Veerabhadrasan

Tadasan – Palm Tree Pose

Tad –palm tree



Taking the asana position

From standing position bring the feet hip width apart. Raise the arms over the head, interlocking the fingers and turning the palms upward. Inhale stretching the body upward, raising the heels and coming onto the toes

The asana position

Try to stretch upward as much as you can. Keep the shoulders relaxed.

Releasing the asana position

Exhaling lower the heels down and relax the shoulders. Repeat as many times as desired.

Anatomical focus

Spine, toes

Awareness

Stretching the whole body, especially the spine, whilst maintaining balance

Do's

- Stretch from the toes to the hands

Don'ts

- Lift the heels so much that balance is lost.
- Bend forward or backwards.

Benefits

- Stretches the body from the toes to the hands.
- Releases tension that may accumulate in the body from asana practice or just in daily life.
- Stretches and realigns the spine.
- Relieves tension and pain in the back and shoulders.
- Stretches the calves
- Gently stretches the abdominal region.
- Improves digestion and helps prevent constipation.
- One of the asanas in shankarprakashalan, the master cleanse

Benefits for Women

- Helps prevent leg cramps and restlessness in the legs during pregnancy.
- Creates lightness in the body and mind, helpful when there is heaviness or dullness.
- Helps relieve tension in the upper back for breastfeeding mothers.

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive complaints
- Back pain
- Leg cramps

Precautions and Contra-indications

Take care to maintain balance and only lift the heels as high as is comfortable.

Duration

Usually done as a movement but can be held for up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- You can practice this pose with the feet flat on the ground if balance is a problem.

Preparatory Poses

Arm movements in standing

Follow Up Poses

Tiryak Tadasan

Vrukshasan

Ek Pad Vrukshasan

Tiryak Tadasan – Swaying Palm Tree Pose

Tiryak – twisted

Tad – palm tree

Taking the asana position



From standing position bring the feet hip width apart. Raise the arms over the head, interlocking the fingers and turning the palms upward. Inhale stretching the body upward and exhaling bend to the left side.

The asana position

Make sure that the body is not bending forwards or backwards. Look straight ahead.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale straightening and exhale to the right. Repeat as many times as desired.

Anatomical focus

Spine, toes

Awareness

Stretching the whole body, especially the spine, whilst maintaining balance

Do's

- Stretch from the feet to the hands

Don'ts

- Bend forward or backwards.

Benefits

- Stretches the body from the toes to the hands.
- Releases tension that may accumulate in the body from asana practice or just in daily life.
- Stretches and realigns the spine.
- Relieves tension and pain in the back and shoulders.
- Stretches the calves
- Improves digestion and helps prevent constipation.
- One of the asanas in shankarprakhshalan, the master cleanse
- Stretches the neck, shoulders and upper back.
- Stretches the hips and sides of the abdomen.

Benefits for Women

- Helps prevent leg cramps and restlessness in the legs during pregnancy.
- Creates lightness in the body and mind, helpful when there is heaviness or dullness.
- Helps relieve tension in the upper back for breastfeeding mothers.
- Relieves tension and creates more space around the belly and pelvis during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive complaints

- Back pain
- Leg cramps

Precautions and Contra-indications

Take care to maintain balance.

Duration

Usually done as a movement but can be held for up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- You can practice this pose with arms on the hips or relaxed by the side if it is difficult to have them raised above the head.
- To some extent this pose can be practiced in a sitting position.

Preparatory Poses

Arm movements in standing

Preparatory movement 5

Tadasan

Follow Up Poses

Sulabh Trikonasan

Trikonasan

Vrikshasana - Tree Pose

From Sanskrit *vriksh* (tree). A tree is always in a standing position, it remains stable and grows upwards. The process of this asana is similar and hence the name.



Taking the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling raise both arms up above the head from the sides and join the palms. Lift the heels, stand on the toes and pull the whole body upwards. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

Apart from the toes the whole body right from the feet is stretched upwards. The arms should be stretched up as much as possible. The legs should be stable and the body pulled upwards towards the sky. The breathing should be smooth and the sight fixed on one point to help maintain balance.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower both arms down from the sides. Lower the heels to the floor and return to standing position.

Anatomical focus

The stretch on the whole body.

Awareness

On maintaining balance, focus on a point in front and concentrate.

Do's

- Pull the shoulders back, open the chest.

- Arms raised over head, palms joined in Namaskar position, upper arms touching the ears.
- Stretch the entire body in upward direction while maintaining the balance.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms.
- Bend forward or sideways.

Benefits

- Generally with any movement some muscles are stretched while others are contracted. In this asana all muscles are worked and stretched in the same direction which helps to remove the spasms of every muscle as well as releasing any tension that may have built up. This gives rest and relaxation to the body.
- Helps bone development and proper alignment of the vertebral column.
- Stretches the body from the toes to the hands.
- Releases tension that may accumulate in the body from asana practice or just in daily life.
- Stretches and realigns the spine.
- Relieves tension and pain in the back and shoulders.
- Gently stretches the abdominal region.
- Improves digestion and helps prevent constipation.

Benefits for Women

- Creates a feeling of lightness which is helpful during pregnancy or during menstruation.
- Stretches the calves and helps prevent leg cramps and restlessness of the legs during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Back pain
- Sciatica
- Constipation

Variations & Tips

You can practice this pose with the feet flat on the ground if balance is a problem.

Duration

Can be held for up to 1 minute.

Variations and tips

- If there is some difficulty in balancing then raise the heels only slightly from the floor or keep them on the ground. The higher the heels the more difficult it is to balance.
- Find a point to focus on.
- Using moola bandha can help to improve the balance.

Preparatory Poses

This pose is often done at the end of an asana class to relieve any tension that may be remaining. It is therefore practiced after asanas, particularly standing asanas or at the end of class after meditation or pranayam, where the body may need a bit of stretching. However it can be practiced at any other time also. Some poses to prepare include –

Tadasan

Arm movements in standing

Follow Up Poses

Ek pad vrikshasan

Intermediate

Series

Ashtanga Danda



- **Vajrasan – Thunderbolt Pose** – This is the starting and finishing point for the series. In vajrasan close the eyes, centre oneself and breathe deeply. From here inhale raising the arms and lengthening the spine.



- Exhale and bend forward into **Shashankasan – Hare Pose**, placing the hands and forehead on the ground.



- Inhale and come up onto the knee, hands under the shoulders into **Marjariasan – Cat Pose**. Press the belly downwards, draw the tailbone up, tilt the head back and open the chest. Exhale rounding the back and drawing the abdomen towards the spine, tucking the chin in towards the chest and the tailbone under.



- Inhale and raise the knees from the ground, moving into **Plank pose**. The body is in a straight line, the gaze forwards, hands under the shoulders.



- Holding the breath slowly lower the body down by bending the arms till it is a few inches from the ground. The body should still be in a straight line. This is **Chaturanga – Four Parts Pose**.



- Exhale and bring the knees, chest and forehead to the ground in **Ashtanga asan – Eight Parts Pose**.



- Inhale lowering the hips, pressing the hands down and raising the upper body up into **Bhujangasan – Cobra Pose**. The shoulders are relaxed, chest open and head tilted back.



- Exhale lifting the hips upward, lengthening the back, tucking the chin in and bringing the heels and forehead towards the floor in **Urdhva Shwanasan – Downward Facing Dog**.
- Inhale back into **Marjariasan – Cat Pose**.
- Exhale into **Shashankasan – Hare Pose**. From here one can repeat the series by moving back into cat pose or relax in this pose for some time with normal breathing.
- To finish inhale back into **Vajrasan – Thunderbolt Pose**. Breathe normally and centre.

Benefits

- Warms up and loosens the joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments.
- Loosens and strengthens the spine.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles.
- Improves digestion.
- Helps with weight loss.
- Strengthens the arms and chest.
- Improves circulation to whole body
- Helps balance the endocrine system
- Prevents constipation
- To some extent the benefits of each individual pose are there but not as much as if they were maintained.
- Good preparation for starting the practice of surya namaskar.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been recent abdominal surgery, high blood pressure, heart problems, pregnancy, hernia or strong back pain.

Extra care should be taken if there is any pain in the back, knees, hips or wrists and avoided or variations taken as needed.

Variations & Tips

- Vajrasan – cushions can be used as support if it is uncomfortable, especially if the thighs are tight or there is pain in the knees or ankles.
- Shashankasan – the forehead does not have to reach the ground but can be wherever it is comfortable. Cushions can be used if needed.
- Marjariasan – if there is discomfort in the knees a folded blanket can be used under the knees.
- Plank Pose – if it is too stressful on the back or abdominal muscles the knees can remain on the ground.
- Chaturanga – this is an optional pose and can be stressful so is best avoided to start with and later it can be incorporated if wanted.
- Ashtanga Asan – if it is uncomfortable to put the forehead down then the chin can remain on the mat.

- Bhujangasan – if the back bend is too strong either the hips can be lifted, the feet can be slightly apart, the arms can be bent or the neck can remain straight instead of tilted back.
- Urdhva Shwanasan – it is not necessary that the heels touch the floor, keeping a straight back is more important. If there is tightness in the calves then a little walking in the pose will be helpful.
- This series can be practiced at a medium speed with the breath or at slower pace, maintaining the asanas.

Surya Namaskar– Sun Salutation



1. From the standing position bring the palms together, thumbs at a 90 degree angle from the fingers, pressed against the sternum Inhaling, remaining in the preposition.



2. Exhaling bend forward in the waist coming into the standing forward bend, trying to place the palms on the floor and head to the knees.



3. Inhaling step the left leg back into the half cobra position, keeping the foot erect and resting the left knee on the floor. Press the hips down towards the ground and bend the neck back. Push the chest forward, opening the chest and pulling the shoulders back. Try to bring the calf and thigh of the right leg close together.



4. Holding the breath, bring the right leg back, joining the legs together. Keep the arms, legs and back straight, creating a plank position. Feet should remain erect.



5. Exhaling, lower the body down to the ground, in the Ashtanga position. First bring the knees on the ground and then the chest and finally the forehead. Keeping the thighs, abdomen and nose off the ground.



6. Inhaling coming into the cobra position, straightening the arms, keeping the toes erect and legs together, knees on the ground. Push the chest forward and pull the shoulders back, gazing up towards the ceiling.



7. Hold the breath and raise the hips up into downward dog. Keep the arms and legs straight. Tuck the chin in towards the chest, push the body backwards and try to lower the heels to the floor. Push the forehead down towards the floor. Make sure not to move the feet forward in this position.
8. Hold the breath and step the right leg forward between the hands coming back into the half cobra position.
9. Exhaling bring the left leg forward into the standing forward bend.
10. Inhaling straightening up and coming back into the preposition.

Benefits:

- Warms up and prepares the body for asana practice.
- Lubricates and increases the blood supply to the joints.
- Stretches and strengthens the whole body.
- Improves efficiency of the internal organs.
- Helps to detoxify the body.
- Stimulates pingala/surya nadi which increases energy and stimulates digestion.
- Increases the prana in the body and helps to remove energy blockages.

- Useful for weight loss when practiced as an exercise.
- Helps to balance the endocrine system.
- Beeja mantras strengthen the heart.
- The particular breathing sequence strengthens the lungs.

Precautions & Contraindications:

Avoid if one has severe back and spinal problems, high blood pressure, heart problems, abdominal surgery or serious abdominal problems. Avoid if there is knee or wrist pain, peptic ulcer, hernia or diarrhoea. Avoid during pregnancy and practice a pregnancy version. Though surya namaskar is often thought of as a warm up to begin class, for some people it can be difficult and may be practiced towards the end of a class, as they build up to it through simpler and more gentle warm up practices.

Variations & Tips

- Can be practiced slowly as yoga, correlated with the breath or even slower, maintaining the asanas or it can be practiced fast as a form of exercise.
- Namaskar – hands can be raised above the head with hands together in namaskar or hands apart. They may remain in the same position whilst a gentle backbend is done or the hands may support the back and one tilts backwards.
- Forward bend – the hands may touch the ground or the fingertips may touch. One can also just let the arms hang down or let the hands touch the knees. If there is back pain or mild sciatica one can squat with the back straight and heels lifted.
- Half Cobra – to come into this pose the second time one may need to take two steps to get the foot between the hands. If one prefers they can keep the fingertips on the ground, this can give a deeper backbend but may give less of a hip opening effect.
- Plank – place the knees on the ground if it is too stressful for the back.
- Ashtanga Asan – if it is uncomfortable to put the forehead down then the chin can remain on the mat.
- Bhujangasan – if the back bend is too strong either the hips can be lifted, the feet can be slightly apart, the arms can be bent or the neck can remain straight instead of tilted back.
- Urdhva Shwanasan – it is not necessary that the heels touch the floor, keeping a straight back is more important. If there is tightness in the calves then a little walking in the pose will be helpful.

Bhujangasan Series

These cobra poses can be practiced as a series or individually.

Shirohasta Bhujangasan

Shiro – Head

Hasta – Arm

Bhujanga – Cobra



From prone position place the hands above the head, shoulder width apart. Bring the forehead to the ground. Exhale and whilst inhaling slowly start to lift the body up, pressing down into the hands, starting with the head, the neck, shoulders and chest. The abdomen may be on the ground, or it may

be raised, depending on flexibility and comfort. Tilt the head back, open the chest, relax the shoulders and try to keep the feet together. To release inhale and whilst exhaling slowly lower the body back down to the ground, bring the hands back down by the sides.

Karnahasta Bhujangasan

Karna – Ear
Hasta – Arm
Bhujanga – Cobra



From prone position place the hands in line with the ears. Bring the forehead to the ground. Exhale and whilst inhaling slowly start to lift the body up, pressing down into the hands, starting with the head, the neck, shoulders, chest and abdomen. The hips may be on the ground, or they may be raised, depending on flexibility and comfort. Tilt the head back, open the chest, relax the shoulders and try to keep the feet together. To release inhale and whilst exhaling slowly lower the body back down to the ground, bring the hands back down by the sides.

Skandhahasta Bhujangasan

Skandha – Shoulder
Hasta – Arm
Bhujanga – Cobra



From prone position place the hands next to the shoulders. Bring the forehead to the ground. Exhale and whilst inhaling slowly start to lift the body up, pressing down into the hands, starting with the head, the neck, shoulders, chest and abdomen. The hips may be on the ground, or they may be raised, depending on flexibility and comfort. Tilt the head back, open the chest, relax the shoulders and try to keep the feet together. To release inhale and whilst exhaling slowly lower the body back down to the ground, bring the hands back down by the sides.

Katihasta Bhujangasan

Kati – Waist
Hasta – Arm
Bhujanga – Cobra



From prone position place the hands next to the waist. Make sure the hands are flat on the ground. Bring the forehead to the ground. Exhale and whilst inhaling slowly start to lift the body up, pressing down into the hands, starting with the head, the neck, shoulders, chest and abdomen. The hips may

be on the ground, or they may be raised, depending on flexibility and comfort. Tilt the head back, open the chest, relax the shoulders and try to keep the feet together. To release inhale and whilst exhaling slowly lower the body back down to the ground, bring the hands back down by the sides.

Anatomical focus

The back and stretch on the front side of the body.

Awareness

The back through the different types of bhujangasan.

Do's

- Try and keep the arms straight, palms on the ground.
- Try and keep the knees and ankles together, toes pointed.
- Gaze towards the ceiling.
- You can lift the hips and thighs if the back is not flexible.
- Open the chest; pull the shoulders backwards and downwards.

Don'ts

- Have any distance between the legs.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- This series is good preparation for more advanced back bends as it increases flexibility of the complete spine.
- Helps to remove backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.
- Shirohasta bhujangasan and karnahasta bhujangasan are good alternatives to saralhasta bhujangasan when the back is less flexible.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.
- Chest opening effect is helpful for breastfeeding mothers.

Therapeutic applications

- Back ache
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should not be practiced by those with severe problems of the spine, stomach ulcers, hernias or pregnant women. It should be practiced with care for those with stiff backs and for those who are menstruating.

Duration

If these asanas are practiced as a series then they can be held for 10 seconds to start and one can build up to 30 seconds for each. If they are practiced individually then one can hold them for up to a minute and more over time.

Variations and tips

- To counter balance the stretch in the body practice shalabhasana after the poses and then shashankasan.
- If the pose is stressful then one can look forward to reduce the pressure on the back.
- Another way to reduce the tension is to lift the hips from the ground to reduce the back bend.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasana

Follow Up Poses

Saralhasta Bhujangasan

Vakrahasta Bhujangasana

Niralamba Bhujangasana

Shalabhasana

Naukasana

Dhanurasana.

Standing Series

This series is a popular series. If each asana is held for a short time then it can be used as a warm up, and if held for longer then the benefits of each individual asana will be awarded. This is one way to follow the standing series. One can add, adjust, remove or change around the poses as one likes but this order flows well and is a good basic standing series.

Each individual asana has its benefits but overall this series is very strengthening for the legs and core. It increases flexibility in the hips especially and is useful for toning the body.

Precautions – as per the specific asanas but especially care should be taken if there is any back or knee pain.

Sequence

Start on one side with Trikonasan – Triangle Pose



Then move into Parivarta Trikonasan – Inverted Triangle Pose



Then into Eka Pada Hastasan – One Arm to Leg Pose



Then Veerasana – Warrior Pose



Veerabhadrasana – Gracious Warrior Pose



Keeping balance on the forward leg move to Patangasan, keeping the arms in front



Then moving to classic Patangasan – Kite Pose



And an optional Natarajasan – Dancing Shiva Pose



Resting in Ugrasan – Ferocious Pose and then continuing on the other side.



Relax in Shavasan.

Supine

Ashwini Mudra – Horse Gesture Pose

Ashwa – Horse
Mudra – Gesture



Taking the asana position:

Initial Position – Sarvangasana Position

Bend both legs. Fold the legs in the waist and let the thighs rest against the stomach. Knees should be just above the face. In this position begin contraction and expansion of the anus muscles, keeping the breathing normal.

The asana position:

One should start practicing this asana when stability in Sarvangasana is achieved. As for the position complete folding of the knees and hips is very important. Similarly the calves should touch the thighs if possible. Do not bend the back during the position as it brings the knees closer to the mouth.

Releasing the asana position:

Stop the contraction and expansion of the anus. Straighten the legs in the waist. Straighten the legs in the knees and come to Sarvangasana position.

Anatomical focus:

Neck, shoulders, back, anus muscles

Awareness:

On contraction and expansion of the anus muscles.

Do:

Legs are bent at the knees and the knees are just above the head or towards the ears.

Press the thighs towards the abdomen.

Try and keep the back in a straight, vertical position.

Try and rest the chin against the chest.

Don't:

Bend the back.

Let the knees come to the ground or away from the body.

Move the neck or overstrain it in chin lock position.

Benefits:

- Strength of the muscles of the uterus, rectum, large intestine and perineum region is increased.
- Useful in preventing the prolapse of the rectum and preventing piles.
- Function of abdominal organs (especially lower abdomen) is improved.
- The Jalandhar Bandha improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all other systems of the body.
- The thyroid gland is improved due to the increase oxygen and blood as well as by reducing excess emotional and mental stress which affects the thyroid.
- Stagnant blood from the lower regions of the body, i.e. legs and abdomen is drained to the heart thereby improving the supply of fresh blood to these parts and the whole circulatory system. Blood supply to the head area i.e. brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat is improved thereby improving their functioning. Therefore all of the pelvic and abdominal area circulation, ear, throat and nose ailments are improved.
- The lung capacity is increased as the diaphragm, which is the muscle of respiration, has to work against gravity in this posture, this helps in the abdominal respiration and is therefore helpful in the treatment of asthma. Toxins in the respiratory system are drained thereby improving the respiratory system.
- Prevents and cures varicose veins.
- Detoxification of the body due to improved efficiency of the organs of the body which leads to youthfulness and anti-ageing effects
- Normalizes body weight due to its effect on the thyroid..
- Due to the effect this asana has on the hormonal system, particularly the thyroid, it balances the circulatory, digestive, reproductive and nervous system.
- Due to the increased blood flow to the head the mind is tranquilized, stress and psychological disturbances are removed.
- The increased blood flow can be beneficial for those who suffer from headaches, though it should not be practiced at the time of headache.
- The thymus gland is stimulated which boosts the immune system.
- It balances the parathyroid glands that ensures regeneration and normal development of the bones.
- It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anus muscles which helps with haemorrhoids.
- The nerves passing through the neck are toned and the neck flexibility is increased.
- The digestive system is greatly improved due to the increase in blood circulation and drainage of stagnant blood.
- The pranic flow is harmonized, increasing energy and having a positive effect on all the body systems.

Benefits for Women

- Helps prevent uterus prolapse
- Strengthens the pelvic floor
- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications:

- Uterus problems
- Uterus and rectal prolapse
- Thyroid disorders
- Asthma
- Reproductive problems
- Headache
- Haemorrhoids
- Varicose veins
- Prevention of cough and colds
- Diabetes

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Any women suffering from severe problems of the uterus should not practice this asana. Should be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation, high blood pressure and brain diseases. Should be avoided if suffering from an enlarged thyroid, spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache and weak blood vessels in the eyes.

Duration:

It should be maintained for 45 seconds to begin with and then increased to 2 minutes.

Variations and tips:

One may need a folded blanket under the neck, shoulders and elbows for support.

Preparatory poses:

Sarvangasana
Viparit Karni
Dwi Pada Uttanpadasana

Follow up poses:

Halasana
Vistrut Pada Halasana
Karnapeedanasana
Matsyasana – to counterbalance the Jalandhar Bandha
Chakrasana

Chakrasan - Wheel Pose

Chakra – Wheel



Taking the asana position:

From supine position bend the knees and place the feet close to the buttocks, about hip-width apart. Lift the arms up and place them beneath the shoulders, with the fingers pointing to the shoulders. Exhale while inhaling; lift the buttock, waist, lower and middle back off the ground. Exhale. While inhaling, lift the shoulders up by pushing onto the ground with the palms. Lift up the buttock; waist and the whole back until the arms and legs are straight.

The asana position:

The whole back is in a backward arching position. There should be no tension in between the shoulder blades and in the neck region. The weight of the body is distributed evenly on the feet and palms. You can do so by shifting the body (not the palms or feet) back and forth to find a balance in the weight distributed. The neck should be in a relaxed position. Do not turn the head to either side as this might put unnecessary tension in the neck and shoulders. The facial muscles should be relaxed. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling bend at the elbows and knees. Slowly lower the head, shoulders, waist and buttocks onto the ground. Rest the back entirely on the ground. Bring both the palms away from the shoulders and have the arms down by the side of the body. Straighten out the legs and come back into supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Spinal column and the muscles attached to the vertebrae, muscles on the upper part of the abdomen, thighs, calves

Awareness:

Maintain slow and rhythmic breathing throughout the whole process of staying in the pose. On the openness felt at the front part of the body, especially the chest and front thigh region. The deep arch in the spinal column.

Do:

- Keep the breathing slow and rhythmic
- Keep the shoulder blades and neck region relaxed and comfortable
- Keep the facial muscles soft and relaxed

- Keep the arms and knees straight
- Keep some distance between the feet for better support and balance while in the pose
- Respect and find acceptance with the body, by not pushing yourself into the pose.

Don't:

- Exert excessive force, which may cause undue strain onto the arms while lifting the body up into the position.
- Force yourself into getting the arch in the spine
- Strain and tense up the body while moving into the pose and/or while doing the pose.

Benefits:

- The entire front part of the body is being stretch entirely, which is good for people who are introverts as the openness in the heart may work on their heart chakra.
- Due to the stretch at the upper part of the abdomen muscles, it gives some pressure on the internal organs of the abdomen and therefore, increasing their efficiency.
- The muscles on the front part of the thighs are stretch and the calves are strengthening while doing and holding the pose. This will also help to strengthen the leg muscles.
- This pose is extremely beneficial for those who sit long hours in front of the desk or computer as they usually hunch over the desk all day long. The backward bend in the pose will relieve tension or stress from the body and help in decreasing the ailments arising out of it.
- This pose will also help in toning and strengthening the entire back muscles.
- Beneficial to nervous, digestive and respiratory systems.
- Improves cardio-vascular co-ordination.
- Stimulates all glands and influences the hormonal secretions.
- Removes sluggishness, improves self- confidence and concentration.
- Beneficial for kidneys, urinary bladder, uterus, indigestion, constipation.
- Improve strength of wrists, arms, thighs and calf muscles.
- Stretches and massages vocal cords.

Benefits for Women:

- Tones reproductive system
- Creates lightness

Therapeutic applications:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Depression
- Indigestion
- Asthma

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is any back pain, heart trouble, high blood pressure, hernia, weak wrists, menstruation, pregnancy or abdominal surgery.

Duration:

Hold asana for 10-60 seconds

Variations and tips:

- To relieve tension felt in the lower back, one can try to lift the heels of the feet off the ground and thus, balancing on the toes and palms.
- Do not focus on arching the spine, instead focus on maintaining steadiness and comfort in the pose. Letting go of perception on how the ideal pose should look like.
- If it is comfortable one can try to bring the feet closer together. One can also try to walk the feet towards the hands.

Preparatory poses:

Ardha Chakrasana
Saralhasta Bhujangasan
Dhanurasan

Follow up poses:

Pawanmuktasan
Shashankasan
Paschimottanasana
Shavasana
Chakrasan from standing
Chakrasan variations

Halasana – Plough Pose

Hala - plough

In this position the body looks like a traditional Indian plough pulled by bulls in the fields. Also by practicing this pose one ploughs the body like one digs the earth, making it loose and free.



Taking the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling slowly raise the legs to a 90 degree angle from the floor. Exhaling raise the waist and hips, taking the legs over the head, keeping them suspended above the ground. After exhaling fully, lower the leg further down and rest the toes on the floor. Keep the toes stretched and breathe normally.

The asana position:

In this position the toes rest on the floor, if there is enough flexibility, otherwise the toes are towards the floor, as far as is comfortable. If the toes reach the floor then try to place the toenails on the floor. Remember there should be no strain. The legs remain straight, if the knees are bent there is less pressure on the abdomen. The arms should remain in the same position, flat on the floor. The chin is pressed into the chest in the jalandhar bandha.

Releasing the asana position:

Exhale and inhaling lift the toes up from the floor, keeping the legs straight in the knees. Continue inhaling and slowly lower the spine back down to the ground, keeping the legs at a 90 degree angle with the floor. Exhaling slowly lower both legs back to the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

The back side of the body is stretched and the front side of the body is compressed.

Awareness:

On the spine and abdomen.

Normal breathing.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight with toes vertical on the ground over your head.
- Legs are in one straight line.
- As far as possible, the back remains straight and vertical.
- Arms straight with palms on the ground.
- Shoulders resting on the ground.
- The chin resting against the chest.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Move the neck or overstrain it in chin lock position.
- Move into this asana fast as a lot of stress is put onto the spine.

Benefits:

- Improves the tone and strength of back muscles as the back is folded, as well as the leg muscles and abdominal muscles. It also removes the rigidity of the back muscles.
- Improves the working of the spinal nerves, putting pressure on the nerves in the neck region which are predominantly sympathetic.
- Improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all the systems of the body.
- Gives a complete stretch to the spine which increases its elasticity and overall functioning.
- Activates digestion and helps with constipation, improves the efficiency of all the abdominal organs such as the spleen, pancreas, liver and kidneys. The breathing movements of the diaphragm help to massage the abdominal organs.
- Activates the thyroid gland and thymus gland, stimulating metabolism and immunity.
- Can induce states of pratyahara (sense withdrawal).

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications:

- Asthma
- Cough and cold
- Constipation
- Menstrual disorders

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation, high blood pressure and brain diseases. Should be avoided if suffering from an enlarged thyroid, spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache and weak blood vessels in the eyes.

Duration:

To begin with this pose can be a little difficult so to start a few repetitions of ten seconds at a time can be repeated. When the body is used to this then the asana can be held for 30 seconds. After some time it can be maintained for up to 3 minutes.

Variations and tips:

- Some like to hold the toes of the feet with the hands or place the hands below the neck. However if held for too long this can put too much pressure on to the upper spine.
- It is important that the back is straight with the chin tucked in towards the chest as this helps the toes to touch the floor.

Preparatory poses:

Sarvangasana
Viparit Karni
Ashwini Mudra

Follow up poses:

Vistrut Pada Halasana
Karnapeedanasana
Matsyasana – to counterbalance the Jalandhar Bandha
Chakrasana

Kandharasan – Shoulder Pose or Bridge Pose

Kandha - Shoulder



Taking the position

From supine position bend both the knees and place the feet close to the buttocks. Take some distance between the feet, at least hip width distance. Hold the ankles or keep the hands on the ground. Exhale and inhaling slowly raise the hips up as high as is comfortable.

The Asana Position

In this position the chest is pressed towards the chin and the shoulder blades are pulled towards each other. The back is arched to some extent. The face should be relaxed. Breathe normally and maintain the position.

Releasing the asana position

When releasing inhale and then exhaling slowly lower the hips down gently. Release the ankles and straighten the legs.

Anatomical focus

Back, buttocks, chest, chin

Awareness

Lifting the body as high as is comfortable.

Do's

- Be stable before coming into the pose
- Lift up the hips high

Don'ts.

- Drop the hips downward
- Raise too high and cause discomfort

Benefits

- Strengthens and tones the pelvic, hip, abdomen, lower back and buttock region.
- Reduces lower back pain
- Opens the chest, improving posture
- Strengthens spine and helps to realign the spine, which can be beneficial if there is sciatica.
- Stretches the abdominal region gently which can help in digestive problems such as constipation.

Benefits for Women

- Useful post natally to tone the entire pelvic region.
- Can help to turn a breech baby.
- The chest opening is helpful during breastfeeding
- Can be helpful in the prevention of miscarriage

Precautions & Contra-indications

If the blood pressure is high this asana should be avoided. This asana is best practiced up to the 6th month of pregnancy, if comfortable. After that extra care should be taken and particular awareness on making sure there is no dizziness. If there is heartburn at the time of practicing then avoid this pose as it may exacerbate the effect. Avoid if there is high blood pressure, ulcer, hernia, menstruation, neck pain.

Variations & Tips

This pose can be practiced as an asana and also as a movement. It can be nice to practice it a few times as a movement to warm up and then maintain it.

A nice addition to this asana is to incorporate the pelvic floor exercises. So when raising the hips apply moola bandha and release on exhalation.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Chakrasan Type 1

Follow Up Poses

Ardha Chakrasan Types 2 and 3
Chakrasan

Karnapeedanasana – Ear Trouble Pose or Folded Leg Plough Pose

Karna – Ear

It is called ear trouble pose because the knees touch the floor next to the ears.



Taking the asana position:

Start in supine preposition. Exhale, while inhaling, lift the legs up to Dwipad Uttanpadasana (two leg-raised pose), maintaining them at a right angle to the ground. While exhaling, lift the buttock and waist off the ground and bring the legs overhead. The body is balancing steadily in this position. Exhaling out completely, touch the toes to the ground and stretch them out, assuming the pose of Halasana. Bend the legs in the knees and bring the knees to the ground and by the side of the ears. The hands are kept as in supine position. Breathe normally in the pose.

The asana position:

The arms remain in the same place as in supine position. The knees are placed close to the ears and touching the ground in the final position. The toes should also be touching the ground. While in the pose, it is important to remain steady and comfortable. The breath should be calm and rhythmic. If the legs are short, the spinal column may bend a little. If the legs are long, the spinal column will remain straight.

Releasing the asana position:

Straighten out the legs at the knees and stretch them backwards, coming into Halasana. Exhale, while inhaling, lift the legs off the ground and keep them straight without bending the knees. With slow and controlled movements, lower down the legs, from the upper spine, middle spine to lower spine, coming into Dwipad Uttanpadasana. Exhaling, lower the legs down to the ground and come back to supine position.

Anatomical Focus:

The whole spinal vertebrae, shoulder, neck, abdominal muscles

Awareness:

The pressure felt on the shoulder and neck region. Have the weight of the entire body balanced and distributed evenly on the arms, shoulders and neck.

Do:

- Breathe normally while staying in the pose.
- Keep the arms firmly grounded to the ground at all times.
- Keep the knees bend and place by the side of the ears.
- Touch the toes to the ground.
- Keep the facial muscles, the neck and shoulder region relaxed at all times.

Don't:

- Tense up the body muscles while moving into the pose.
- Stop breathing while in the pose.
- Keep the knees straight.
- Strain the neck by pushing at the spine to move the legs to the ground and knees to the ears.

Benefits:

- The benefits of Karnapeedanasana is experienced too in Halasana, but because of the bend in the knees, there is more pressure added to the spine. This pose helps to increase the efficiency and elasticity of the whole spinal column as it is being stretched and massaged.
- As there is pressure on the abdomen while moving into the pose and holding it, the intestinal organs get a good massage which makes this pose beneficial for those with weak abdominal muscles.
- The digestive system also improves while holding the posture.
- Allows introversion, bringing calmness

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications:

- Digestive problems
- Stress

Precautions and Contra-indications:

The body should not be strained in any way to get the knees touching the ground, as over-straining of the body will cause injury to the spinal column.

People with severe trouble of the spinal column should avoid doing this pose.

Duration:

For beginners, there may be some difficulties in placing the knees down and may not be comfortable for one to hold the posture for long period. One should try to stay in the pose for at least 30 seconds. With practice, the time can be increased to 1-1.5 minutes. When the knees touch the ground, strain in the body will be minimized and a firm pose can be attained. The time duration can then be increased.

Variations and tips:

One could practice Halasana first and once it is being expertise, then move on to karnapeedasana. The most important thing is that there should be no strain on the body. In whichever stage practitioners is in, there should be acceptance and awareness within the body and mind. People would often try to support their back, and end up pushing themselves into the pose to place the knees down. But the ideal pose is that the arms should be on the ground at all times, so do not push the body into the pose. One should practice listening and respecting the body

Preparatory poses:

Halasana

Vistrut Pad Halasan

Follow up poses:

Matsyasana

Paschimottanasanaz

Matsyasana – Fish Pose

Matsya - fish

It is said that the body looks like a fish in this position and also that if practiced in water one is able to float.



Taking the asana position:

Spread the legs apart at about a distance of one foot. Bend the left leg at the knee and place it on the right thigh. Bend the right leg at the knee and place it on the left thigh. With the support of the elbows raise the head, curve the neck backward and place the top of head on the floor creating an arch in the back. Hold the toes of the feet with opposite hands and continue breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this asana, the thighs and knees are placed on the ground. The back is stretched in a curve and the head is on the floor. There is compression of the cervical vertebrae and a stretch on the throat, known as the Matsya Bandha, which counterposes the Jalandhar Bandha. The elbows touch the floor if the back is flexible enough and the toes are clasped by the hands.

Releasing the asana position:

Release the toes. Using the support of the elbows, slowly release the neck and return the shoulders and head to the floor. Straighten the right leg. Straighten the left leg. Bring both legs together, returning to the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Neck, head, throat, chest, hips, back, legs.

Awareness:

The stretch in the back, neck and throat.

On the opening of the chest and deep breathing.

Do:

- While taking and releasing the position, support the neck with the elbows or the hands.
- Try to rest the crown of the head on the ground.
- Hold the toes or if that is difficult place the hands on the thighs or ground.

Don't:

- Move, overstretch or turn the neck while you are in the position.
- Overstretch the neck.
- Come into or out of the position fast.

Benefits:

- The Matsya bandha causes a stretching on the thyroid and parathyroid glands, thereby improving their function and counterbalancing the effects of the Jalandhar bandha.
- It stretches the intestines, liver, pancreas, bladder and other abdominal organs which improves their functioning and efficiency.
- Reduces blood supply to the legs and redirects it to the reproductive and pelvic organs. Stagnant blood around vertebral column is drained. Improves supply to brain and face, also stretches the carotid artery.
- Toning of abdominal, thigh and intercostal muscles.
- Toning of intercostals muscles help in deep breathing, so it is helpful in asthma and bronchitis. It opens up the chest and lungs.
- Haemorrhoids
- Increases circulation to the back which helps in backache and cervical spondylitis.
- Boosts the immune system due to its effect on the thymus gland.
- Loosens the spine and prevents round shoulders.
- Loosens the legs and prepares them for meditation poses.

Benefits for Women

- The reproductive system is improved due to the increased blood supply.

Therapeutic applications:

- Asthma
- Bronchitis
- Reproductive disorders
- Cervical spondylitis
- Haemorrhoids
- Back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should not be performed by people suffering from high blood pressure, heart diseases, hernia or ulcers. Should be avoided during menstruation and pregnancy.

Duration:

The position should be held for up to 30 seconds or, if counterposing Sarvangasana or any pose with the Jalandhar bandha, then it should be held for between 1/3 to 1/2 the time that the other pose was held for.

Variations and tips:

One can keep the legs straight instead of being in Padmasana.

The legs can be folded in Swastikasana or Samasana or a simple cross legged position.

To begin with, or if the neck is delicate, then it is better to place the hands next to the head before placing the crown of the head on the floor. This gives more support to the head and neck than the elbows do.

Preparatory poses:

Sarvangasan, Halasan, Ashwini Mudra, Karnapeedanasan are all poses that are often practiced before matsyasan.

Padmasan

Bhujangasan

Follow up poses:

Shavasan

Chakrasan

Naukasana – Boat Pose

Nauk – boat

In this asana the body takes the shape of a yacht. In this pose the abdominal muscles are contracted whereas in the prone Naukasana the abdominal muscles are expanded.



Taking the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling slowly raise the legs to a 45 degree angle from the floor. Holding the breath, raise the shoulder and back from the floor, grabbing the toes of the raised legs with both hands. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this position the body is balanced on the buttocks only. The legs should remain straight as the pressure will be lost if the legs are bent. The toes should be held by the hands and if this is difficult then the ankles or knees can be held. The back should be kept as straight as possible. The arms should remain straight.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling release the toes and lower the body back down to the ground. Continue exhaling and slowly lower the legs to the ground, coming back into the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Legs, abdomen, lower back

Awareness:

Legs, abdomen, lower back

Do:

- Keep the legs straight and inclined at a 45 degree angle with the floor.
- Try and keep the back as straight as possible.
- Eyesight fixed on the toes, this will help maintain the balance.
- You may start from sitting position if it is difficult to achieve the position from supine position.
- Keep the arms and back straight as much as possible.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Bend the elbows.

Benefits:

- The pressure created on the intestines, liver, pancreas, kidneys and other abdominal organs improves their function.
- Tones the thigh, calf and abdominal muscles up to certain extent, stagnant blood is drained from the legs.
- Beneficial for hernia and kidney problems.
- Helps to improve balance and has a positive effect on the nervous system.
- Removes lethargy.
- Removes nervous tension.
- Gives freshness and vitality to the body.
- Reduces fat in the abdominal area.
- If practiced before shavasana it will give a deeper state of relaxation.
- Can be practiced on waking to increase the vitality.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs
- Increases prana in the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Nervous tension
- Lethargy
- Hernia
- Kidney problems

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Must be avoided if there is recent abdominal surgery as there is a lot of pressure on the abdomen. Avoid if heart problems, high blood pressure, pregnancy, ulcer, menstruation.

Duration:

Start with a few seconds and build up to 15 seconds.

Variations and tips:

If it is difficult to practice this pose from the supine position then it can be practiced from sitting. Bend both of the knees and grab hold of the toes. From here slowly lift the legs up and straighten them, balancing on the buttocks.

Other variations include –

- Lifting the legs just 30 cms from the ground, raising the head the same amount and having the arms pointing in front with the gaze over the fingertips.
- Placing the hands behind the head, interlocked, and lifting the legs at various heights.
- Placing the forearms on the ground with the back at 45 degrees and raising the legs to 45 degrees.
- Instead of holding the feet keeping the arms parallel with the ground.

Preparatory poses:

Dwi pada uttanpadasana

Follow up poses:

Shavasana

Sarvangasana – Shoulder Stand Pose

Sarva – all

Anga – limb



Taking the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling, contract the abdomen and slowly raise both the legs to a 90 degree angle from the floor. Exhaling raise the waist and the hips from the floor and take the legs backwards over the head. Inhaling raise the back and the legs up into a vertical position, placing the hands on the upper back for support. The chin should rest against the chest, creating the chin lock. Fix the eyesight on the toes and maintaining the asana, continue normal breathing.

The asana position:

One should concentrate on getting the legs, waist and the back in one straight line and making this line 90 degrees with the ground. In this asana the arms up to the elbows are placed on the floor, shoulder width apart. The body from the feet to the shoulders is in a straight line. The chest is pushed forward and the chin is placed in the jugular notch forming a tie which is called 'Jalandhar Bandha'. All the pressure is on the neck, shoulders and the back of the head. The hands are placed on the back ribs, the legs are straight and the feet are relaxed

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling bend in the waist and lower the legs over the head, releasing the hands from the upper back. Inhaling slowly lower the back to the floor, keeping the legs at a 90 degree angle from the floor. Here lower the back very slowly, vertebrae by vertebrae.

Exhaling slowly lower both legs back to the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Neck, shoulders

Awareness:

Keeping the body in a straight line.

Remaining balanced.

Normal breathing.

The focus can also be on the throat and the thyroid.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight with toes pointing to the sky.
- Try and keep the body in a straight line from the chest to the tips of the toes.
- Head straight and eye sight fixed on the toes.
- Make sure that the trunk is raised enough vertically so that the chin can comfortably rest against the chest.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Move the neck or overstrain it in the chin lock position.
- Bring the legs over the head when in the asana position but don't keep them completely vertical if it causes tension.
- Raise the head from the floor.
- Tense the legs or point the feet as this contracts the legs and prevents drainage of blood.

Benefits:

- The Jalandhar Bandha improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all other systems of the body.
- The thyroid gland is improved due to the increase oxygen and blood as well as by reducing excess emotional and mental stress which affects the thyroid.
- Stagnant blood from the lower regions of the body, i.e. legs and abdomen is drained to the heart thereby improving the supply of fresh blood to these parts and the whole circulatory system. Blood supply to the head area i.e. brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat is improved thereby improving their functioning. Therefore all of the pelvic and abdominal area circulation, ear, throat and nose ailments are improved.
- The lung capacity is increased as the diaphragm, which is the muscle of respiration, has to work against gravity in this posture, this helps in the abdominal respiration and is therefore helpful in the treatment of asthma. Toxins in the respiratory system are drained thereby improving the respiratory system.
- Prevents and cures varicose veins.
- Detoxification of the body due to improved efficiency of the organs of the body which leads to youthfulness and anti-ageing effects
- Normalizes body weight due to its effect on the thyroid..

- Due to the effect this asana has on the hormonal system, particularly the thyroid, it balances the circulatory, digestive, reproductive and nervous system.
- Due to the increased blood flow to the head the mind is tranquilized, stress and psychological disturbances are removed.
- The increased blood flow can be beneficial for those who suffer from headaches, though it should not be practiced at the time of headache.
- The thymus gland is stimulated which boosts the immune system.
- It balances the parathyroid glands that ensures regeneration and normal development of the bones.
- It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anus muscles which helps with haemorrhoids.
- The nerves passing through the neck are toned and the neck flexibility is increased.
- The digestive system is greatly improved due to the increase in blood circulation and drainage of stagnant blood.
- The pranic flow is harmonized, increasing energy and having a positive effect on all the body systems.
- Sarvangasana has all the benefits of Shirshasana but is safer and easier to perform.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications:

- Thyroid disorders
- Asthma
- Reproductive problems
- Headache
- Haemorrhoids
- Varicose veins
- Prevention of cough and colds
- Diabetes

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should not be performed by people suffering from high blood pressure, heart conditions or brain diseases. Should be avoided during menstruation and pregnancy. Should be avoided if suffering from a very enlarged thyroid, enlarged spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache, weak blood vessels in the eyes, sinus congestion.

Duration:

This asana is difficult in the beginning especially for women with heavy hips and men with big bellies. This asana should be maintained for 3 minutes after sufficient practice to get the desired results.

Variations and tips:

- One may need a folded blanket under the neck and shoulders for support.
- For some beginners it may be difficult to raise the legs straight. If so then one can bend the knees a little while taking the position and then straighten out the legs.
- Generally it is easier to hold the position than to come into the position as there is less stress on the abdominal and spinal muscles, however there is more stress on the upper back muscles.

Preparatory poses:

Dwi Pada Uttanpadasana
Viparit Karni

Follow up poses:

Matsyasana is essential to practice after Sarvangasana to counter balance the effect of the Jalandhar Bandha. Otherwise an asana that bends the head backwards like Bhujangasana or Chakrasana.

Halasan

Vistrut Pada Halasana

Karnapeedanasana

Ashwini Mudra

Supta Vajrasan – Reclining Thunderbolt

Supta – Sleeping

Vajra – Thunderbolt



Taking the asana position

From the supine position slowly bend one leg and place the foot next to the hip. From here bend the other leg and do the same.

The asana position

The knees may be touching or there may be some separation. Comfort is of utmost importance.

Bring the arms up over the head or hold the ankles. Relax and breathe normally, maintaining for as long as is comfortable.

Releasing the asana position

Let the arms be by the sides. Slowly release one leg and straighten it, then the other. Relax.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, thighs, knees, lower back

Awareness

On the stretch across the abdomen and thighs. Relaxation.

Do's

- Take distance between the knees if needed.

Don'ts.

- Let the body become strained, this should be a relaxing pose.

Benefits

- Good for the pelvic region, abdominal organs and thighs.
- Stretches the hips.
- Increases efficiency and massages pancreas, liver, intestines, spleen, uterus, urinary bladder and kidneys.
- Increases efficiency of the lungs.
- Strengthens the respiratory system and opens the chest.
- Improves digestion and is useful in constipation
- Gives rest to the legs and helps with leg cramps.
- Relaxing and soothing.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Can help during menstruation to remove congestion and tension
- Helpful prenatally and postnatally.

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Menstrual problems
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

For pregnancy, if lying on the back is uncomfortable or there is dizziness then avoid this asana. Best avoided after the 6th month as it is quite a strong stretch and may become uncomfortable as the belly increases in size. This asana puts stress on the knees so should be avoided if there is knee pain. Best avoided if there is sciatica or sacral problems or preterm labour.

Duration

From 30 seconds up to 5 minutes if comfortable and supported.

Variations and tips

- A bolster or two can be used to lift the upper body to 45 degrees if preferred. This is especially useful during pregnancy. The leg position can also be practiced in sitting position.

Preparatory Poses

Supta Titaliasan
Leg movements

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasan

Viparit Karni – Inverted Pose

Viparit – reversed, inverted
Karni/karani – doing, action



Taking the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling slowly raise both the legs to a 90 degree angle from the floor. Exhaling raise the waist and the hips from the floor and take the legs backwards over the head. Inhaling place both hands below the waist for support and straighten the legs, toes pointed to the ceiling. The trunk of the body should be at a 45 degree angle from the floor. Fix the eyesight on the toes and maintaining the asana, continue normal breathing.

The asana position:

In this asana the upper arms are placed on the floor. The body from the neck to the elbows is kept straight. The legs are together and the neck is free. The majority of the pressure is being on the hands, wrists and elbows. The back is at a 45 degree angle and the elbows are close together. The legs are vertical but slightly tilted over the head if it is difficult.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the legs over the head, bring the arms back to the floor. Inhaling slowly lower the waist back down to the floor keeping the legs at a 90 degree angle from the ground. Exhaling slowly lower both legs back to the supine position.

Anatomical focus:

Neck, shoulders, elbows, legs

Awareness:

Remaining balanced.

Normal breathing.

The focus can also be on the movement from the navel to the throat.

Do:

- Keep the legs with toes pointing to the sky.
- The trunk of the body should be kept about at a 45 degree angle from the ground.
- Head straight and eye sight fixed on the toes.
- Make sure that the trunk is raised enough vertically so that the chin can comfortably rest against the chest.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Move the neck or overstrain.
- Bring the legs over the head when in the asana position but don't keep them completely vertical if it causes tension.
- Raise the head from the floor.
- Tense the legs or point the feet as this contracts the legs and prevents drainage of blood.

Benefits:

- Stagnant blood from the lower regions of the body, i.e. legs and abdomen is drained to the heart thereby improving the supply of fresh blood to these parts and the whole circulatory system. Blood supply to the head area i.e. brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat is improved thereby improving their functioning. Therefore all of the pelvic and abdominal area circulation, ear, throat and nose ailments are improved.
- The lung capacity is increased as the diaphragm, which is the muscle of respiration, has to work against gravity in this posture, this helps in the abdominal respiration and is therefore helpful in the treatment of asthma. Toxins in the respiratory system are drained thereby improving the respiratory system.
- Prevents and cures varicose veins.
- Detoxification of the body due to improved efficiency of the organs of the body which leads to youthfulness and anti-ageing effects
- Due to the increased blood flow to the head the mind is tranquilized, stress and psychological disturbances are removed.
- The increased blood flow can be beneficial for those who suffer from headaches, though it should not be practiced at the time of headache.
- It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anus muscles which helps with haemorrhoids.
- The nerves passing through the neck are toned and the neck flexibility is increased.
- The digestive system is greatly improved due to the increase in blood circulation and drainage of stagnant blood.
- The pranic flow is harmonized, increasing energy and having a positive effect on all the body systems.
- Balances the breath, ida and pingala.
- Balances the thyroid.
- Increases the circulation to the pituitary and pineal glands.
- Relieves constipation.
- Prevents atherosclerosis and restores vascular elasticity and tone.
- Beneficial for memory loss and dementia as well as increasing mental alertness.
- Increases the metabolism when held for longer periods of time, such as 10 - 15 minutes.
- Can be used as a mudra as written in Kriya, Kundalini and Tantric texts.
- Can be used instead of Sarvangasana, especially when one wants to put less stress on the neck.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications:

- Thyroid disorders
- Asthma
- Reproductive problems
- Headache
- Haemorrhoids
- Varicose veins
- Prevention of cough and colds
- Diabetes
- Memory loss and dementia
- Atherosclerosis
- Constipation
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should not be performed by people suffering from high blood pressure, heart conditions or brain diseases. Should be avoided during menstruation and pregnancy. Should be avoided if suffering from an enlarged thyroid, spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache and weak blood vessels in the eyes.

Duration:

This asana is difficult in the beginning especially for women with heavy hips and men with big bellies. This asana should be maintained for 2 minutes after sufficient practice to get the desired results. After practice for some time it can be increased to 5-10 mins daily, even up to 30 mins daily but this is under the guidance of a yoga expert.

Variations and tips:

- One may need a folded blanket under the neck, shoulders and elbows for support.
- For some beginners it may be difficult to raise the legs straight. If so then one can bend the knees a little while taking the position and then straighten out the legs.
- This asana will be different for everyone due to body proportions and individual differences in weight distribution. This position takes more abdominal strength than spinal muscle strength. It is a good position to practice coming in and out of if you want to develop more control over the abdominal muscles. For women it can be a more difficult pose to hold due to the greater proportion of weight in the lower body. It can also be more difficult for those with very flexible backs as the abdominal muscles have to work harder.

Preparatory poses:

Dwi Pada Uttanpadasana

Follow up poses:

Sarvangasana

Ashwini Mudra

Halasana

Vistrut Pada Halasana

Karnapeedanasana

Matsyasana
Chakrasana

Vistrutapada Halasana - Spread Leg Plough Pose

Vstrut – Spread
Pada - leg
Hala - plough



Taking the asana position:

Come to supine position. Inhale, lift the legs up to 90 degrees(perpendicular to the ground), coming to Uttanpadasana. Keep the shoulders and neck relaxed in this position. There is no strain/tension on the face. While exhaling, lift the waist& hips up and keep the legs floating behind the head, retaining a balance. Exhaling completely, touch the toes of the legs to the ground. The heels will be pointing straight up. Keep the breath normal, raise both the arms over the head and hold onto the toes of the feet. Stretch the legs apart from each other with the help of the hands, maintaining a straight line at the knees. Breathe normally in the pose.

The asana position:

The heels should be kept pointing towards the sky at all times, maintaining a stretch at the back of the legs. Both legs should be kept straight at all times to balance the body while holding the pose. The points of contact with the ground are the shoulders, the vertebrae of the neck, the head, both the toes of the legs and the arms. There will be a compression between the chin and the chest, creating Jalandhar bandha automatically. Pressure is shifted onto the neck and shoulders, which might make it difficult to balance. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to maintain stability in this posture.

Releasing the asana position:

First, one should prepare ones mind for releasing the asana.

Try to join the feet together first, while still holding on to the toes.

Release the toes and bring the hands down to the ground, keeping them parallel to each other.

Exhale, while inhaling, lift the legs off the ground while keeping them straight at the knees, bringing the legs down to Dwipada Uttanpadasana.

Exhale, and slowly lower the legs down to the ground coming back to supine position.

Anatomical focus:

The shoulders

Spinal column

Hamstring

Abdomen region

Awareness:

On balancing of the body in the posture.

On maintaining a steady, smooth & controlled breathing.

Do:

- Keep the mind focused on the effects of the posture.
- Keep the legs straight at all times.
- Relax the facial muscles.
- Remain steady and comfortable in the posture.
- Take slow, long and deep breath.

Do not:

- Turn the head to either side, as this would cause injuries to the neck.
- Bend the knees, as this would defeat the purpose of practicing the asana.
- Let the arms move away from the ground as this would cause you to lose your balance.

Benefits:

- The actions of stretching towards both the sides, help to shift the pressure onto the digestive system. With breathing movements of the diaphragm, posture would help in massaging all intra-abdominal organs and glands, and increasing its overall efficiency of the digestive system.
- When the legs are stretched apart, there is an increase of pressure on the muscles and joints of the waist thereby helping to tone the core region.
- The gravity allows a deeper stretch at the back of the legs. In addition, pulling the legs apart helps to stretch the anterior part of the legs.
- Blood flow to the face would improve complexion.
- This posture also helps to tone the arms as it is being stretched and strengthened with the pressure from the inverted body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Opens the pelvis

Therapeutic applications:

- All stress related disease
- Stress
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Insomnia

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Posture is not to be performed by people with high blood pressure or brain diseases.

Posture is not suitable for those with neck issues, such as cervical spondylitis.

People with recent abdominal surgery or have disorders like, stomach ulcers, hernia, should avoid doing this pose. As in inverted posture, it should not be performed by people who are menstruating nor is it suitable for pregnant women because of the intense pressure on the abdomen region.

Duration:

30 seconds to a minute over time.

Variations and tips:

- If the feet are not touching the ground, to maintain balance of the body and to enjoy the benefits of the pose, you can place your hands on the upper back for support.
- You can place a cushion/ block underneath the toes for better support.
- You can also place a cushion underneath the shoulder region (or the upper back region) for further comfort while holding the pose or for those with less flexibility in the upper spine and between the shoulder blades.

Preparatory poses:

Uttanapadasana
Viparita Karni
Sarvangasana
Halasana

Follow up poses:

Matsyasana

Prone

Ardha Naukasana - Half Boat Pose

Ardha –Half
Nauk - Boat



Taking the asana position

From prone position bend the left hand at the elbow and place it on the back and stretch the right hand above the head, inhale and raise the right hand, head, chest and right leg above the ground.

The asana position

Try to lengthen the spine whilst raising the arm and leg as high as comfortable. Gaze forward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling lower the leg and chest and arm. Bring the arms back down by the sides. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Spine, abdomen

Awareness

Raising the arm and leg up whilst lengthening the spine.

Do's

- Lift up both the arm and leg
- Maintain balance and not tilt to the side

Don'ts

- Bend the leg

Benefits

- Good for beginners having a weak back.
- Tones back muscles and improves flexibility.
- It stimulates the spinal nerves, stretches the abdominal region and strengthens the back.
- Decreases fats.
- Relieves mild lower back pain.
- Improves bowel movements and blood supply to abdominal region.
- Improves posture.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive problems
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Proceed with caution if you have any back problems. Do not perform if you've undergone recent abdominal operations.

Duration

Hold the asana for 10-30 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Instead of having the arm wrapped behind the back it can remain straight in front.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasan

Ardha Shalabhasan

Shalabhasan

Follow Up Poses

Tiryak Naukasan

Naukasan

Dhanurasan

Dhanurasana – Bow Pose

From Sanskrit *dhanu* (bow). As a bow is strained when the string is pulled, similarly the whole body is stretched when this asana is performed.



Taking the asana position

Bend both the legs and keep them at a distance of 6 to 8 inches from each other. Catch both the legs firmly near the ankles. Place the forehead on the ground. Exhale and while inhaling pull the legs upwards with the hands and raise the chest, allowing the whole body to be stretched in a curve, raising the neck to gaze towards the ceiling. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position the whole body rests on the abdomen. The thighs are raised from the floor along with the head, shoulders and chest. Ideally the knees are at the same level as the shoulders and the head is tilted back. The ankles are raised towards the sky. The arms are straight and the knees are separated. Over time the knees can slowly be brought together. As the weight of the body is on the abdomen there will be a slight rocking movement due to the breath.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling bring both knees, shoulders and chin slowly to the floor. Release the ankles and bring the hands beside the body. Straighten the bent legs, bring them to the floor and return to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

The stretch on the front side of the body, compression of the spine and stretch into the arms and legs.

Awareness

On the abdomen, back and expansion and contraction of the abdomen

Do's

- Try to balance on the abdomen.
- Keep the knees and thighs off the ground; keeping about 1 foot distance between knees.
- Raise the chest and shoulders off the ground.
- Open the chest and pull the shoulders back.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms.
- Drop the head.

Benefits

- The body weight is balanced on the abdominal muscles and they are given pressure so that the intra-abdominal organs, i.e. stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas and intestines are massaged by the change in pressure. It also improves the secretions of these organs. It improves the peristalsis of the intestine and relieves constipation. The blood flow to the abdominal organs is also improved. Sluggishness of the liver is removed as is dyspepsia. With regular practice it will reduce the fat around the abdomen and thigh areas.
- This asana creates strength in the muscles of the spinal cord and the nerves of the back. It helps to realign the spine. It also strengthens the muscles of the arms and thighs.
- It widens and opens the chest area thereby improving respiration, relieving asthma and bronchitis. It is helpful for breast development and helps to remove hunching of the upper back and shoulders.
- There is an improvement in the circulation of lymph and blood throughout the body especially the arms and legs due to the toning of the muscles.
- Tones the adrenal glands and balances their secretions.
- Massages the kidneys.
- Stimulates the sympathetic nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Good chest opener for breastfeeding women
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes
- Incontinence
- Colitis
- Menstrual disorders
- Asthma
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should be completely avoided if you are suffering from diseases of the backbone. If there is recent abdominal surgery, hernia or ulcer in the stomach this posture should be avoided. Must be avoided if suffering T.B. Pregnancy and menstruation.

Duration

To begin with this pose can be held only for 5 to 10 seconds. Over time this can be increased or repetitions of 10 seconds can be practiced. The timing can be increased up to 30 seconds and then later up to three minutes.

Variations and tips

- There will be some rocking movement because of the diaphragm movements for breathing.
- Some people find it easier to come into the position if they place their forehead on the floor before raising the body.
- An easier variation is to keep the thighs on the ground and only raise the chest.
- An advanced variation is to have the knees and ankles together.

Preparatory Poses

Saralhasa Bhujangasana
Vakrahasta Bhujangasana

Shalabhasana
Ardha Dhanurasana

Follow Up Poses

Naukasana
Ardha Paschimottanasana
Paschimottanasana
Vajrasana Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2.

Naukasana – Boat Pose

From Sanskrit *nauk* (boat). The shape of the body looks like a boat.



Taking the asana position

Bring the arms in front of the head, resting them on the floor with the palms joined together. Forehead on the floor. Exhale and while inhaling raise the arms, forehead and chest from the ground and at the same time raising the legs from the waist, keeping the legs straight. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position both the arms and legs are raised from the ground. The palms are together and the head is between the arms with the upper arms close to the ears. The heels and knees are together and both the arms and legs are straight. All of the weight is placed on the abdomen. The legs and arms should be raised as much as is comfortably possible. The arms and legs should be stretched away from each other, lengthening the body.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the shoulders, forehead, arms and legs to the floor. Keeping the forehead resting on the floor. Return both hands to the sides of the body and the chin on the ground, coming into the prone position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen.

Awareness

The stretch from the fingertips to the toes.

Do's

- Keep both the legs straight in the knees and toes pointed.

- Keep both the arms straight in elbows and palms joined in Namaskar position over the head.
- Keep the head between the arms throughout the asana, arms against the ears.
- Try to balance on the abdomen.
- Try to raise the thighs off the ground.
- Try to raise the shoulders and chest off the ground.

Don'ts

- Bend the elbows or knees
- Keep distance between legs or knees

Benefits

- The effects on the abdominal area are similar to Dhanurasana but are slightly increased as the stretch and pull is not transferred to the hands and legs but is carried by the abdominal area.
- The body weight is balanced on the abdominal muscles and they are given pressure so that the intra-abdominal organs, i.e. stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas and intestines are massaged by the change in pressure. It also improves the secretions of these organs.
- It improves the peristalsis of the intestine and relieves constipation.
- The blood flow to the abdominal organs is also improved.
- Sluggishness of the liver is removed as is dyspepsia.
- With regular practice it will reduce the fat around the abdomen and thigh areas.
- There is a complete stretch from the fingertips to the toes, releasing tension in the whole body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Dyspepsia
- Anorexia

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is recent abdominal surgery, back pain, hernia or ulcer in the stomach this posture should be avoided. Avoid during pregnancy and menstruation.

Duration

To begin with this asana can be held for 5 to 10 seconds. Repetitions can be practiced. After some time it can be maintained for 15 seconds and later up to 2 minutes.

Variations and tips

- There will be some rocking movement because of diaphragm movements for breathing.

Preparatory Poses

Saralhasta Bhujangasana
 Vakrahasta Bhujangasana
 Shalabhasana
 Dhanurasana.

Follow Up Poses

Ardha Paschimottanasan

Paschimottanasana
Vajrasana Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2.

Niralamba Bhujangasana – Unsupported cobra pose

Nir – gone
Alamba – support
Bhujanga – cobra



Taking the asana position

Come into the prone position. First, interlock the thumbs or interlaced the fingers on the back of the body. Exhale and while inhaling, lift up the head and shoulders off the ground with the support of the muscles connecting to the spinal column. Lift the chin, shoulder, chest and abdomen off the ground. Gradually stretch the shoulders back with the help of the arms and then lift them up with the help of the spinal cord. Each vertebra is gradually lifted up, with the pressure slowly passing from the vertebra of the neck to those in the waist. Breathe normally into the pose.

The asana position

Ideally, the head, shoulders, chest and diaphragm region are lifted off the ground, while the legs remain on the ground at all times. One should only move as far as one is still comfortable in the pose. The heels and toes should be kept together at all times. The ideal pose is achieved when an attempt is made to hold the neck backwards. However, if there is strain in the neck, one should just gaze forward and breathe normally in the pose.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling, first release the waist to the ground, then the abdomen, the chest and then bend the vertebrae of the neck down to touch the chin on the ground. Release the arms down to the side of the body and come back to prone position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, spinal muscles, spinal column.

Awareness

Maintain a steady and rhythmic breathing throughout the whole duration of going into, holding and releasing of the pose, focus on lengthening the spine first before, bending the neck backwards. Especially for beginners, you do not want to strain the spine, especially the cervical region of the spine, when you are in this pose. By over-bending one could strain that region, which lead to injuries of the lumbar region.

Do's

- Keep the toes and heels together at all times while in the pose.
- Do not lift the arms up.
- Breathe normally while in the pose.

Don'ts

- Lift the arms up, even though this might allow some people to lift the upper torso further up. This might cause undue strains on the shoulders and neck instead, causing more harm and injuries.
- Hold the breath while in the pose; breathe normally.
- Move in to posture with jerky movements, as this will cause injuries to the spine due to lack of awareness while moving in to posture.

Benefits

- Muscles on the abdomen region are stretch desirably.
- While maintaining posture, the pressure on the abdomen region increases due to breathing in the pose. The intra-abdominal organs get a good massage and thus increasing their efficiency.
- The muscles at the back of the body, alongside the spine, are strengthened, as one is using the muscles here to lift the upper torso up and while maintaining the posture.
- The blood circulation and efficiency of the spinal cord and muscles are improved also, and thereby improving general health.
- It could also be practice after a series of forward-bending posture, which could cause pain and discomfort for some beginners.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Weak digestive system
- People with poor posture

Precautions and Contra-indications

People with diseases of the spinal column should avoid doing this pose, as it is a very strengthening pose that might aggravate the condition. Those who have hernia, tuberculosis of the intestine, stomach ulcers should perform this asana with expert guidance. Beginners or people with stiff spinal column should practice this asana with awareness, moving into posture in a slow and controlled manner.

Duration

For beginners, they can try to hold asana for at least 10-15 seconds first. Practice of having a slow, steady and rhythmic breathing should be practiced to further increase the strength and endurance of holding this pose. After gradual practice, one can slowly increase the time to 30 seconds with focus on steady & controlled breath and also, steady and comfortable asana. Once one is able to experience relaxation while in the pose, the duration can be increased to 3 minutes.

Variations and tips

- If the spinal column is stiff and you are practicing this asana for the first time, then practice with variation of supporting with the arms, as in Vakrahasta Bhujungasana, so that spinal column will achieve some degree of elasticity before practicing Niralamba Bhujungasana.

- One should first think of lengthening the spine first before stretching up as this creates space between the vertebrae, allowing muscles to be stretched and strengthened at the same time.
- If there is unbearable tension while maintaining pose, one can spread the legs slightly apart.
- One should gaze to the front if there is any undue stress and tension at the cervical region of the neck.
- If there is pain in the pelvic region, a pillow or folded towel can be used for support and remaining comfortable in the pose. However, pillow or folded towel should not be too big, as there is a tendency to use support as a way of lifting the upper torso higher. The benefits of doing this pose will be decreased.

Preparatory Poses

Bhujungasan series

Sahajahasta Bhujungasan

Vakrahasta Bhujungasan.

Follow Up Poses

Makarasana

Shavasana

Vajarasana Type 1

Niralamb Shalabhasan- Unsupported Locust Pose

Nir – no

Lamb – support

Shalabh – locust



Taking the asana position:

From prone position bend the elbows and interlaced the fingers at the back of the neck. The chin is resting on the ground. Exhale, while inhaling lift both legs up gradually.

The asana position:

The elbows should not be on the ground; but are just slightly above the ground with the arms parallel to the ground. The lifted legs should be straight while moving into the pose and maintaining it. The toes are pointed to the back. The chin should be on the ground and breath should remain steady and rhythmic; do not hold the breath while in this asana.

Releasing the position:

Inhale, while exhaling, with slow and controlled movement, place the legs on the ground. Release the hands from the back of the neck and place the arms by the side of the body, coming back into the prone position.

Anatomical focus:

Lower back, Lower abdomen

Awareness:

Raising as high as is comfortable with stable breath

Do:

- Keep the chin grounded as there is the tendency to lift it off.
- Legs should remain straight with toes pointing to the back. One may find that with the knees bent, the legs looked like it is lifted high off the ground, but the benefits of strengthening the legs would be minimized, if knees are bent.
- Keep elbows slightly off the ground. They should not be lifted too high up as one would also lift the chin off the ground at the same time.
- Remember to breathe normally while in the pose, as there would be a tendency to stop doing so.

Don't:

- Tense up the whole body while lifting the legs off the ground and maintaining it. The body should be soft and efforts to be made on relaxing the body.

Benefits:

- Similar benefits to normal shalabhasan
- It helps to strengthen the legs in prone position, as the legs and toes are stretched desirably.
- This pose strengthens the muscles on the lower back, with the pressure that one gets from lifting the legs off the ground and maintaining it.
- The muscles on the lower abdomen are stretched when the legs are lifted off, and thus toning them.
- The pressure felt on the abdomen while holding the asana increases the efficiency of the digestive organs, excretion system and the reproductive system.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic Applications:

- Reproductive problems
- Digestive problems
- Constipation

Precautions& Contra-indications:

People who have any spinal column ailments, especially on the lower vertebrae should not attempt this pose. Those with hernia, intestinal ulcers and other diseases of the small and large intestine should avoid it. Avoid in pregnancy and menstruation.

Duration:

In the initial stage, the asana should be kept steady for a duration of at least 30 seconds so as to gain its advantageous effects. With continuous practice, the duration can be increased to 1 to 1.5 minutes.

Variations & Tips:

- For a start, focus should be on maintaining a slow and rhythmic breathing. This could be achieved when the pose is steady and comfortable. People often lift the legs up too high, and end up straining the body and breath. As in Niralamba Bhujungasana (lengthening the torso to the front), think of lengthening the legs to the back of the room. Stretch the entire length of the legs, but do not tense up while doing so. Practice patience and humility in the pose.
- Move into the posture in a slow, controlled and systematic way so as to keep the awareness and ideal position in mind at all times.
- Beginners should work slowly on improving the strength of the lower back muscles, before lifting the legs up or increasing the duration to hold this pose. This would help in minimizing the strain of the breath. Benefits of this pose are greatly minimized if the individual capacity is exceeded.
- One should practice minimum lifting and increased duration, instead of maximum lifting of the legs and maintaining the posture for a shorter time. The ideal pose should be achieved under these guidelines.

Preparatory Poses:

Ardha Shalabhasana
Shalabhasana

Follow-up Poses:

Makarasana
Shashankasan
Shavasana

Saralhasta Bhujangasana – Straight Arm Cobra Pose

Saral – Straight
Hasta – Arm
Bhujanga – Cobra



Taking the asana position

Bring both hands near the chest and place the palms on the ground with the fingers together and thumb pointed towards the body. Elbows should be raised towards the ceiling. Place forehead on the ground. While inhaling raise the forehead, bend the neck backwards and then slowly raising the shoulders, chest and abdomen from the ground until the arms are straight in the elbows. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position the pressure is felt on the arms and hands as well as the lower back. Over time this pressure can gradually be placed more on to the lower back. One should try to raise the body up with the help of the spine. Once the final position is attained the arms are straight, the chest is forward and open, the shoulders and neck are back and the heels are together. The breathing should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the abdomen, chest and finally forehead on the ground using the support of the arms. Place the chin on the floor and return the arms back to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

The lower back and stretch on the front side of the body.

Awareness

The arch of the back, relaxing the lower back and normal breathing.

Do's

- Try and keep the arms straight, palms on the ground.
- Try and keep the knees and ankles together, toes pointed.
- Gaze towards the ceiling.
- You can lift the hips and thighs if the back is not flexible.
- Open the chest; pull the shoulders backwards and downwards.

Don'ts

- Have any distance between the legs.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- Helps to remove backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.
- Chest opening effect is helpful for breastfeeding mothers.

Therapeutic applications

- Back ache
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should not be practiced by those with severe problems of the spine, stomach ulcers, hernias or pregnant women. It should be practiced with care for those with stiff backs and for those who are menstruating.

Duration

To begin with this asana should be held for 5 to ten seconds. It can be repeated 3 to 5 times, depending on the individual's capacity. With practice the number of repetitions can be increased. At this point reduce the number of repetitions but increase the time. Gradually increase the time to 1 minute. After more practice the time can be increased up to 3 to 5 minutes.

Variations and tips

- To counter balance the stretch in the body practice shalabhasana after saralhasta bhujangasana.
- If the pose is stressful then one can look forward to reduce the pressure on the back.
- Another way to reduce the tension is to lift the hips from the ground to reduce the back bend.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasana
Karnahasta Bhujangasana

Follow Up Poses

Vakrahasta Bhujangasana
Niralamba Bhujangasana
Shalabhasana
Naukasana
Dhanurasana.

Shalabhasana – Locust Pose

Shalabh – Locust



Taking the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling raise both legs from the waist, keeping the legs straight. Keep the toes stretched and continue normally breathing.

The asana position

In this position both legs are raised with the legs kept straight. There should be no bending of the knees, otherwise the desired strain on the organs will be reduced. The chin should remain on the ground and the head, neck and shoulders should remain relaxed. The abdomen and thighs are stretched and the palms are pressed to the floor. There should be normal breathing and no trembling of the legs.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the legs back down to the ground and return to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

On the lower back, abdomen and legs.

Awareness

On normal breathing and keeping the body relaxed.

Do's

- Keep both the legs straight and together at the knees.
- Chin on the ground.
- Palms pressing on the ground.
- Toes pointing backwards.

Don'ts

- Bend the knees.
- Keep distance between the legs.
- Touch the forehead on the ground.

Benefits

- Stimulates the parasympathetic nerves in the lower spinal region. Removes the pressure on the sciatic nerve and gives relief from backache and slipped disc (however it should be practiced with caution for those suffering from slipped disc).
- Improves the function of the abdominal organs especially the lower abdomen by improving peristalsis in the large intestine and especially in the large portion of the colon. Improves appetite.
- Improves the strength of the thigh and abdominal muscles and improves blood supply to the lower back and neck muscles, relieving stiffness in this region.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Mild sciatica
- Mild slipped disc
- Constipation
- Anorexia
- Back ache

Precautions and Contra-indications

Practice with caution if there is slipped disc or any other severe spinal problems. Any recent abdominal surgery, hernia or prolapse. Pregnancy or menstruation.

Duration

In the beginning this asana should be held for just a few seconds but can gradually be built up to 15 seconds. It can be repeated 3 to 5 times.

Variations and tips

- Only raise the legs as far as it is comfortable, do not allow the legs to tremble.
- Arms inserted below the thighs with palms facing downwards or upwards if that is uncomfortable to help raise the legs more.
- Another variation is to have the hands together with fingers interlocked, supporting on the ground.
- A simple variation is to keep the legs at 90 degrees and raise the legs. The benefits are much less but one can slowly build the strength in the body so that later they can do the normal shalabhasana.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Shalabhasana.

Follow Up Poses

Naukasana

Dhanurasana.

Tiryak Bhujangasana – Twisted Cobra Pose

Tiryak– Twisted
Bhujanga – Cobra



Taking the asana position

Bring both hands near the chest and place the palms on the ground with the fingers together and thumb pointed towards the body. Elbows should be raised towards the ceiling. Place forehead on the ground. Separate the legs about half a metre. While inhaling raise the forehead, bend the neck backwards and then slowly raising the shoulders, chest and abdomen from the ground until the arms are straight in the elbows. This is the position from which the movement is done.

The asana position

In this position the pressure is felt on the arms and hands as well as the lower back. The head remains straight and the arms may be slightly bent if necessary. From here inhale and whilst exhaling twist the head and upper part of the body to look over the left shoulder towards the toes. The arms will be straight or a little bent as one twists. The legs stay apart. Inhale back to the front and exhale twisting to look over the right shoulder. Inhale back to the front. This is one round. Continue.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slower lower the abdomen, chest and finally forehead on the ground using the support of the arms. Place the chin on the floor, bring the legs together and return the arms back to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

The lower back and abdomen.

Awareness

Relaxing the lower back and the pressure and stretch on the abdomen.

Do's

- Try and keep the arms straight, palms on the ground in the original position.
- Let the legs be apart.
- Look forward in the original position, and to the toes when twisting..
- You can lift the hips and thighs if the back is not flexible.
- Open the chest; pull the shoulders backwards and downwards.

Don'ts

- Keep the feet together.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- Helps to remove backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.
- Strengthens the arms.
- This pose is much stronger on the intestines than the other cobras. It squeezes the abdomen and is very helpful for constipation which is why it is one of the asanas in shankarprakashan, the master cleanse.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.
- Chest opening effect is helpful for breastfeeding mothers.

Therapeutic applications

- Backache
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should not be practiced by those with severe problems of the spine, stomach ulcers, hernias or pregnant women. It should be practiced with care for those with stiff backs and for those who are menstruating.

Duration

The amount of times this asana is practiced will depend on the reason it is being done. For a general practice 3-5 rounds may be practiced, whereas if it is being practiced in the master cleanse it may be 60 - 120 rounds or even more.

Variations and tips

- Practice shashankasan as a counter pose if its putting too much stress on the back.
- If it is too difficult to have the arms straight then the arms may be bent to some extent.
- Another way to reduce the tension is to lift the hips from the ground to reduce the back bend.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasana

Karnahasta Bhujangasan

Saralhasta Bhujangasan

Follow Up Poses

Vakrahasta Bhujangasana

Niralamba Bhujangasana

Shalabhasana

Naukasana

Dhanurasana
Shashankasan

Tiryak Dhanurasan -Diagonal Bow Pose

Tiryak - Twisted
Dhanu - Bow



Taking the asana position

From prone position, bend the left leg in the knee and grab the ankle with the right hand. Stretch the left hand above the head and place forehead to the ground. Inhale and raise the right thigh and left hand straight, head, shoulder, chest above the ground.

The asana position

Try to pull the foot upward with the hand whilst pushing the foot backwards, arching the body like a bow. If a stronger stretch is wanted then raise the left leg as well. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhale lower the body to the ground, releasing the foot. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, spine

Awareness

On arching the spine

Do's

- Lift up both the chest and thigh.
- Maintain balance and not fall to the side

Don'ts

- Lift the straight leg if its difficult.
- Rock the body.

Benefits

- As per *dhanurasan*, but to a lesser degree.
- Stretches and strengthens the muscles on the sides of spinal column.
- Decreases fats.
- Relieves mild lower back pain.
- Improves respiration and opens chest.
- Improves bowel movements and blood supply to abdominal region.
- Improves posture.
- Gives a diagonal stretch to the back.

Benefits for Women

- Useful chest opener for breastfeeding women
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes
- Constipation
- Respiratory problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

As per *dhanurasan*. Do not practice if you have heart problems, high blood pressure, hernia, colitis, serious back pain, ulcers or knee pain. The stretch in the knees is stronger in this position, so be careful if the knees are weak.

Duration

Hold the asana for 15-30 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- For a deeper stretch hold the toes.

Preparatory Poses

Bhujangasan
Shalabhasan
Ardha Dhanurasan

Follow Up Poses

Dhanurasan
Naukasan

Tiryak Naukasan - Diagonal Boat Pose

Tiryak – Twisted
Nauk - Boat



Taking the asana position

From prone position bend the left hand at the elbow and place it on the lower back, stretch the right hand above the head. Inhale and raise the right hand, head, chest and left leg above the ground.

The asana position

Try to lengthen the spine whilst raising the arm and leg as high as is comfortable. Gaze forward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling release the asana in reverse. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Spine, abdomen

Awareness

Raising the arm and leg up whilst lengthening the spine.

Do's

- Lift up both the arm and leg
- Maintain balance and not tilt to the side

Don'ts

- Bend the leg

Benefits

- Good for beginners having a weak back.
- Tones back muscles and improves flexibility.
- It stimulates the spinal nerves, stretches the abdominal region and strengthens the back.
- Decreases fats.
- Relieves mild lower back pain.
- Improves bowel movements and blood supply to abdominal region.
- Improves posture.
- It stimulates the nerves while giving a strong diagonal stretch down the length of body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive problems
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Proceed with caution if you have any back problems. Do not perform if you've undergone recent abdominal operations.

Duration

Hold the asana for 10-30 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Instead of having the arm wrapped behind the back it can remain straight in front.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasan

Ardha Shalabhasan

Shalabhasan

Ardha Naukasan

Follow Up Poses

Naukasan

Dhanurasan

Urdhva Mukha Shvanasana - Upward Facing Dog Pose

Urdhva – upward

Mukha – face

Shvana – dog



Taking the asana position

From prone position take sufficient distance (30-40cms) between both legs. Place the palms beside the chest, forehead on the ground, elbows facing the sky, keeping the toes erect. Inhale and raise the head and shoulders upwards till the arms are straight at the elbows. Stretch the spine and neck upwards and back. Pull the shoulders back and push the chest forward. Pressing the waist downwards try to raise the knees above the ground not more than a few centremetres.

The asana position

This position resembles Saralhasta bhujangasan but the difference is that the knee caps are pulled towards the thighs in the upward direction. Keep the buttocks slightly contracted and the toes stretched. The hips are lifted from the ground. Breathe normally. Over time one can keep the feet together as this intensifies the pressure on the back.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling slowly lower the knees, hips, chest and forehead to the ground. Release the hands and bring them back to the sides in prone position. Relax the toes.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, abdomen, thighs, knees, wrists

Awareness

Keeping the body slightly lifted and the arch of the spine

Do's

- Lift the knees and hips
- Straighten the arms
- Relax the shoulders

Don'ts

- Overstretch

Benefits

- Similar to bhujangasan but at a decreased level as the body does not relax as much so the internal benefits are less.
- Useful for stiff back as it rejuvenates the spine
- Strengthens knees and the muscles around them
- Useful for mild back pain
- Chest is expanded, increasing elasticity of lungs; chest muscles and efficiency of breathing
- Functioning of heart is increased due to more space.
- Relieves gases in abdomen.
- Increases efficiency of urinary bladder
- Regularizes blood supply in lower abdomen, increases blood supply and efficiency of vocal chords, thyroid glands, adrenal and kidneys

Benefits for Women

- Pelvic region is strengthened
- Tones the reproductive system

Therapeutic applications

- Mild back pain
- Asthma

- Flatulence
- Urinary problems
- Stress

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is strong back pain, knee or wrist pain, ulcer, hernia, pregnancy or recent abdominal surgery.

Duration

Hold asana for 10 sec to 1 min.

Variations and tips

- This asana can be practiced by keeping the legs and feet together.

Preparatory Poses

- Bhujangasan Series

Follow Up Poses

- Saralhasta Bhujangasan
- Shashankasan
- Adho Mukha Shvanasan

Vakrahasta Bhujangasana – Bent Arm Cobra Pose

From Sanskrit *vakra* (bent), *hasta* (arm), *bhujanga* (cobra).



Taking the asana position

Bring both hands near the chest and place the palms on the ground with the fingers together and thumb pointed towards the body. Elbows should be raised towards the ceiling. Place the forehead on the ground. While inhaling gradually raise first the forehead, shoulders and chest from the ground. The support of this movement should be on the spinal column; the arms remain bent at the elbows and do not bear the weight of the body. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this asana the pressure is transferred away from the hands and arms and increased on the lower back. The body is raised with the help of the lower back instead of the arms. Once the final position is attained the arms remain bent, the shoulders are relaxed, the chest is open and the neck tilted back. Both heels are together. The breathing should be normal. The arms can be used for support if necessary but ideally without. The body will be raised a little less than it is in Saralhasta Bhujangasana.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the chest, shoulders and finally the forehead on the ground. Place the chin on the floor and return the arms back to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

The lower back and stretch on the front side of the body.

Awareness

The arch of the back, relaxing the lower back and normal breathing.

Do's

- Keep the arms bent, with the elbows close to the body and pointed towards the ceiling.
- Try and keep the knees and ankles together, toes pointed.
- Gaze towards the ceiling.
- Open the chest; pull the shoulders backwards and downwards.
- Try and support yourself with the spinal column.

Don'ts

- Have any distance between the legs.
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards ears.
- Let the elbows point away from the body.
- Support the body with the arms.

Benefits

- Helps to remove backache and neck ache as well as keeping the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.
- Tones the kidneys which help with purification of blood, removing any stagnant blood and improving the health of the whole body.
- Tones the adrenal glands which helps us to adapt to stress in a healthier manner due to the regulation of adrenaline. It makes us more physically and mentally stable.
- Cortisone, also secreted by the adrenal glands is balanced, which helps to alleviate rheumatism.
- Tones the liver, making it beneficial for those with a sluggish liver.
- Regulates the thyroid gland.
- Expands and opens the chest which encourages deep breathing as well as helping to correct rounded shoulders.
- Useful for slipped disc and sciatica as it relieves the pain and can also relocate the slipped disc.
- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back and to give general balance to the body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus.
- Helps to alleviate gynaecological disorders such as leucorrhoea (irregular vaginal discharge due to an imbalance in oestrogen), dysmenorrhoea (painful menstruation) and amenorrhoea (absent menstruation).

Therapeutic applications

- Back ache
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation
- Neck pain
- Sluggish liver
- Impure blood
- Stress
- Slipped disc

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should be completely avoided if you are suffering from diseases of the backbone. If there is recent abdominal surgery, hernia or ulcer in the stomach this posture should be avoided. Must be avoided if suffering T.B. Pregnancy. It should be practiced with care for those with stiff backs and for those who are menstruating.

Duration

To begin with this asana should be held for 5 to ten seconds. It can be repeated 3 to 5 times, depending on the individual's capacity. With practice the number of repetitions can be increased. At this point reduce the number of repetitions but increase the time. Gradually increase the time to 45 seconds. After more practice the time can be increased up to 3 to 5 minutes.

Variations and tips

- To counter balance the stretch in the body practice shalabhasana after vakrahasta bhujangasana.
- The forearms should remain parallel to one another and the elbows should not fall out to the sides which can be due to weak forearms.

Preparatory Poses

Sahajahasta Bhujangasana
Saralhasta Bhujangasana.

Follow Up Poses

Niralamba Bhujangasana
Shalabhasana
Naukasana
Dhanurasana.

Sitting

Aakarna Dhanurasana – Arched Bow Pose Type 1

Aa – up to
Karna – ears
Dhanu –bow

In this position the body gets stretched like that of the string of a bow in archery.



Taking the asana position:

Bend the left leg and place the foot on the thigh of the right leg. Hold the big toes of each leg with opposite hands. Exhale and while inhaling pull the left leg upwards with the right hand, trying to bring the left foot to the right ear. The right elbow should be pointing upwards. The trunk of the body and the neck should be erect. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In order to bring the foot to the ear one is tempted to bend the neck, which should be avoided. It is more important to keep the trunk and neck straight. Raise the foot as much as possible and then stabilise it. Breathe smoothly. The other leg should remain straight on the floor. The spine should remain straight and the gaze should be forward.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling lower the left leg back down to the right thigh. Release the hands. Straighten the left leg and return to the sitting position. Practice on the opposite side

Anatomical focus:

Hips, lower back, pelvic, hamstrings

Awareness:

On the stretch into the hip joint

Do:

- Hold the toes with opposite hands.
- Keep the right leg straight and left leg folded at the knee.
- Try to pull the left foot to right ear with right hand. If it is painful to just grab the large toe then one can hold all the toes together.
- Point the right elbow towards the ceiling.
- Try and keep the back as straight as possible.

- Open the chest and pull the right shoulder back.
- Keep the neck straight and gaze forward.

Don't:

- Bend the neck forward or side ways.
- Bend the back.
- Bend the right leg at the knee.

Benefits:

- Tones the muscles of the arms, shoulders and legs especially the calf muscles, inner and back side of the thigh, deltoid region and scapular. Tones the perineum region.
- Improves the efficiency of, and loosens, the knee and elbow joints.
- Improves the circulation in the legs due to contraction of the calf muscles.
- Pressure is created on the abdomen, this helps to relieve constipation and helps to improve the secretion of the glands in the abdominal region.

Benefits for Women:

- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is hip, knee or back pain.

Duration:

Up to 30 seconds and longer over time.

Variations and tips:

- If it is difficult to raise the leg one can hold the foot with both hands instead. The main point of the asana is to get the stretch into the hip joint, not to touch the foot to the ear.
- If it is difficult to hold the toes of the straight leg then place the hand on the ankle, shin or knee.
- If it is difficult to hold the toes with the hand then hold the whole foot instead of just the toes.

Preparatory poses:

- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Leg movement Type 2
- Ardha Pawanmuktasana

Follow up poses:

- Aakarna Dhanurasan Type 2
- Padmasan
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2

Aakarna Dhanurasana – Arched Bow Pose Type 2

Aa – up to
Karna – ears
Dhanu –bow

In this position the body gets stretched like that of the string of a bow in archery.



Taking the asana position:

Bend the left leg and place the foot on the thigh of the right leg. Hold the big toes of each leg with their corresponding hands. Exhale and while inhaling pull the left leg upwards with the left hand towards the left ear. The left elbow should be pointed upwards. The trunk of the body and the neck should be erect.

The asana position:

Once the position has been taken there should be smooth breathing. When the leg is lifted the other leg and arm should remain straight. The sight should be fixed on the other end of the straight arm. The gaze should be forward and the back should be as straight as possible. The elbow should be pointing upwards and the foot next to the ear or as close as possible.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and while exhaling lower the left leg back down to the right thigh. Release the hands. Straighten the left leg and return to the sitting position. Practice on the opposite side

Anatomical focus:

Hip, pelvis, lower back, hamstrings

Awareness:

On the hip joint

Do:

- Hold toes with the hands of the same side.
- Pull the left foot to the left ear with the left hand. If it is painful to do this grab the large toe then one can hold all the toes together.
- Point the left elbow towards the ceiling.
- Try and keep the back as straight as possible.
- Open the chest and pull the left shoulder back.

Don't:

- Bend the neck forward or side ways.
- Bend the back.
- Bend the left leg.

Benefits:

- Tones the muscles of the arms, shoulders and legs especially the calf muscles, inner and back side of the thigh, deltoid region and scapular. Tones the perineum region.
- Improves the efficiency of the knee and elbow joints.
- Improves the circulation in the legs due to contraction of the calf muscles.
- Pressure is created on the abdomen, this helps to relieve constipation and helps to improve the secretion of the glands in the abdominal region.
- The strain on the hips is of a different type to Aakarna Dhanurasan Type 1.

Benefits for Women:

- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is hip, knee or back pain.

Duration:

Up to 30 seconds and longer over time.

Variations and tips:

- If it is difficult to raise the leg one can hold the foot with both hands instead. The main point of the asana is to get the stretch into the hip joint, not to touch the foot to the ear.
- If it is difficult to hold the toes of the straight leg then place the hand on the ankle, shin or knee.
- If it is difficult to hold the toes with the hand then hold the whole foot instead of just the toes.
- Some people find this position easier than type 1.

Preparatory poses:

- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Leg movement Type 2
- Ardha Pawanmuktasana
- Aakarna Dhanurasan Type 1

Follow up poses:

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2

Adho Mukha Shvanasan - Downward Facing Dog Pose

Adho - down
Mukha – face
Shvan - dog



Taking the asana position

From sitting position come into cat pose. The knee and feet are hip distance apart, hands under the shoulders. Tuck the toes under, inhale, raise the waist and push the body backward and upwards with the tail bone facing up, moving the heels towards the ground. Bend the neck downward so that the top of the head may be placed on the ground or towards the ground, tucking the chin in.

The asana position

Breathe normally, maintaining the position. The back should be flat and lengthened and the heels on or towards the ground. Ideally the legs should be together but if it is difficult then some distance can be there to remove pressure on the back.

Releasing the asana position

To release raise the head up, lower the waist and come into a plank position or directly into cat pose. Come back to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Back, hamstrings, calves

Awareness

Lengthening the back side of the body

Do's

- Have the legs straight
- Lengthen the back
- Keep the arms straight

Don'ts

- Move the feet closer to get the heels to the ground as this may round the back

Benefits

- Removes fatigue, exhaustion and energizes the body.
- Improves kidney function.
- Good for runners: brings lightness, strength and speed to the legs, heels and ankles.

- Strengthen legs while alleviating pain and stiffness in heels.
- Stiffness and arthritis in the region of the shoulder blades is relieved.
- Improves blood supply and rejuvenates the brain cells, pituitary glands, eyes, ears and nose.
- Improves memory.
- Good for low blood pressure.
- Diaphragm moves up which massages the heart and improves its efficiency
- Abdominal muscles are drawn towards the spine and strengthened.
- Gives many of the benefits of *sirshasan*, due to the inversion of the upper body.
- Strengthens the neck, shoulder and arm muscles.
- Removes excess fat from around the waist.
- Can be a relaxing pose after certain strong poses, particularly back bends

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive system

Therapeutic applications

- Memory
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is heart disease, high blood pressure, spondylitis, slipped disc, sacral infection, sciatica, ear trouble, weak eye capillaries, severe asthma, brain problems, dizziness, pituitary or thyroid trouble, thrombosis, vertigo or late pregnancy.

Duration

Hold the asana for 15 seconds to 1 minute.

Variations and tips

- Keep distance between the feet is it is too much strain for the back

Preparatory Poses

- Marjariasan

Follow Up Poses

- Bhujangasan
- Shashankasan

Ardha Matsyendrasana – Half spinal twist

Ardha – Half

Matsyendra – Famous Rishi

The complete spinal twist, poorna matyendrasan was the favourite meditation pose of the Rishi Matsyendranath. However, as it is difficult to practice so a simplified form came about.



Taking the asana position:

Bend the left leg and place the left foot on the ground over the right knee. Bend the right leg and fold it so that it is resting on the ground with the right heel near the left buttock. Bring the right hand over the left leg and grab the big toe of the left foot. Inhale and exhaling twist the trunk of the body as much as possible, turning the neck so the gaze is over the left shoulder and encircle the waist with the left hand with the palm facing outwards. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally

The asana position:

In this position there is a strong twist on the spine and abdomen. The right arm is pressed against the left knee and the left arm is wrapped behind the back, leading to an increased twist on the body. The chest is open and the spine is erect. One side of the abdomen is compressed and the other side is stretched. The right leg and knee remains on the floor. The left knee should be close to the right armpit.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and exhaling turn the neck back to face the front. Release the hands and place them beside the body. Straighten the right leg. Straighten the left leg and return to sitting position. Practice the same on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus:

The spine, hips, chest and arms.

Awareness:

The twist on the spine and relaxed breathing.

Do:

- With the right hand, hold the left big toe from the left of the left knee. If it is difficult to hold the toe then one can hold the ankle or raise the toes keeping the heel on the ground. Encircle the lower back with the left arm, palm facing outwards. Turn to the left side in the

spine; turn the shoulders and head to the left.

- Try to keep both of the buttocks firmly on the ground. Only twist as far as you can and keep your back and neck straight.

Don't:

- Lift either of the buttocks off the ground or sit on the heel. Let the bent leg fall away to the side. Let the back or neck bend. Sit on the right heel.
- Overstrain the knees and hips. Lift the left sole of the foot from the floor.

Benefits:

- Increases the elasticity of the spine, tones the spinal nerves and improves the functioning of the spinal cord.
- Stretches the muscles on one side of the body whilst compressing the muscles on the other side.
- Relieves back pain and stiffness from between the vertebrae.
- Useful for slipped disc.
- Massages the abdominal organs and increases the digestive juices making it useful for loss of appetite and constipation.
- Useful for diabetics, with concentration on the pancreas.
- Regulates the secretion of bile and adrenaline.
- Relieves tension that may have built up in the back from forward and back bending asanas.
- Opens the chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs.
- Loosens the hip joints, relieving stiffness.
- Releases tension in the arms, shoulders, upper back and neck.
- Increases purification of the blood as well as the internal organs.
- Improves round shoulders.

Benefits for Women:

- Increases the circulation to the pelvic region and therefore providing fresh blood, nutrients and oxygen, improving the health of the reproductive organs as well as the urinary system.
- Useful for preventing urinary tract disorders.
- Beneficial for menstrual disorders.

Therapeutic applications:

- Diabetes
- Constipation
- Anorexia
- Cervical Spondylitis
- Urinary tract disorders
- Menstrual disorders
- Indigestion

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation due to the strong twist in the abdomen. Care should be taken for those with peptic ulcer or hernia. Those with severe spinal problems should avoid and those with mild slipped disc can benefit but in severe cases it should be avoided.

Duration:

To begin with this asana may be held for only a short time but should gradually be built up to 2 minutes. After more practice it can be held for up to 5 minutes on each side.

Variations and tips:

- If it is difficult to hold the foot or remain in the position there are some other variations that can be used to begin with.
- The right leg can be kept straight instead of wrapping it around the body and/or the left foot can be placed a little further away from the body, closer to the right foot.
- Instead of holding the left foot with the right hand the feet can be raised, closer to the hands.
- Instead of holding the toes the right arm can be bent with the hand pressed against the left shoulder or the left knee can be held by both the arms.
- If it is difficult to balance the left hand can be placed close to the body with the palm on the ground supporting the torso instead of wrapping it behind the back.
- If one wants to get more stretch between the shoulder blades then one can wrap the right arm under the left leg and behind the body, clasping the left hand.
- If there is discomfort sitting on the floor then one can sit on a pillow.

Preparatory poses:

Leg movements

Vakrasana Type 1 and 2

Follow up poses:

Poorna Matsyendrasan

Ardha Padma Bandhasan – Half Lotus Forward Bend pose

Ardha – half

Padma – lotus

Bandha – tied



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the left leg and place the left foot on the right thigh in half-lotus pose. Encircle the left arm around the waist and hold the left toe. Hold the right toe with the right hand and inhale. While exhaling bend forward with the back straight trying to touch the forehead to the knee or shin.

The asana position

In this position there is a strong pressure from the foot against the abdomen. There is a slight hunch in the back but it should not be too much. The forehead should be towards the shin and the leg straight. There is a slight twist in the spine as one twists a little inward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling, lift the head and raise the body from the hips. Release both hands. Release the left foot, straighten the leg and place the hands by your sides, returning to sitting position. Practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, entire back, hamstrings, knees

Awareness

Focus on lower back, abdomen, hips

Do's

- Bend from the hips and keep the back straight when bending forward.
- Keep the knee of the folded leg as close to the ground as possible.

Don'ts

- Bend the knee of the extended leg.

Benefits

- Abdominal organs are contracted and digestive powers increased.
- Good for relieving constipation.
- Can help with stiffness in the knees.
- Improves intestinal peristalsis.
- Prepares legs and hips for meditative poses.
- Strengthens the legs.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Disorders of the urea-genital system
- Menstrual disorders
- Sluggish liver
- Diabetes
- Colitis
- Kidney complaints
- Bronchitis
- Eosinophilia
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is sciatica, slipped disc, hernia, back, hip, knee or ankle pain, abdominal surgery or menstruation.

Duration

Up to 2 minutes on each side

Variations and tips

- If one cannot reach the toes from behind the back one should reach as far forward as possible and stay like that. Slightly bending forward and twisting the body can help to reach the toes.
- A variation is to bend forward with the leg in half lotus but hold the foot of the straight leg with both hands.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Paschimottanasan
Paschimottanasan
Padmasan Preparatory Movements
Padmasan
Baddha Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

Kashyapasan
Ardha Padma Bandhasan in standing

Ardha Paschimottanasana – Half Forward Bend Pose

Ardha – Half
Pascha – westward
Uttan – intense stretch

The front side of the body is called the east side, while the back side is called the west side.



Taking the asana position:

Bend the left leg in the knee and place the sole of the left foot on the inside of the right thigh. Inhale. Exhaling hold the big toe of the right foot with the left hand and encircle the right hand around the waist. Exhale out completely lowering the body further and resting the forehead on the knee. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this asana one leg is folded and the calf and leg are on the floor. The straight leg should remain straight and not bent. The arm that is holding the foot should be relaxed with the elbow pointing downwards or resting on the floor. The body should be bent from the base of the spine so that the spine remains straight, not hunched. The forehead is on the knee or shin or as close as is comfortable. There should be no strain and one should not pull on the toes. The other arm is wrapped around the back. The breath is normal and with every exhalation the body should relax a bit more.

Releasing the asana position:

Exhale and inhaling raise the head. Restore both hands beside the body. Straighten the left leg and take the sitting position. Practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus:

Hamstrings, lower back, hips

Awareness:

Stretching the back side of the body.

Do:

- Keep the right leg straight. Place the right arm behind encircling the lower back, palm facing outwards. Try to touch the forehead to the knee.

Don't:

- Bend the right leg.
- Overstrain the neck while bending forward.
- Overstrain the knees.

Benefits:

- It stretches the muscles of the back side of the body from head to the ankles.
- It contracts the muscles of the anterior part of the body. This creates pressure on the thorax and abdomen, improving the process of respiration and the functions of the intra abdominal glands, especially the secretions.
- Improves the flexibility of the lumbar region, the hips and thigh (back side of thighs and calves).
- Improves the blood circulation in the back region and tones the spinal nerves.
- Improves alignment of the vertebral column.
- Removes the fat from the hips, the abdomen and thigh region.
- Loosens the hips and knees for meditative positions.
- It prepares the body for the full forward bend, Paschimottanasan.
- Stretches the hamstrings and calves, preventing leg cramps and fluid retention.
- Relieves mild lower back pain.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Removes pelvic congestion
- Helpful asana during menstruation and pregnancy
- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Obesity
- Menstrual Problems

Precautions and Contra-indications:

While bending downwards the knees and thighs may raise, this should be avoided. Avoid if there is strong back pain. Care should be taken not to round the shoulders. Avoid compressing the belly in pregnancy, take a variation.

Duration:

It can be held for up to 30 seconds to start and over time this can be increased to 4 or 5 minutes on each side.

Variations and tips:

- It is natural for one side of the body to be tighter than the other due to the asymmetries of the body.
- Not everyone will have the bent knee on the floor due to flexibility. This is not a problem but there should not be strain when holding the position. One can place the sole of the foot a little further down on the inner knee if necessary.
- If it is difficult to hold the toes one can place the hand on the ankle, shin or knee. One can also use both hands if needed.
- Another more opening variation is the use the same side hand to reach for the foot and instead of trying to bring the forehead to the shin one looks upward, twisting inward. The other hand may be on the hip or raised over the head.
- Bolsters or pillows can be used if you want to maintain the position for a longer period of time. They can be placed on the knees or shin so that the body can relax onto them. Some people may want a small cushion under the knee as well. This is especially helpful during pregnancy and menstruation.

Preparatory poses:

Paschimottanasan Preparatory Movements

PM 6 and 9

Chakki Chalanasana 5 x

Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasan 5 x

Padmasan Yogamudra Type 1 to front and sides swapping feet over. Sit up from supine with arms over head, contract abdomen and coming into paschimottanasan, repeat 5 times.

Vajrasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2

Ardha Paschimottanasan

Vajrasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2

Follow up poses:

Paschimottanasan

Ardha Padma Bandhasan

Eka pad hastasan

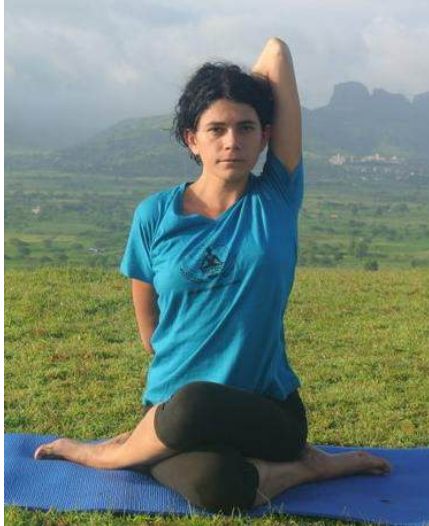
Baddha Hasta Gomukhasan - Tied Cow's Face Pose

Baddha – tied

Hasta – arm

Go – cow

Mukh – face



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the left leg and place the left foot on the ground over the right knee. Bend the right leg and fold it so that it is resting on the ground with the right heel near the left buttock. Adjust the right knee so that it rests on the left knee. Stretch the right arm above the head, bend it and place the palm on the back. Bring the left arm behind your back from the lower side. Try to reach the fingers to clasp both hands together.

The asana position

Keep the neck, head and spine straight. Press the back side of the head against the inside of the raised arm. Close the eyes, relax and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling release your hands to your sides. Straighten the bottom leg in front of you. Straighten the other leg returning to sitting position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Pelvic region, chest, entire spine.

Awareness

On pelvic region, hips, chest and upper back.

Do's

- Try to wrap the legs around each other so that one knee is on top of the other
- Keep the spine upright
- Reach for the hands behind the back

Don'ts

- Hunch over or bend the head down
- Overstrain

Benefits

- This asana induces relaxation and alleviates tiredness, tension and anxiety.
- It stimulates the kidneys.
- Good for diabetes, back ache, sciatica, rheumatism.
- Relieves general stiffness in the spinal cord, waist, shoulders and neck, extends latissimus dorsi fully.
- Relieves and prevents cramps in the legs and the leg muscles become supple.
- Great posture for the respiratory system as the chest is opened.
- Great pose for relieving cramps, laziness, fatigue, mental stress, diabetes, back pain, sciatica, arthritis, shoulder and neck stiffness.
- As arms form the symbol of infinity it is a good posture for higher meditation.
- Improves posture

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs
- Strengthens pelvic region
- Helpful during pregnancy to stabilize the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Upper back pain
- Asthma
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Diabetes
- General backache

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is pain in the knees, shoulders or arms.

Duration

Hold asana for 10 seconds to 1 min.

Variations and tips

- If one cannot reach the hands behind the back one can use a strap or hold onto the clothes.

Preparatory Poses

Gomukhasan

Arm and shoulder movements

Leg Movement 2

Follow Up Poses

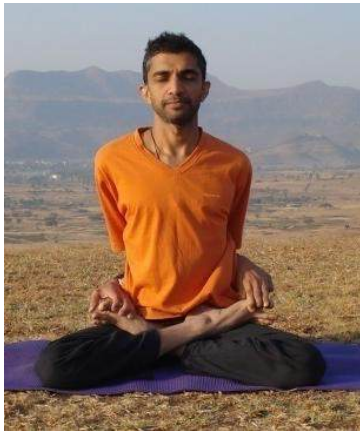
Padmasan asanas

Bhunamanasan

Baddha Padmasan - Tied Lotus Pose

Baddha – tied

Padma - lotus



Taking the asana position

From padmasan wrap the arms around the back and grab the big toes of the same side foot.

The asana position

In this position the spine is straight. The padmasan position should remain unchanged. To ease taking hold of the toe, press the shoulder blades further together and lean forward a bit. The sight should be fixed on a point and the breathing should be smooth. The chest will be open.

Releasing the asana position

Release the right hand and place it back into Dhyana mudra. Release the left hand and place it back into Dhyana mudra.

Anatomical focus

Chest, hips, knee, feet

Awareness

Keeping the chest open

Do's

- Keep the spine upright
- Keep the chest open
- Hold the toes tightly

Don'ts

- Push into padmasan when the body is not ready
- Try to reach and hunch the back

Benefits

- Great for shoulders, arms and back.
- Good for reducing fat around the waist.
- Eventually assists in the awakening of kundalini.
- Improves flexibility of hips, ankles and knees.
- Loosens the hip and knees

- Removes tension in the shoulders and back.
- Opens the chest

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive region
- Improves circulation to breasts

Therapeutic applications

- Upper back pain
- Weight loss and toning

Precautions and Contra-indications

This asana puts a lot of pressure on the abdomen and therefore any person with abdominal troubles or recent surgery should avoid this practice. Practice with caution if there is back, hip, ankle or knee pain.

Duration

To begin with hold this asana just for a few seconds and slowly build up to one minute over time.

Variations and tips

- Make sure the feet are placed high so that it is easy to grab hold of the feet. It helps to bend forward and some find it easier to grab both feet at the same time.
- You can also stretch the shoulders back if it is difficult to grab the toes.
- An advanced version of this pose is to bend forward, whilst still holding the toes.

Preparatory Poses

Padmasan Preparatory movements
Ardha Padmasan
Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2
Ardha Padma Bandhasan

Eka Pada Hastasan – Arm to Leg Forward Bend

Ek – one

Pada – leg

Hasta – arm



Taking the asana position

In sitting position spread the legs to their maximum distance, keep the legs straight and firmly on the ground with the toes pointed upwards. Inhale and while exhaling hold the left toe with the right hand and encircle the left arm around the waist behind the back. Exhale fully bending forward bringing the forehead towards the left knee or shin.

The asana position

In this position there is a strong stretch on the inner thighs as well as the hamstrings and lower back. One should try to avoid hunching too much and instead lengthen the spine. Both buttocks should remain on the ground. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling release the left toe and raise the body from the hips. Join the legs back together, place the hands by the sides and return to sitting position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Calf muscles, hamstrings, back of the upper body, abdominal area.

Awareness

Focus on lower back, abdomen, hips

Do's

- Keep the legs straight.
- Keep the buttocks on the ground.

Don'ts

- Hunch the back or bend the leg in order to touch the forehead to the knee.

Benefits

- Improves the flexibility and blood supply to all the joints and muscles of the leg, lower back and hip.
- Stimulates circulation to the nerves and muscles of the spine.
- Tones and massages the abdominal region, hence also increasing the blood supply.
- Improved blood supply to the brain.

Benefits for Women

- Beneficial for menstrual disorders.

Therapeutic applications

- Menstrual disorders
- Sluggish liver
- Diabetes

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is pain in the legs, pelvis, lower back or waist, slipped disc or sciatica.

Duration

Over time up to one minute

Variations and tips

- It is important to experience the stretch in the hamstring and lower back in this asana.
- If one cannot touch the foot one can hold the ankle or shin instead
- It can be helpful to keep the other hand on the ground as a support to go further into the pose.

Preparatory Poses

- Vajrasana Yogamudra Type 1
- Eka pad Uttanpadasana
- Ardha Paschimottanasana

Follow Up Poses

- Ugrasana
- Ekapad hastasana in standing

Gomukhasan - Cow's Face Pose

Go – cow

Mukh - face



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the left leg and place the left foot on the ground over the right knee. Bend the right leg and fold it so that it is resting on the ground with the right heel near the left buttock. Adjust the right knee so that it rests on the left knee. Place the hands either on the knee or on the respective foot whichever is comfortable.

The asana position

Hold the head, back and neck straight. Close the eyes and relax.

Releasing the asana position

To release the asana, release the hands to the sides. Straighten the bottom leg and then straighten the other leg returning to sitting position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Pelvic region, chest, entire spine

Awareness

On pelvic region, hips.

Do's

- Keep the spine upright
- Wrap the legs around each other as much as possible

Don'ts

- Overstrain or push the knees

Benefits

- As a meditative asana.
- Increases flexibility in knees and hips.
- Outer muscles of the thighs are stretched.
- Pelvic and reproductive organs are toned and massaged.
- Prevents cramp in legs, make leg muscles elastic.
- Back becomes erect in meditative pose.

Benefits for Women

- Good for pelvic region and reproductive organs.
- Helps stabilise the pelvis during pregnancy

Therapeutic applications

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Diabetes
- Lower back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee or hip pain.

Duration

20 seconds to a minute, or longer if comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Try to have the legs close so that the knees are on top of each other but if that's not possible one can aim for that over time

Preparatory Poses

- Hip movements

- Padmasan Preparatory Movements

Follow Up Poses

- Baddha Gomukhasan

Hansasana – Swan pose

Hansa – swan

In this asana, the entire body is in a straight line, at an angle to the ground, with only the toes and hands touching the ground. The final posture looks like the form of a swan, hence the name.



Taking the asana position: Initial Position – Sitting position

Bend the legs one after the other and come onto the feet in a squat. Rest the knees to the ground. Spread the knees apart and place the hands on the ground about 3 to 4 inches apart, with the fingers pointing towards the feet. Bend and touch the elbows together and lean the upper body forward so that the abdomen (near the navel) is resting on the elbows and the chest is resting on the upper arms. Stretch the legs backward until they are straight. The feet should be together, with only the tips of the toes touching the ground. Roll the shoulders back and raise the head slightly so that the head, neck, shoulders, back and legs form a straight line at an angle to the ground. Breathe normally.

The asana position:

In this position, the entire body is kept in a straight line, with most of the weight on the elbows that are pressing onto the abdomen. The wrists are kept about 3 to 4 inches apart, which helps in balancing the body. The feet should be kept together, with only the tips of the toes touching the ground.

Releasing the asana position:

Hunch the upper body slightly by bending the neck and the shoulders forward. Slowly step the feet one after the other forward. Straighten the arms and come into a squat. Place the arms by the side of the body, straighten out the legs and come back into the sitting position.

Anatomical focus:

The compression on the abdominal organs and glands.

Awareness:

On the massage on the abdomen with every breath.

Do:

- Keep the body in a straight line.
- Roll the shoulders back.
- Gaze forward at a fixed point.
- Lean forward sufficiently so that most of the body weight is on the elbows and wrists.

Don't:

- Overstrain the elbows or wrists. If the weight is too much to bear, release the posture slowly.

Benefits:

- Massages and stimulates the abdominal organs and muscles.
- Stimulates the appetite.
- Helps to expel stomach and intestinal worms.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens the arms and wrists which can be weak for some women.

Therapeutic applications:

- Constipation
- Flatulence
- Sluggishness of the liver and kidneys

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Peptic or duodenal ulcers, Colitis, Hyperacidity, Hernia, High blood pressure, heart disease, Pregnancy & menstruation

Duration:

10 to 15 seconds in order to reap the benefits of the asana. With practice, the asana can be held for up to 1 minute.

Variations and tips:

A cushion or pillow may be placed under the face to prevent injury in case you lose balance. Beginners may also place the head on the ground for support while moving into or out of the asana. Advanced practitioners should focus on increasingly shifting more weight onto the elbows and wrists by leaning the body forward while still keeping the body straight, in order to prepare for the more advanced asana of Mayurasana.

Preparatory Poses

- Merudandasana

Follow Up Poses

- Mayurasana

Merudandasana – Crow Pose

Merudanda – Spinal column

Meru – A name of mountain

Neither of these Sanskrit words translate to the word crow but this is the name that many people correlate with this pose. The relation to Meru or Hill is there as when the hips are raised high the body looks a little like a small hill.



Taking the asana position:

From sitting position, bring the feet in, close to the body, and come onto the toes with the support of the hands. Place the hands about 1 to 1.5 ft apart on the ground in front of the knees, with the fingers spread out. Bend the arms slightly and touch the inner side of the knees to the outer sides of the respective upper arms. The shins should also be touching the back of the respective upper arms. This is one placement, a variation to this, though harder for most, is to place the knees directly on the upper arms. However this can be painful for some and can cause bruising if the arms are delicate and not used to the practice. Squeezing the knees against the arms and the arms pushing out against the knees, slowly lean the body forward, lifting the buttocks in the air, gradually transferring the body weight onto the hands. Keeping awareness of the hands, particularly the fingertips as the weight is transferred forwards. Then lift the feet off the floor, balancing the body on only the arms. The legs should automatically be lifted from the ground, there should be no jumping. The gaze should be on the ground a foot or more away.

The asana position:

In this position, the hands form the base of the posture, so the fingers should be spread to form a wide base. The sides of the knees are pressing firmly against the sides of the respective upper arms, and the feet are lifted off the floor, with the big toes touching each other. In order to maintain balance, the gaze should be fixed on the floor, about 3 ft forward. Awareness should be maintained on the hands, particularly the palms.

Releasing the asana position:

Slowly lower the feet to the ground by moving the body backwards. Release the knees from the arms. Come onto the toes. Place the hands on the ground by the side of the hips, straighten out the legs and come back into the sitting position.

Anatomical focus:

Hands and wrists.

Awareness:

On maintaining balance.

Do:

Spread the fingers to form a wide base.

Lean the body forward so that the body weight shifts to the arms and the feet automatically lift off the floor.

Keep the big toes touching if possible.

Breathe normally.

Don't:

Keep the elbows straight.

Look straight down on the floor. This increases the likelihood of falling forward and landing on the nose/face.

Try to jump into the position, instead gradually transfer the weight forward, but not downwards.

Benefits:

- Strengthens and balances the nervous system.
- Strengthens the arms and wrists.
- Tones and strengthens the abdominal muscles and organs.
- Develops sense of physical balance.
- Develops concentration and focus
- Increases confidence

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic floor

Therapeutic applications:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Helps reduce hyperactivity

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, cerebral thrombosis, pregnancy, weak wrists or carpal tunnel syndrome. Take care not to jump which may lead to falling and hitting the nose or straining the wrists.

Duration:

A steady pose should be held for at least 15 seconds. With practice, a steady posture can be held for 1 minute.

Variations and tips:

- This asana requires more coordination and balancing rather than muscular strength. However, if the arms/wrists are not strong enough to support the entire body weight, you should lean the body weight forward onto the arms such that only one foot is lifted off the ground, with the toes of the other foot on the ground. Hold this pose for some time and alternate the foot being lifted up. This will help to develop the necessary strength in the arms/wrists to support the full pose.
- Practice of the preparatory poses will help one to develop strength and balance.

- Don't forget the different options for placement of the knees and upper arms and remember never to rush the pose. Everyone can do it with time.
- Remember balancing positions reflect the state of the mind. If you are feeling emotional it may be more difficult to achieve this pose, instead try at another time when your mind is more steady.

Preparatory poses:

Ashtangasan
Plank pose
Adho Mukha Shwanasan
Utkatasan

Follow up poses:

Hansasan
Ek Pad Merudandasan
Parshwa Merudandasan
Bakasan

Padangusthasana– Big Toe Balancing Pose

Padangustha – Big toe

In this asana, the practitioner is squatting on the ground on only one leg. Ideally, the entire body weight is on only the big toe of the foot that is on the ground, hence the name.



Taking the asana position:

From sitting position, bring the feet in, close to the body, and come onto the toes. Lift the left foot up and place it on the right thigh. Make sure that the right thigh is parallel to the ground. Adjust the right heel so that it presses against the perineum. The entire body weight is now borne by the toes and ball of the right foot. Once balance is achieved, bring the hands to the front of the chest in namaskar.

The asana position:

In this asana, the body is balanced only on the balls and toes of the right foot, with the left foot resting on the right thigh. The hands are in namaskar position in front of the chest. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position:

Release the hands from namaskar pose and place them on the ground near the body. Release the left leg and place the left foot next to the right. Straighten out the legs with the help of both hands and come back into sitting position. Repeat the asana on the other side by placing the right foot on the left thigh.

Anatomical focus:

Foot, pelvis, legs, core

Awareness:

On maintaining balance by focusing on a fixed point.

Do:

Keep the spine erect.

Keep the right heel pressing on the perineum.

Keep the right thigh parallel to the floor.

Move slowly in and out of the posture to maintain balance.

Use the strength of the ankle and leg to maintain balance and minimise movement while in the pose.

Don't:

Move the body about too much to maintain balance.

Hold the breath while in the posture.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the legs, especially the ankles and toes.
- Regulates the reproductive system.
- Prevents spermatorrhea.
- Promotes brahmacharya.
- Trains the nervous system.

Benefits for Women:

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Strengthens the pelvic floor

Therapeutic applications:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is any knee, hip, ankle or toe pain.

Duration:

At least 15 seconds so as to experience the benefits of the asana. With daily practice, the duration can be extended up to 1 minute.

Variations and tips:

If it is difficult to maintain balance initially, the hands may be placed on the ground for support. Once some degree of stability is achieved, release one hand from the ground and hold it in half-namaskar

position in front of the chest and gradually, release the other hand and complete the namaskar position in front of the chest.

Preparatory poses:

- Preparatory movement 10
- Utkatasana

Follow up poses:

- Vatayanasan

Padmasana – Lotus Pose

Padma – lotus

In this asana the position of the feet looks like a blossoming lotus. This asana has been given great importance in the Yoga shastras and is one of the best asanas for meditation, concentration and pranayama.



Taking the asana position:

Spread both of the legs about one foot apart. Bend the left leg and place the left foot on the right thigh. Bend the right leg and place the right foot on the left thigh. Place both hands on the knees in Dhyana Mudra. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this position the head, neck and spine are kept in a straight line from the floor and the eyes are straight ahead with the breath smooth. The hands in Dhyana mudra rest on the knees without any kind of pressure. If the arms are long then they can be bent so that the backs of the hands remain on the knees. There should be no strain in the arms. The weight of the body should be on the spine. Ideally the knees should be touching the floor but this should not cause strain. The body should be balanced and aligned.

Releasing the asana position:

Release Dhyana Mudra and return the arms beside the body. Straighten the right leg. Straighten the left leg. Join the legs and come into sitting position. One may like to practice it again starting with the right leg instead.

Anatomical focus:

Pelvis, hips, knees, ankles

Awareness:

Stillness, introversion, the meditative aspect

Do:

Sit with back erect, neck straight and shoulders relaxed, legs bent in knees.

If it is difficult then one can keep only one foot on the opposite thigh and other foot on the floor, practicing Ardha Padmasana (Half Lotus Pose).

One can fold left leg first or right leg first as per the convenience.

Don't:

Hunch your back.

Strain the hands or arms, keep them relaxed.

Overstrain the knees.

Benefits:

- Stabilizes the body and mind.
- Allows one to sit steadily for a long period of time which is ideal for the practice of meditation, concentration and pranayama.
- Applies pressure to the lower spine which relaxes the nervous system.
- The position of legs makes the body and spine automatically straight.
- It redirects the flow of prana from the lower chakras to the higher chakras.
- Is used as an initial position for other asanas such as Sharanagat mudra, Utthit Padmasan etc.

Benefits for Women

- Improves blood circulation in the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications:

- Avoid if there is hip, knee or ankle pain.

Duration:

This asana can slowly be increased up to 10 minutes to gain the benefits and after some time can be extended up to 2 or 3 hours.

Variations and tips:

Note – here it is said to bend the left leg first and then the right, however in the old yoga books it is said to bend the right leg first and then the left. It is not yet known what difference it makes which leg is first.

It is important that the hip joints be slightly above the knees, otherwise the pelvis tilts posteriorly, the spine flexes and tightens and many of the surrounding muscles try to compensate working against gravity which causes fatigue. Therefore if one cannot sit with the hips higher than the knees a small cushion or folded blanket should be used to restore the normal spinal curves, and allow the body and head to be properly supported.

If it is difficult then one can sit in ardha padmasan, half lotus pose. It is strongly recommended that one should feel comfortable in ardha padmasan before moving to padmasan. To sit in ardha padmasan only one leg is placed on the thigh and the other foot is tucked underneath. This causes a lot less pressure on the knees and hips.

Preparatory poses:

- Padmasan Preparatory movements
- Ardha and Purna Titali – Butterfly – the soles of the feet are together and the feet are as close to the body as possible. Press the knees down towards the floor with the hands or the forearms.
- One leg straight, one foot on thigh. First bring the knee to the chest then push the knee down towards the ground.
- In the same position rotation the knee, working on the hip also.
- Rocking the baby movement – encircle the leg with the arms and rock the leg to either side.
- Squatting position then palms together in namsakar, pressing the upper arms against the legs.
- Ardha Padmasan

Follow up poses:

- Parvatasan
- Sharanagat Mudra
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2
- Baddha Padmasan
- Utthit Padmasan
- Kukkutasan
- Garbhasan
- Bakasan

Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 – Lotus Gesture Type 1

Padma – lotus

Mudra – gesture



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the legs into cross-legged position or ideally come into Padmasan - lotus pose by spreading your legs a little more than hip-width apart. Bend one leg and place it on the opposite thigh. Bend the other leg and place it on the opposite thigh. Take both hands behind the back, interlocking the thumbs, palms facing outwards. Inhale and while exhaling bend forward from the hips and rest the forehead on the ground.

The asana position

In this pose the forehead should be relaxed on the ground, or as close as it can get. The buttocks should remain on the ground. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling straighten the body from the hips. Release the hands and straighten the legs, one after the other. Place the palms beside the hips and return to sitting position. Shake the legs out, relax and practice on the other side if there is time.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, entire back, chest

Awareness

Focus on abdomen and forehead.

Do's

Take the arms behind the back, place one hand on top of the other, palms facing upwards and interlock the thumbs.

Don'ts

Lift the buttocks off the ground.

Overstrain the neck while bending forward.

Overstrain the knees.

Benefits

- Applies pressure to the intestines, liver, spleen and other internal organs increasing the blood circulation to those areas and therefore improving their function.
- Regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands.
- Tones the pelvic muscles and the sciatic nerves.
- Alleviates disorders of the female and male reproductive organs.
- Helps eliminate anger and is very cooling for the brain.
- Relieves constipation.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Improves circulation to pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Weak digestive system
- Anger management
- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee, hip, ankle or back pain, slipped disc, sciatica, vertigo, recent abdominal surgery or pregnancy.

Duration

Up to 2 minutes over time.

Variations and tips

- One can sit in ardha padmasan or swastikasan if it is difficult.
- One can place a bolster or blanket under the forehead if one cannot comfortably reach the floor or use the fists.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements

Follow Up Poses

- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 2
- Parvatasan
- Sharanagat Mudra
- Kukkutasan
- Garbhasan
- Utthit Padmasan
- Bakasan

Padmasan Yogamudra Type 2 – Lotus Gesture Type 2

Padma – lotus
Mudra – gesture



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the legs into cross-legged position or ideally come into Padmasan - lotus pose by spreading your legs a little more than hip-width apart. Bend one leg and place it on the opposite thigh. Bend the other leg and place it on the opposite thigh. Place your palms on the abdomen below the navel, keeping the right palm on top of the left hand. Inhale and while exhaling bend forward from the hips and rest the forehead on the floor. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

The asana position

In this pose the forehead should be relaxed on the ground, or as close as it can get. The buttocks should remain on the ground. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling straighten the body from the hips. Release the hands and straighten the legs, one after the other. Place your palms beside your hips and return to sitting position. Shake your legs out and relax.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, entire back, chest

Awareness

Focus on abdomen and forehead

Do's

Put the arms in front of the abdomen, place one hand on top of the other, palms facing upwards.

Don'ts

Lift the buttocks off the ground.

Overstrain the neck while bending forward.

Overstrain the knees.

Benefits

- Applies pressure to the intestines, liver, spleen and other internal organs increasing the blood circulation to those areas and therefore improving their function.
- Regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands.
- Tones the pelvic muscles and the sciatic nerves.
- Alleviates disorders of the female and male reproductive organs.
- Helps eliminate anger and is very cooling for the brain.
- Relieves constipation.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Improves circulation to pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Weak digestive system
- Anger management
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee, hip, ankle or back pain, slipped disc, sciatica, vertigo, recent abdominal surgery or pregnancy.

Duration

Up to 2 minutes over time.

Variations and tips

- One can sit in ardha padmasan or swastikasan if it is difficult.
- One can place a bolster or blanket under the forehead if one cannot comfortably reach the floor or use the fists.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1

Follow Up Poses

- Parvatasan
- Sharanagat Mudra
- Kukkutasan
- Garbhasan

- Utthit Padmasan
- Bakasan

Paschimottanasana – Forward Bend Pose

Pascha – westward

Uttan – intense stretch

The front side of the body is called the east side, while the back side is called the west side. In this asana the complete west side is stretched from the heels to the head and is therefore called Paschimottanasan.



Taking the asana position:

Inhale. While exhaling grab hold of the big toes of each feet with the corresponding hands. Exhale out completely and fold forward keeping the back straight, try to rest the forehead on the knees. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

After bending forward keep the heels, calves and thighs touching the floor. The spine should be straight and the forehead should rest on the knees. The breath should be smooth and if possible the elbows should rest on the floor. As the abdomen is completely folded the bend should be completed after exhaling fully. One should bend only to ones comfort and then stabilise at that point. The knees should not be bent towards the forehead. As the body relaxes the head, shoulders and chest will automatically and naturally come down. Do not strain or pull on the feet to get the forehead closer to the knees. The breath will allow the body to relax more.

Releasing the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling raise the head. Release the hands and return to sitting position.

Anatomical focus:

Back, hamstring, pelvis

Awareness:

Stretching the whole back side of the body and compressing the abdomen.

Do:

- Hold the toes with the hands, keeping the legs straight.
- Bend forward in the waist.
- Try to touch the forehead to the knees and elbows to the ground.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Arch the spine whilst trying to bring the forehead to the knees.

Benefits:

- It stretches the muscles of the back side of the body from head to the ankles.
- It contracts the muscles of the anterior part of the body. This creates pressure on the thorax and abdomen, improving the process of respiration and the functions of the intra abdominal glands, especially the secretions.
- Improves the flexibility of the lumbar region, the hips and thigh (back side of thighs and calves).
- Improves the blood circulation in the back region and tones the spinal nerves.
- Improves alignment of the vertebral column.
- Removes the fat from the hips, the abdomen and thigh region.
- The nadi's are purified.
- Helps to activate the kundalini shakti.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Removes pelvic congestion
- Helpful asana during menstruation
- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Diabetes
- Menstrual disorders
- Bronchitis
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications:

People who suffer from slipped disc or sciatica should not practice this asana or those who have had recent abdominal surgery.

Duration:

This asana can be held for up to 30 seconds to start with and over time this can be increased to 3 – 5 minutes.

Variations and tips:

If there is a lot of tightness in the hamstrings and gluteus maximus there will be some restriction in hip flexion. This causes the hip flexors and abdominal muscles to contract to lower the body to the knees causing congestion. Instead a blanket can be placed under the buttocks.

Preparatory poses:

- Ardha Paschimottanasan
- Vajrasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2
- PM 6 and 9
- Chakki Chalanasana 5 x
- Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasan 5 x
- Padmasan Yogamudra Type 1 first to the left side, then the front and then the right side. Swap the legs over and repeat. Sit up from supine with the arms over the head. Contract the abdomen and come into paschimottanasan, repeat 5 times.

Follow up poses:

- Ardha Padma Bandhasan
- Ugrasan
- Ek pad hastasan

Shashank bhujangasan – Striking Cobra Pose



The asana position and movement

From shashankasan slowly start moving the chest forward as one inhales, keeping it close to the ground. When the chest is near the hands start raising the chest upward and taking the position of bhujangasan, straightening the arms, placing the pelvis on the floor or towards the floor. Hold for a few seconds and then exhale, lift the buttocks, moving backwards and placing the buttocks on the heels and the forehead down in shashankasan. Relax.

Anatomical focus

Spine, chest

Awareness

The movement of the spine with the breath.

Do's

- Keep the chest near the floor in this movement.

Don'ts

- Strain at any time.

Benefits

- Benefits are similar to shashankasan and bhujangasan but at a decreased level as the poses are not maintained.
- Strengthens the back, shoulders and arms.
- Improves flexibility in the spine and tones the spinal nerves.
- Tones abdominal organs
- Tones male reproductive organs
- Preparation for advanced surya namaskar
- Useful warm up before other practices

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive system
- Post natally is helpful for toning and strengthening

Therapeutic applications

- Menstrual problems
- Digestive disorders

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is sciatica, strong back pain, high blood pressure, heart problems, weak wrists, knee pain, vertigo, ulcer, hernia, pregnancy.

Duration

Up to 10 repetitions can be practiced, as per comfort.

Variations and tips

- For a stronger effect on the shoulders and arms one can come back from cobra by lowering the chest and keeping it close to the floor instead of lifting up. This is good preparation for the advanced surya namaskar.

Preparatory Poses

Shashankasan

Follow Up Poses

Bhujangasan

Ashtanga danda

Advanced surya namaskar

Sharanagat Mudra – Gesture of Surrender

The desire of submitting and becoming one with the Divine energy is the theme of this asana. The position of the body reflects the feeling of submission to God or a higher energy.



Taking the asana position

The starting position is Padmasana. Exhale and while inhaling raise the hands upward from the sides and join the palms. Exhaling bend forward and touch the forehead on the floor, keeping the arms straight over the head. Continue to maintain the position, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position the abdomen is folded. The bend should be from the waist to get a complete fold. The arms stretched out front help to get a maximum fold. The knees should be on the floor and the spine should remain straight. The forehead should be placed on the floor, the further the forehead is from the folded legs the more stretch into the hips and spine. The arms should remain close to the ears and the breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling raise the forehead from the ground and straighten the waist, keeping the arms stretched above the head. Exhaling lower the arms down from the sides and place them in Dhyana Mudra on the knees.

Anatomical focus

Spine, pelvis

Awareness

Surrender

Do's

- Sit in Swastikasana or cross legged position if you are not comfortable in Padmasana.
- Touch the forehead on the ground by bending forward in the waist.
- Keep the hands in Namaskar position on the ground, head between the arms.

Don'ts

- Lift the buttocks off the ground.
- Bend the elbows.
- Overstrain the knees

Benefits

- Pressure on the internal organs increases the blood circulation to those areas and improves their functioning.
- This posture develops the attitude of surrender which has an effect on an emotional level.
- Applies pressure to the intestines, liver, spleen and other internal organs increasing the blood circulation to those areas and therefore improving their function.
- Regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands.
- Tones the pelvic muscles and the sciatic nerves.
- Helps eliminate anger and is very cooling for the brain.
- Relieves constipation.
- Stretches the hip and knee joints
- Over a long time it can help to awaken the kundalini shakti.

Benefits for Women

- Alleviates disorders of the female and male reproductive organs.
- Helps one to let go which is helpful if there are a lot of mixed emotions.

Therapeutic applications

- Stress and anxiety
- Anger
- Digestive problems
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Those with weak knee joints should practice with caution. Avoid if there is sciatica, any strong back pain or abdominal surgery.

Duration

It can be held for up 1 1/2 minutes over time and can be increased to 3 minutes.

Variations and tips

- Only bend as far forward as is comfortable. If you cannot place the forehead on the floor either use a cushion or let the head be relaxed.
- If it is difficult to sit in Padmasan then sit in any other cross legged position and if that is hard then sit in Vajrasan.
- Have the feeling that you are letting go, either to a God, Guru, Supreme Energy, MotherNature or to yourself. You should have in your mind something that resonates with you, it is a very personal thing.
- It is often done at the end of class and can also be as a thank you tot hat higher energy or to yourself.

Preparatory Poses

Parvatasan

Follow Up Poses

Vrukshasan

Siddhasan – Perfect pose

Siddhi – perfections

Siddha – one who has achieved perfections



Taking the asana position

In sitting position spread both legs a little more than hip-width apart. Bend the left leg and place the sole of the left foot against the right inner thigh and the heel against the perineum or vagina. Bend the right leg and place the sole of the foot against the left inner thigh, heel on top of the left heel and against the genital region. For men the heel is pressed into the pubis above the genitals, for women it is pressed onto the vagina area. Place both hands on the knees in Dhyana Mudra.

The asana position

In this position the spine should be erect, the knees ideally on the ground and the body stable and comfortable. One should relax and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

To release the asana, place the hands back on the floor next to the hips. Straighten the right leg. Straighten the left leg. Bring both legs back together. Repeat on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

Pelvic region, spine, knees

Awareness

Focus on pelvic region, spine and relaxed abdomen

Do's

Keep the spine erect.

Have the backs of the hands on the knees, not off the knees.

Press the heel against the perineum/vagina

Don'ts

Strain the knees or ankles.

Benefits

- Strengthens the spine.
- Reduces stress on the muscles of the body which leads to decreased strain on the heart, decreased respiration rate and increased concentration of the mind.
- Dhyana mudra stabilizes the pulse.
- Is beneficial for redirecting sexual energy and stimulating mooladhara and swadhisthan chakra which helps to maintain brahmacharya.
- Calms the nervous system.
- Redirects blood away from the legs and into the spine, pelvic and abdominal area.
- Helps to develop siddhis along with pranayam, concentration and meditation.

Benefits for Women

- Improves circulation to pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Reproductive problems
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Sexual problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Those with hydrocele or enlargement of the testicles should not practice this asana. Avoid if there is knee, hip or ankle pain.

Duration

At first a few minutes is enough but one should aim to be able to sit in this pose for ten minutes and over a period of many years, up to 2—3 hours.

Variations and tips

It is common for the upper foot sole to fall away from the body. With practice and increased flexibility this can be overcome. If it is very difficult to sit in the position then place the upper leg in front of the other leg, heel directly in front of the other heel. In this way there is still pressure of the heel of one foot but less pressure on the hips and knees. Also if there is some pain place some cloth between the ankle bones. It is important that the hip joints be slightly above the knees, otherwise

the pelvis tilts posteriorly, the spine flexes and tightens and many of the surrounding muscles try to compensate working against gravity which causes fatigue. Therefore if one cannot sit with the hips higher than the knees a small cushion or folded blanket should be used to restore the normal spinal curves, and allow the body and head to be properly supported.

Preparatory Poses

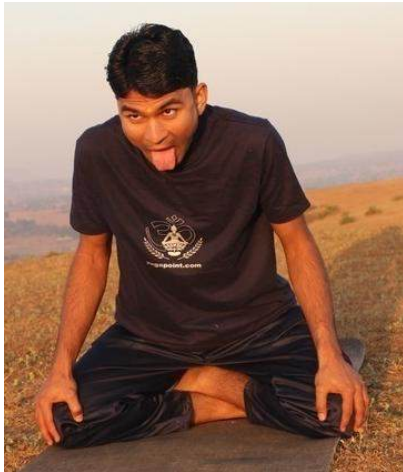
- Sukhasan
- Swastikasan
- Padmasan Preparatory movements

Follow Up Poses

- Parvatasan
- Sharanagat Mudra

Simhasana - Lion Pose

Simha – Lion



Taking the asana position

Bend the right leg and place the foot under the left buttock. Bend the left leg and cross the left ankle over the right ankle, placing the left foot under the right buttock. Rest the hands onto the knees with the fingers spread out. Lean the body to the front slightly, placing the body weight onto the hands. The hands should be kept straight. Inhale and whilst exhaling tilt the head slightly downwards, open the mouth, make the sound “ah” and stick the tongue out, pointing the tip of the tongue down. Widen the eyes and tense all facial muscles. Breathe normally. The gaze should either be at the nosetip or eyebrow centre.

The asana position

In this asana, the entire weight of the upper body should be shifted onto the knees via the arms. All facial muscles should be stretched, with the tongue hanging as far out as possible.

Releasing the asana position

Relax the facial muscles and straighten out the neck. Straighten out the body and place the hands on the ground, by the hips. Straighten out the left leg. Straighten out the right leg and come back into the sitting pose.

Anatomical focus

Face, throat, knees

Awareness

On the slight pressure in the eyes and stretch in the facial muscles as well as the throat and the mental release.

Do's

- Keep the back straight.
- Keep the chest open.
- You may shift the position of the legs slightly to make sure that you are firmly seated and in balance.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms.

Benefits

- Facial, eye and tongue muscles are stretched, refreshing the blood supply to these muscles, improving their efficiency.
- The folded legs redirects the flow of prana from the lower chakras to the higher chakras.
- Gives a glow to the skin
- Strengthens the throat
- Improves the voice
- Removes tension and frustration
- Makes the mind and body feel lighter
- Helps those who are too introverted

Benefits for Women

- Helps remove suppressed emotions that can affect the menstrual cycle.

Therapeutic applications

- Depression
- Stress
- Dull voice
- Tightness in the face
- Asthma
- Stress Management
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

For those with weak knee or ankle joints, this asana should be practiced with caution. If there is strong throat pain avoid the sound.

Duration

This asana should be practised for at least 30 seconds to gain the benefits and after some time can be extended up to 3 minutes.

Variations and tips

If it is difficult to sit in the position described above, you can simply sit in vajrasana with the knees wide apart, and leaning your body weight onto the hands placed on the ground in front of you with the fingertips pointed towards you, stretching the forearms.

Preparatory Poses

Vajrasana

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasan

Tolangulasana - Scale pose

Tola – balance

Angula – toes

In this asana, the form of the upper and lower body resembles the two ends of a weighing scale, hence the name.



Taking the asana position

From padmasana, place the hands on the ground, by the side of the hips. Slowly lean backwards and place the elbows on the ground. Form fists with the hands and place the fists (palms facing down), under the buttocks. Exhale and while inhaling, lift the padmasana to 45 degrees from the ground, balancing the body on the fists and lower arms.

The asana position

In this position the weight of the upper body is supported by the arms. Abdominal strength is required to lift the padmasana to 45 degrees with the ground. The spine remains straight and the head should be held erect, with the eyes looking forward. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling, slowly release the padmasana back to the ground. While inhaling, lift the back up vertically with the support of the hands. Place hands back in dhyana mudra on the knees, coming back into padmasana.

Anatomical focus

Strengthening of the abdominal muscles.

Awareness

On breathing and keeping the pose steady.

Do's

Keep the back straight.
Keep the head erect.
Keep the chest open.

Don'ts

Tilt the head back.

Benefits

- Tones the abdominal organs.
- Strengthens the shoulders, back and neck.
- Opens up the chest

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic muscles

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems
- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been recent abdominal surgery, pregnancy, hip, back, ankle or knee pain.

Duration

This asana should be held for at least 30 seconds to reap the benefits. With further practice, a duration of 3 to 5 minutes can be achieved.

Variations and tips

- If you are not able to come into padmasana, you may perform this asana with the legs crossed or in ardha padmasan.

Preparatory Poses

- Naukasana (supine)
- Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

- Utthit Padmasana
- Kukkutasana
- Garbhasan
- Bakasan

Ugrasana – Ferocious pose

Ugra – ferocious



Taking the asana position:

Spread the legs as far apart as possible, with the toes pointing up to the ceiling. Inhale and lengthen the spine. Hold the left toes with the left hand and right toes with the right hand. Exhale and bend forward from the hips. If possible, touch the forehead to the ground.

The asana position:

In this position, the legs are spread as far apart as possible. The hands are holding onto the respective toes and the upper body is folded forward towards the ground. The back is kept straight and ideally, the forehead should be touching the ground. With practice, the chest and abdomen may also be touching the ground. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling, straighten out the waist. Release the hands and place the arms by the side of the hips, with the palms on the ground. Join the legs and come back into sitting position.

Anatomical focus:

The stretch in the inner thighs and along the entire back side of the body, including the hamstrings, buttocks, back and neck.

Awareness:

On the relaxation of the back muscles.

Do:

Keep the legs straight.
Relax your body into the posture with every exhalation.
Keep the back straight.
Keep the toes pointing up.

Don't:

Jerk your body forcefully in order to touch the forehead to the ground.

Benefits:

- The pressure against the abdomen gives an intense massage to the abdominal organs and glands, which helps to increase the blood circulation and efficiency of the organs and glands.
- Stretches the hamstrings and inner thighs.
- Increases flexibility in the hip joints.
- Removes excess weight from the abdominal and pelvic areas.

Benefits for Women:

- Tones pelvic region
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications:

- Disorders of the uro-genital system
- Menstrual disorders
- Sluggish liver
- Diabetes
- Colitis
- Kidney complaints
- Bronchitis
- Eosinophilia

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Those suffering from slipped disc, sciatica or other severe spinal problems should avoid this asana. This asana is also contraindicated for those suffering from high or low blood pressure.

Duration:

The asana should be performed for at least 30 seconds. With daily practice, the duration can be increased to 2 minutes.

Variations and tips:

- If it is not possible to catch the toes with your hands, it is ok to simply place the arms on the ground.
- It is more beneficial to keep the back straight and bend from the hips, than to hunch the back in order to catch the toes or touch the forehead to the ground.
- It may also be easier if you do not spread the legs to your limit. This will relieve the strain on the inner thighs.
- Once you can touch your forehead to the ground, work towards relaxing the muscles further so that gradually, the front of the shoulders, chest and even abdomen touches to the ground.

Preparatory poses:

- Paschimottanasan Preparatory Movements
- Preparatory Movements 6 and 9
- Sit with legs slightly apart. Perform 'grinding the mill' movement 5 times in each direction.
- Legs slightly apart, bend forward and touch the right foot with the left hand looking over the right shoulder, repeat 5 times on each side.
- Padmasan Yogamudra Type 1 to front and sides.
- Lie in supine position with arms overhead, contract abdomen, sit up and try to touch hands to toes or beyond, then lie back in supine, repeat 5 times.
- Ardha Paschimottansana
- Paschimottanasana
- Ekapadhasana

Follow up poses:

- Ugrasan in standing
- Koormasan

Ushtrasan – Camel Pose

Sulabh – Simple Camel

Ardha – Half Camel

Poorna – Full Camel



Sulabh - From vajrasan come onto the knees. Bring the hands behind the back, supporting the back and slowly and gently start to tilt the body back and pressing the hips slightly forward. Breathe normally and maintain for as long as is comfortable. Alternatively a more gentle version is to stay in vajrasan and place the fingertips behind the body, on the ground, tilting backwards and expanding the chest. Breathe normally.



Ardha – From vajrasan come onto the knees. Slowly and carefully bring the right hand onto the right heel. The foot may be flat on the ground or the toes may be erect. One may like to have the other hand on the belly, as a support and also to keep the awareness of not going too far into the pose. If desired one can raise the arm above the head, increasing the expansion of the chest. Breathe normally and repeat on the other side.



Purna – From vajrasan come onto the knees. Have the feet flat on the floor or toes erect. Slowly place the right hand onto the right heel and the left hand onto the left heel. Be very gentle and make sure it is comfortable. Push the hips forward and try to keep the thighs vertical. Open the chest and draw the shoulder blades together. Relax the neck. Breathe normally.

Anatomical focus

Back, neck, pelvis, chest, thighs

Awareness

Creating a nice arch, opening the chest and pressing the hips forward.

Do's

- The most comfortable variation
- Push the hips forward, trying to keep the thighs parallel
- Open the chest

Don'ts

- Drop the hips
- Overstretch

Benefits

- Improves digestion and prevents constipation.
- Stretches the spinal nerves and helps remove tension in the back.
- Opens the chest and expands the lungs. Useful if there is breathlessness.
- Improves posture, especially if the shoulders are rounded.
- Stretches the neck and thyroid.
- Stretches the abdominal region.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Stretches the pelvic region.

Therapeutic applications

- Asthma
- Respiratory problems
- Mild back and neck pain
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if strong back pain. Avoid if there is any discomfort. The full camel is a strong pose, do not push yourself, listen to your body.

Duration

Up to 3 minutes over time.

Variations and tips

- Use a small blanket under the knees if there is too much pressure on the knees.
- Lift the heels and tuck the toes under to decrease the arch.

Preparatory Poses

- Each of these camel poses prepares for the next.
- Bhujangasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shashankasan
- Chakrasan

Utkasana - Single Toe Balance Pose



Taking the asana position

In sitting position, bend your left leg and bring the foot to the left buttock. Bend your right leg and place the right foot next to the left foot. Shift the weight forward onto the toes and place your hands by your sides for support. The entire body weight is now borne by the toes. Once balance is achieved, join the palms in front of the chest.

The asana position

Maintain stability, focus on a point and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

To release the asana, release the hands and place them on the ground by your sides. Straighten out the legs, one after the other returning to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Toes, knees, entire spine

Awareness

On maintaining balance by focusing on a fixed point.

Do's

- Keep the spine erect.
- Keep the thighs parallel to the floor
- Move slowly in and out of the posture to maintain balance.
- Use the strength of the ankles and legs to maintain balance and minimize movement while in the pose.

Don'ts

- Move the body about too much to maintain balance.
- Hold the breath while in the posture.

Benefits

- Strengthens the legs, especially the ankles and toes.
- Regulates the reproductive system.
- Prevents spermatorrhoea.
- Promotes brahmacharya.
- Trains the nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic region
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Male reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is ankle or knee pain.

Duration

Hold up to one minute for good results and up to 3 minutes over time

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult to maintain balance initially, the hands may be placed on the ground for support. Once some degree of stability is achieved, release one hand from the ground and hold it in half-namaskar position in front of the chest and gradually, release the other hand and complete the namaskar position in front of the chest.

Preparatory Poses

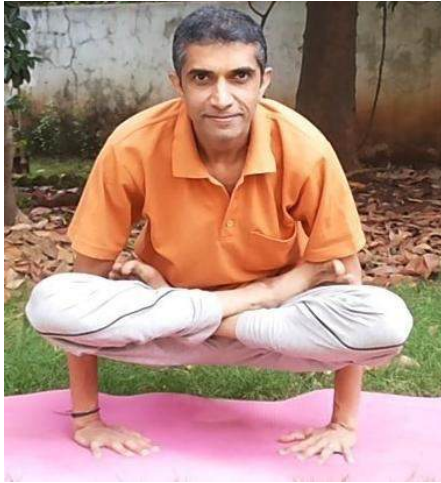
- Preparatory movement 10

Follow Up Poses

- Padangushtasan

Utthit Padmasan - Lifted Lotus Pose

Utthit – lifted
Padma – lotus



Taking the asana position

Sit in padmasana. Place the palms next to the thighs. Inhale and raise the whole body off the floor.

The asana position

Make sure the fingers are spread apart and pressure is on the fingers and palms. The hands are near the thighs, not the hips, as this makes it easier to lift up. Ideally the padmasan remains parallel to the floor. For some they will lift only a few centimetres, for others it will be much higher. The body, especially the face, should remain relaxed. The breathe should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the padmasan to the floor. Release the legs.

Anatomical focus

Pelvis, arms, hands, core

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Keep the hands close to the thighs
- Relax the face
- Focus on a point

Don'ts

- Keep the hands near the hips
- Raise the body too high cause shaking and instability

Benefits

- Strengthens arms, wrists, shoulders and the abdomen.
- Good for balancing.
- Good preparation for more difficult arm balances and padmasan variations.
- Strengthens nervous system

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic region and reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are heart problems, high blood pressure, hernia, back, hip, ankle, knee or wrist pain.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- If one cannot sit in padmasan they can use any other meditative position, though it can be hard to lift as the lower leg may drop down.
- Some people prefer to place their hands on two blocks when they are new at the pose to help them lift up.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements

Follow Up Poses

- Bakasan

Vajra Matsyasan – Thunderbolt Fish Pose

Vajra – thunderbolt

Matsya – fish



Taking the asana position

In sitting position, bend your left leg and bring the foot to the left buttock. Bend your right leg and place the right foot next to the left foot. Shift the weight forward onto the toes. Bring your knees to the ground, toes together, heels apart and sit between your heels in vajrasana variation. Inhale and while exhaling lean back slowly, take the support of the elbows one after another and place the top of the head on the ground. Keep the hands on their respective thighs or hold the feet.

The asana position

Relax in the asana, breathe normally, The back is arched, the pelvis, abdomen, chest and throat is stretched. The thighs should be together but if its difficulty some separation can be there.

Releasing the asana position

To release the asana, bring your hands to the ground and support your upper body with your elbows. Slowly release the head from the ground, straighten the neck and raise your body up from the hips. Raise your knees and shift your weight onto your toes. Straighten the left leg. Straighten the right leg and lower the buttocks to the ground returning to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, lower back, knees, chest.

Awareness

On lower abdomen, chest, throat.

Do's

- Sit between the heels if possible (sitting on top is a variation)
- Keep the mouth closed

Don'ts

- Overstretch and strain the neck or other parts of the body

Benefits

- As per Vajrasana and Matsyasana, it stretches the knees and abdomen.
- Good for leg muscles and abdominal organs
- The dorsal region is fully extended, lungs are well expanded, neck muscles strengthened.
- Thyroid and parathyroid are stimulated
- Helps remove digestive ailments and constipation
- Spinal nerves are toned
- Redirects sexual energy to the brain for spiritual purposes
- Legs are loosened for meditative asanas
- Intelligence and creativity are enhanced

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic region
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications

- Hypothyroidism
- Reproductive problems
- Weak digestion
- Asthma and bronchitis.

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee or back pain.

Duration

Up to one minute over time and later up to three minutes

Variations and tips

- If one cannot sit between the heels one can sit on top of the heels, as per normal vajrasan
- One can separate the knees if its difficult

Preparatory Poses

- Vajrasan
- Matsyasan

Follow Up Poses

- Advanced Vajrasan Series
- Supta Vajrasan

Vajrasana Yoga Mudra Type 1 – Thunderbolt Gesture Type 1

Vajra – thunderbolt

Mudra – gesture



Taking the asana position

Take both hands behind the back, interlocking the thumbs, palms facing outwards. Inhale and while exhaling bend in the waist and rest the forehead on the floor. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position the forehead rests on the floor or as close as possible. The arms remain behind the back and the buttocks should remain on the heels and should not be lifted. The knees should be together unless it is difficult. The body should be relaxed and the breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling straighten the waist. Place the palms back down on the knees.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, back

Awareness

Relaxing the back, the gentle pressure on the abdomen

Do's

- Take the arms behind the back, palms facing upwards and interlock the thumbs.
- Bend forward only as much as is comfortable. This should be a relaxing pose.

Don'ts

- Lift the buttocks off the ground.
- Overstrain the neck while bending forward.
- Overstrain the knees.
- Stretch the arms up, they should be relaxed on the body.

Benefits

- Applies pressure to the intestines, liver, spleen and other internal organs increasing the blood circulation to those areas and therefore improving their function.
- Regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands.
- Tones the sciatic nerves.
- Alleviates disorders of the male reproductive organs.
- Helps eliminate anger

- Cools the brain.
- Relieves constipation.
- Relaxes the back

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic muscles and uterus ☐
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications

- Menstrual disorders
- Constipation
- Stress and anxiety
- Back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Those with weak knees should practice this posture with caution. Slipped disc or severe spinal column problems should avoid this asana. Should be avoided by people suffering from vertigo.

Duration

This position can be held for up to 2 minutes and if that is comfortable longer periods of time up to 15 minutes.

Variations and tips

- This position is often difficult for sports players. If this is the case then spread the knees apart.
- One can also place a cushion under the buttocks and also under the forehead. For some people a few cushions may be needed or even a chair.
- It is recommended that something is placed under the forehead so the body can relax more.
- If the position is easy for you then place the forehead further away from the knees, giving a stronger stretch.
- Practice with the knees apart for pregnancy and menstruation.

Preparatory Poses

Vajrasan.

Follow Up Poses

- Vajrasan Yoga Mudra Type 2
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Types 1 and 2
- Ardha Paschimottanasan
- Paschimottanasan

Vajrasana Yogamudra Type 2 – Thunderbolt Gesture Type 2

Vajra – thunderbolt

Mudra – gesture



Taking the asana position

Place the palms on the abdomen below the navel, keeping the right palm on top of the left palm. Inhale and while exhaling bend in the waist and rest the forehead on the floor. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally. The elbows should be pointing towards the roof.

The asana position

In this position the forehead is ideally touching the ground. The elbows remain pointing towards the roof and the elbows should be tucked in. There is pressure of the hands on the abdomen. The buttocks remain on the heels and not raised. The breathing is relaxed.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and while inhaling straighten the waist. Place the palms back down on the knees.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, back, arms

Awareness

Pressure on the abdomen.

Do's

- Put the arms in front of the abdomen, place one hand on top of the other, palms facing upwards.
- Bend forward only as much as is comfortable. This should be a relaxing pose.
- Keep the elbows pointing towards the roof.

Don'ts

- Lift the buttocks off the ground.
- Overstrain the neck while bending forward.
- Overstrain the knees.
- Let the elbows fall to the sides.

Benefits

- Applies pressure to the intestines, liver, spleen and other internal organs increasing the blood circulation to those areas and therefore improving their function.
- Regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands.

- Tones the pelvic muscles and the sciatic nerves.
- Alleviates disorders of the female and male reproductive organs.
- Helps eliminate anger
- Cools the brain.
- Relieves constipation.
- Relieves excess gas.
- The benefits are the same as Vajrasana Yoga Mudra Type 2 but increased due to the pressure applied from the hands to the abdomen.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic muscles and uterus
- Removes pelvic congestion

Therapeutic applications

- Menstrual disorders
- Constipation
- Stress and anxiety
- Back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Those with weak knees should practice this posture with caution. Slipped disc or severe spinal column problems should avoid this asana. Should be avoided by people suffering from vertigo or recent abdominal surgery.

Duration

This position can be held up 1 1/2 minutes and if that is comfortable can be extended up to 15 minutes.

Variations and tips

- This position is often difficult for sports players. If this is the case then spread the knees apart.
- One can also place a cushion under the buttocks and also under the forehead. For some people a few cushions may be needed or even a chair.
- It is recommended that something is placed under the forehead so the body can relax more.
- If the position is easy for you then place the forehead further away from the knees, giving a stronger stretch.

Preparatory Poses

- Vajrasan
- Vajrasan Yoga Mudra Type 1.

Follow Up Poses

- Padmasan Yoga Mudra Type 1 and 2
- Ardha Paschimottanasan
- Paschimottanasan
- Ardha Padma Bandhasan

Vakrasan Type 1 – Twisted Pose Type 1

Vakra – twist and bend



Taking the asana position:

In sitting position bend the left leg and place the left heel near the buttock, keeping the sole of the left foot firmly on the ground. Place the left hand and right hand on the ground near the right thigh with the fingers of both hands facing each other. Inhale and while exhaling twist the trunk of the body and the neck to the right, keeping the spine erect, looking back over the shoulder. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

The asana position:

In this asana the spine should remain straight. The base of the spine and the hips should remain stable on the floor. There should be a twist from the base of the spine to the neck. The bent knee should be kept close to the chest. The sight should be turned to follow the neck. Breathing should be smooth.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling turn the neck to the front. Return the left hand to the left side of the body. Straighten the left leg and return to sitting position. Now practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, entire back, chest

Awareness

Focus on entire spine

Do's

- Keep the right leg straight.
- Turn to the right side in the spine, turn the shoulders and head to the right.
- Try to keep both the buttocks firmly on the ground.
- Try to keep the left foot close to the body.
- Place both the palms on the ground close to the right thigh with finger tips facing each other.
- Only twist as far as you can keep your back and neck straight.

Don'ts

- Lift either of the buttocks off the ground.
- Let the bent leg fall away.

- Let the back or neck bend.
- Overstrain the knees.

Benefits

- The vertebral muscles of the back and abdomen are twisted laterally; especially the upper back and shoulder region.
- Improves the function of the spine as the blood flow to the spine, particularly the cervical and thoracic spine, is increased.
- Tones the spinal nerves, increases elasticity, reduces stiffness and relieves backache.
- Helps reduce fat in the abdominal region.
- Internal organs are twisted and so it helps in draining the blood which is accumulated in the organs and the blood vessels of abdomen.
- Helps to drain the secretions which are remaining in the ducts of the abdominal organs.
- In day to day life we do not regularly twist the spine. So it is a necessary asana to practice to keep the spine healthy.

Benefits for Women

- Beneficial in Menstrual disorders

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes.
- Constipation.
- Anorexia.
- Cervical Spondylitis.
- Urinary tract disorders.
- Menstrual disorders.
- Indigestion.

Precautions and Contra-indications

Serious spinal column complaints should avoid this asana. Avoid if having recent abdominal surgery, hernia or prolapse. Pregnancy or menstruation.

Duration

This asana can be held for up to 2 minutes on each side to start and over time can be increased to 5-6 minutes on each side.

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult to place the palm on the ground then one can place the fingertips or place the hand on the opposite shoulder, keeping the spine erect.
- One can also move the bent leg further away from the body, closer to the other foot.
- The aim of the asana is to get a good twist into the spine, not to place the palm on the ground.

Preparatory Poses

- Leg movement type 3
- Knee movement type 2
- Preparatory Movements Type 6 and 9

Follow Up Poses

- Vakrasan Type 2.
- Ardha Matsyendrasana.

Vakrasan Type 2 – Twisted Pose Type 2

Vakra – twist and bend



Taking the asana position

In sitting position bend the left leg and place the left heel near the thigh, keeping the sole of the left foot firmly on the ground. Bring the right hand over the left leg and place it on the ground, with about a forearm's distance between the hands, fingers facing away from each other. Pressing the right arm against the left knee inhale and while exhaling twist to the left side and turn the neck to look over the left shoulder. Maintain the asana, breathe normally.

The asana position

This twist is aided by the use of the shoulders, knee and arm. In this asana the spine should remain straight. The base of the spine and the hips should remain stable on the floor. There should be a twist from the base of the spine to the neck. The sight should be turned to follow the neck. Breathing should be smooth. The spine should remain erect and not bent forward. The chest should remain open.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling turn the neck to the front. Return the right hand to the right side of the body. Straighten the left leg and return to sitting position. Now practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, entire back, chest

Awareness

Focus on entire spine

Do's

- Keep the right leg straight.
- Turn to the left side in the spine, turn the shoulders and head to the left.
- Try to keep both the buttocks firmly on the ground.
- Press the left knee with right upper arm towards right and keep the left foot close to the body.
- Place both the palms on the ground close to the left thigh with finger tips facing away from each other.
- Only twist as far as you can keep your back and neck straight.

Don'ts

- Lift either of the buttocks off the ground.
- Let the bent leg fall away.
- Let the back or neck bend.
- Overstrain the knees.

Benefits

- The vertebral muscles of the back and abdomen are twisted laterally; especially the upper back and shoulder region.
- Improves the function of the spine as the blood flow to the spine, particularly the cervical and thoracic spine, is increased.
- Tones the spinal nerves, increases elasticity, reduces stiffness and relieves backache.
- Helps reduce fat in the abdominal region.
- Internal organs are twisted and so it helps in draining the blood which is accumulated in the organs and the blood vessels of abdomen.
- Helps to drain the secretions which are remaining in the ducts of the abdominal organs.
- In day to day life we do not regularly twist the spine. So it is a necessary asana to practice to keep the spine healthy.
- All of these benefits are felt more strongly in this asana compared to Vakrasana Type 1.

Benefits for Women

- Beneficial in Menstrual disorders

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes.
- Constipation.
- Anorexia.
- Cervical Spondylitis.
- Urinary tract disorders.
- Menstrual disorders.
- Indigestion.

Precautions and Contra-indications

Serious spinal column complaints should avoid this asana. Avoid if having recent abdominal surgery, hernia or prolapse. Pregnancy or menstruation.

Duration

This asana can be held for up to 2 minutes on each side to start and over time can be increased to 5-6 minutes on each side.

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult to place the palm on the ground then one can place the fingertips or place the hand on the opposite shoulder, keeping the spine erect.
- One can also move the bent leg further away from the body, closer to the other foot.
- The aim of the asana is to get a good twist into the spine, not to place the palm on the ground.
- Note – some people find that Ardha Matsyendrasana is a little easier than this pose.

Preparatory Poses

- Leg movement type 3
- Knee movement type 2
- Preparatory Movements Type 6 and 9
- Vakrasana Type 1

Follow Up Poses

- Ardha Matsyendrasana.

Standing

Garudasana – Eagle Pose

From Sanskrit *garud* (eagle). Garudasana is the advanced stage of Sankatasana. In some pictorial depictions where Garuda is shown in human form, its form resembles that of the asana.



Taking the asana position

Shifting the weight of the body onto the right leg and bending it slightly, lift the left leg up by bending it slightly at the knee. The body is now balanced entirely on the right leg. Cross the left leg over the right leg and hook the top of the left foot behind the right calf. The toes of the left leg should be showing from the left side of the right lower leg. The right leg remains slightly bent at the knee. Bend both arms at the elbows and raise them to chest level. Place the right upper arm over the left upper arm, and continue to entwine the two arms. Touch both hands together in a namaskar pose.

The asana position

In this position, the left leg is effectively entwined around the right leg, as in Sankatasana. The upper body should be kept straight. The arms are also entwined around each other. Gaze forward at a fixed point to maintain balance.

Releasing the asana position

Release the arms and return them to the side of the body. Release the left leg. Place the left foot back onto the ground and come back to standing position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

On the stretch on the joints of the left leg, as well as the shoulders.

Awareness

On maintaining balance while focusing on a fixed point.

Do's

- Keep the upper body straight.
- Gaze at a fixed point in front to keep balance.

Don'ts

- Lose balance.
- Lift any part of the right sole off the ground.
-

Benefits

- Increases the blood supply to and loosens the joints in the legs and arms.
- Strengthens and improves circulation to the hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, elbows and wrists.
- Improves balance
- Strengthens the legs
- Strengthens nervous system
- Improves focus and concentration
- Strengthens the lower back and can help relieve sciatica

Benefits for Women

- Helps to stabilise the lower abdominal and pelvic muscles which is helpful during pregnancy.
- Brings lightness to the body during pregnancy or when there are feelings of heaviness.

Therapeutic applications

- Sciatica
- Rheumatism
- Unstable pelvis during pregnancy

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if ankle or knee pain.

Duration

30 seconds or more on each side.

Variations and tips

- Initially, it may be difficult to wrap one leg around the other fully. Bending the right leg more will allow the left leg to be more easily wrapped around it.
- It may also be difficult to join the hands together in namaskar pose. It is ok if the palms are not touching each other totally.

Preparatory Poses

Sankatsana.

Follow Up Poses

Vatayanasana

Mridang Bandha – Drum Pose

From Sanskrit *mridang* (drum). In this asana the position of the body resembles that of a person playing a drum, hence the name.



Taking the asana position

Step the left leg out to the side, away from the right leg at a distance of 1 to 1.5 feet. Turn the toes outward as far as possible, keeping the heels in line with each other. Bend the knees a little as though you are going to sit down on a chair. Place the arms away from the waist and slightly forward. The arms are held in such a position as if they are holding a drum, which comes up to slightly below your waist.

The asana position

In the ideal pose, the toes are turned completely outward such that they are in line with the heels. As such, it is necessary to bend the knees in order to maintain balance. The hands being placed slightly in front of the body also helps to balance the body. The upper body remains upright, with the eyes gazing forward.

Releasing the asana position

Bring the arms back to the sides of the body. Straighten the knees. Point the toes forward. Step the left foot back to standing position.

Anatomical focus

On the opening in the hips and stretch on the leg joints.

Awareness

On normal breathing and maintaining balance.

Do's

- Step the feet apart about 1 to 1.5 feet.
- Keep the heels and toes in line.
- Keep the upper body upright, including the neck.

Don'ts

- Lose balance.
- Lean the upper body forward or backward in order to balance the body.

Benefits

- Strengthens the leg muscles.
- Increases the blood supply to and loosens the joints in the legs and hip.
- Decreases fats in legs

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region
- Removes pelvic congestion
- Prepares one for delivery during pregnancy

Therapeutic applications

- Reproductive problems
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications

Care should be taken for those with stiffness in the knees.

Duration

15 seconds. Over time it can be built up to 2 minutes.

Variations and tips

- Bend the knees slightly more if it is difficult to turn the toes out completely.

Preparatory Poses

- Uttanasana
- Sankatasana

Follow Up Poses

- Vayu nishkasan
- Namaskarasan

Natarajasan – Dancing Shiva Pose

Nat – artist, actor

Nataraj – name of Shiva, king of dancers



Taking the asana position

From standing position find a point to focus on. Bend the left leg and take hold of the left ankle with the left hand from behind the body. Carefully start raising the leg upward, stretching the leg and arm away from the body as much as one can comfortably. Raise the right arm in front and place the hand in dhyana mudra and have the palm facing down.

The asana position

One can slightly bend forward in this pose to increase the stretch and lift the leg further away. The right leg should remain stable. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the right arm down by the side and lower the left leg so that the knees are together. Breathing normally release the left ankle and bring the feet together. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, legs, arms, shoulders, ankles

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Lift up the leg as high as is comfortable
- Focus on a point
- Keep the lower leg stable

Don'ts

- Twist the body to the side
- Try to arch so much that the body becomes unstable

Benefits

- Strengthens the back
- Tones the spinal nerves
- Relieves mild back pain
- Opens the chest and lungs
- Improves posture
- Massages abdomen
- Stretches the pelvic region
- Strengthens the legs, knees and ankles
- Improves balance and coordination
- Gives a feeling of lightness
- Strengthens nervous system

Benefits for Women

- Opens pelvic region
- Gives lightness to pregnant women who feel heavy and gives a back bend when they cannot practice in prone position

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Asthma
- Mild back pain
- Pregnancy

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is strong back pain, ankle pain or recent abdominal surgery.

Duration

Up to one minute over time

Variations and tips

- The full position involves bring the foot to the head and is a nice advanced variation.
- If someone has difficulty with balance they can use a chair or wall as a support.

Preparatory Poses

- Ardha Dhanurasan
- Patangasan

Follow Up Poses

- Poorna Natarajasan

Parivarta Trikonasan – Inverted Triangle Pose

Parivarta - Inverted

Trikon – Triangle

In this asana the position of the body becomes like a triangle. There is a twist on the truck of the body as the body is turned towards the opposite leg, and hence the name Parivarta Trikonasana.



Taking the asana position:

Step the left leg out to the side, away from the right leg.

Turn the foot of the left leg to the left.

Inhale and while exhaling bend the left leg in the knee creating a 90 degree angle and twist the upper body to the left.

Place the right palm on the ground beside the left foot, palm in line with the left foot. The right upper arm should be placed over the left thigh, close to the left knee.

Raise the left arm over the head so that it is near the left ear. Keep the neck straight and continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this position, the upper body is twisted and the left arm, truck of the body and right leg is in one straight line. The left arm should be touching the left ear. The left leg is at a 90 degree angle. The

right arm is straight and the palm is placed on the floor on the outside of the left foot. Most of the body weight is balanced between the left and right legs.

Releasing the asana position:

Exhale and while inhaling release the left hand to the side of the body.

Lift the right arm from ground and straighten the body, releasing the twist.

Straighten the left knee.

Turn the left foot to face the front.

Step the left leg back beside the right leg and come back to the standing position.

Practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus:

On the stretch on one side of the body and the twist in the truck of the body.

Awareness:

On normal breathing and keeping the body open and stretched.

Do:

- Legs should be stepped out at a distance of about 4 to 5 feet. (Distance depends on individual height and ability to stretch the body).
- The left leg should be bent such that the thigh and calf make a 90 degree angle with each other, with the thigh parallel to the ground.
- Make sure that the right leg is kept straight. Try to ground the foot of the right leg if it is possible.
- Keep both arms straight.
- Try to align the head and ear with the arm that is extended overhead.
- Place the right hand on the ground parallel and close to the left foot, fingers pointing the same direction as the toes.
- Place the right upper arm over the left thigh, close to the left knee.
- Pull the shoulders back, opening the chest.
- Align the left heel with the arch of the right foot.

Don't:

- Place the right upper arm in front of the left knee.
- Bend the arms.
- Overstrain your left knee or let the left knee extend over the left ankle.
- Bend the right leg.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the leg muscles.
- Helps maintain proper balance of the body, removes fat from the waist.
- Improves the efficiency of the digestive system.
- Strengthens the nervous system.
- Strengthens and loosens the hips and knees.
- Improves balance.
- Gives a gentle twist to the spine, relieving tension, particularly in the upper back.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic region.
- Stretches the sides of the abdomen and chest, helpful if there is rib pain and creates more space during pregnancy.
- Tones the reproductive organs.

Therapeutic applications:

- Obesity
- Reproductive problems
- Constipation
- Digestive complaints

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is back pain, knee problems or hernia. Take a simple variation if one is menstruating or pregnant. Avoid any variation after 6 months of pregnancy.

Duration:

Over time it can be built up to 1 minute.

Variations and tips:

- If the position is difficult then there are some variations. If you cannot get the right hand to the floor then it is ok to place the fingertips on the ground. If this is difficult, then place the right elbow over the left thigh and continue to have the left arm raised. The right heel may also be lifted from the ground, in order to get the right arm over to the left side. The easiest variation is to have the hands in namaskar.
- Breathing may become laboured due to the twist in the truck of the body and the compression of the abdomen with the left thigh. Continue to breathe normally.

Preparatory poses:

- Preparatory Movement No. 2
- Trikonasana
- Ardha Matsyendrasana

Follow up poses:

- Shree Krishnasana

Patangasana – Kite pose

From Sanskrit *patang* (kite). In this asana, the body looks like that of a kite flying in the air, hence the name Kite pose



Taking the asana position

Exhale and inhaling, raise both arms sidewise to shoulder level. Exhale and lower the upper body until it becomes parallel with the ground. At the same time, slowly raise the left leg from behind until it forms a straight line horizontally with the body. Breathe normally.

The asana position

In this position, only the right leg is left standing on the ground. The rest of the body is lifted and forming a parallel line with the ground, with the arms spread away from the body.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and inhaling, slowly straighten the body and lower the left leg down to the ground beside the right leg. Exhale and slowly release the arms back to the side of the body. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Core muscles, leg, foot.

Awareness

On normal breathing and maintaining balance.

Do's

- Spread the arms 90 degrees away from the body and parallel to the ground.
- Keep the legs straight.
- Keep the back straight.
- Gaze at a fixed point in front on the ground to help maintain balance.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms or the legs.
- Hunch the back.

Benefits

- Strengthens the back, hips and legs.
- Improves coordination of the nervous system with the musculoskeletal system.
- Improves balance.
- Improves focus and concentration.

Benefits for Women

- Creates lightness in the body during pregnancy and when there is heaviness.
- Strengthens pelvic muscles.

Therapeutic applications

- Stress and anxiety
- MS
- Parkinsons

Precautions and Contra-indications

High blood pressure.

Duration

Up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- Ideally the upper body and left leg should form a horizontal straight line. If it is not possible to lift the left leg to hip level, it is ok to simply lift the leg as high as possible, while keeping the leg straight.
- Instead of having the arms out to the sides the arms can be straight out, parallel to the ground and with the hands together.
- If balance is a problem one can keep their hands on their hips and just lift the leg or use a wall or chair as a support.

Preparatory Poses

- Veerabhadrasana.

Follow Up Poses

- Natarajasana

Sankatasana – Difficult Pose

Sankat – Difficult



Taking the asana position

Shifting the weight of the body onto the right leg and bending it slightly, lift the left leg up by bending it slightly at the knee. The body is now balanced entirely on the right leg. Cross the left leg over the right leg and hook the top of the left foot behind the right calf. The toes of the left leg should be showing from the left side of the right lower leg. The right leg remains slightly bent at the knee. Place the hands in namaskar in front of the chest.

The asana position

In this position, the left leg is effectively entwined around the right leg, with the hands in namaskar position in front of the chest. The upper body should be kept straight. Once the left leg is wrapped over the right, the right leg should be straightened in order to feel the strain on the left leg. Gaze forward at a fixed point to maintain balance.

Releasing the asana position

Release the hands from namaskar position and return the arms to the side of the body. Release the left leg. Place the left foot back onto the ground and come back to standing position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

On the stretch on the joints of the left leg.

Awareness

On maintaining balance while focusing on a fixed point.

Do's

- Keep the upper body straight.
- Gaze at a fixed point in front to keep balance.

Don'ts

- Hunch the back or shoulders.
- Lift any part of the right sole off the ground.

Benefits

- Increases the blood supply to and loosens the joints in the legs.
- Strengthens and improves circulation to the hips, knees, ankles and shoulders.
- Improves balance
- Strengthens the legs
- Strengthens nervous system
- Improves focus and concentration
- Strengthens the lower back and can help relieve sciatica

Benefits for Women

- Helps to stabilise the lower abdominal and pelvic muscles which is helpful during pregnancy.
- Brings lightness to the body during pregnancy or when there are feelings of heaviness.

Therapeutic applications

- Sciatica
- Rheumatism
- Unstable pelvis during pregnancy

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if ankle or knee pain.

Duration

At least 30 seconds on each side.

Variations and tips

- Initially, it may be difficult to wrap one leg around the other fully. Bending the right leg more will allow the left leg to be more easily wrapped around it.
- Use a wall or chair if balance is difficult.

Preparatory Poses

- Leg movements
- Pawanmuktasan series one

Follow Up Poses

- Garudasana.

Shirshasana – Headstand Pose

Shirsha – Head

When performing this asana, the body is inverted, with the top of the head on the ground and the legs up in the air, and hence the name.



Taking the asana position:

From standing position, come into a squat, on the toes. Rest the knees on the ground and interlace the fingers of both hands together, placing the hands and forearms to the ground in front. The elbows should be one forearm's length apart, about 30cm. Bend forward and place the fontanelle (top of the head) on the ground, resting the back of the head between both palms. Straighten both knees. Slowly, walk the toes towards the head. The back, neck and head should form a straight line, perpendicular to the ground. Slowly bend the knees, lifting the legs off the ground towards the chest, while keeping balance on the forearms and head. Straighten the back and slowly point the knees towards the ceiling. Straighten the legs and point the toes up, breathing normally.

The asana position:

The whole body should be straight and perpendicular to the ground, with the toes pointing up. The weight of the entire body is balanced between the forearms and the head. Eyes can be closed to achieve stability of the mind which helps in balancing. Otherwise, the sight can be fixed on one point on the ground to help maintain balance. The breathing should be smooth and through the nose.

Releasing the asana position:

Bend the knees slowly, touching the buttocks with the heels. Bend at the waist and bring the knees close to the chest. Straighten the legs and touch the toes to the ground gently. Bend the knees and lower the hips down slowly to Vajrasana Yogamudra, with the forehead resting on the ground for 15 to 30 seconds. Lift the head and sit in Vajrasana with closed eyes for a minute. Fold the fingers and gently press the heel of the palms on the closed eyes. Release the palms and come back into a squat, on the toes. Stand up slowly.

Anatomical focus:

Head, shoulders, forearms, core

Awareness:

On maintaining balance.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight and toes pointed up.
- Focus on the breathing in order to calm and quiet the mind.

Don't:

- Jump or fling the legs up to come into the asana.

Benefits:

- Improved blood circulation to the brain and eyes, increasing their efficiency.
- Helps to bring the impure blood from the lower region of the body to the heart, relieving strain from the heart.
- Helps to reverse the effects of gravity on the spine which helps to relieve the pressure on the vertebrae and also helps in the re-alignment of the vertebral column, correcting any minor postural defects.
- Puts pressure on the pituitary gland which helps to increase its efficiency, and in turn the efficiency of all other hormone-producing endocrine glands which are controlled by it.
- The weight of the abdominal organs on the diaphragm encourages deeper exhalation so that more carbon dioxide and other toxins are removed from the lungs.
- Relieves anxiety

Benefits for Women :

- Strengthens pelvic floor
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications:

- Many forms of nervous and glandular disorder, especially those related to the reproductive system
- Varicose veins
- Anxiety
- Anger management
- Recommended for the prevention of asthma, hay fever, diabetes, menopausal imbalance, headaches and migraine.

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is heart disease, high or low blood pressure, thrombosis, arteriosclerosis, chronic catarrh, chronic constipation, brain diseases, weak blood vessels in the eyes, asthma, excess weight, chronic or acute neck pain, stiff neck, osteoporosis, kidney problems, conjunctivitis, chronic glaucoma, inflammation of the ears, blood haemorrhage in the head, pregnancy and menstruation, during a headache or migraine, prior to aerobic exercise.

Beginners may use the support of a wall to guard against losing balance and tumbling down.

Duration:

A daily practice of between 1 to 3 minutes. This asana can be held for up to 30 minutes.

Variations and tips:

If there is difficulty in balancing, then only perform the asana up to where the legs are bent and try to balance in that position. Once balance is achieved after consistent practice, the legs can be straightened with relative ease.

Alternatively, you may wish to walk the feet forward as much as you can, and then simply lift one leg into the air at a time.

Preparatory poses:

- Dolphin pose is an excellent all-rounder pose to strengthen the arms, shoulders, abdomen and back, as well as to improve flexibility in the hips.
- Other inverted poses such as Ugrasana (ferocious pose), Sarvangasana (shoulderstand pose) can be practised to gain confidence and get used to the feeling of being inverted.
- To strengthen the arms: Merudandasana
- To strengthen the back: Backbends such as chakrasana, naukasana (prone), niralambha shalabhasana, niralambha bhujangasana.
- To strengthen the abdomen: Naukasana (supine)
- To improve hip flexibility which makes it easier to walk the toes toward the head and lift the toes off the ground: Forward bends such as paschimottasana, uttanpadasana, pawanmuktasana
- Spinal twists such as vakrasana, ardha matsyendrasana.

Follow up poses:

- Shirshasan variations
- Shashankasan
- Shavasana

Sulabh Parivarta Trikonasan – Simple Inverted Triangle Pose

Sulabh – Easy

Parivarta – Inverted

Trikon – Triangle



Taking the asana position

From standing position take at least 3 feet distance between the legs. Turn the left foot to the left side and the right foot slightly to the left so that it is comfortable and stable. Inhale raising the arms up from the sides so that they are parallel to the floor. Exhale and slowly twist to the left side, bringing the right hand onto the left foot, shin or knee and raising the right arm upward, making a straight line with the arms.

The asana position

Look upward and breathe normally. Try to keep the chest open and the legs straight. Maintain steadiness through the legs and feet.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale raise the body back up, exhaling lower the arms and turn the foot back to the front. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Legs, chest, arms, twist.

Awareness

Maintaining balance and the twist in the spine.

Do's

- Place the hand in the most comfortable position
- Take enough distance between the feet

Don'ts

- Overstretch and lose balance

Benefits

- Strengthens the leg muscles.
- Strengthens and loosens the hips and knees.
- Improves balance.
- Gives a gentle twist to the spine, relieving tension, particularly in the upper back.
- Strengthens the nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic region.
- Stretches the sides of the abdomen and chest, helpful if there is rib pain and creates more space during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is strong back pain, pelvic or knee pain. Maintain balance.

Duration

Up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- For a simplified version instead of raising the right arm upwards you may wrap the right arm behind the back.

Preparatory Poses

Sulabh Trikonasan

Follow Up Poses

Trikonasana

Parivarta Trikonasana

Trikonasana – Triangle Pose

Trikon – Triangle



Taking the asana position

Step the left leg out to the side, away from the right leg. Turn the foot of the left leg to the left. Inhale and while exhaling bend the left leg in the knee creating a 90 degree angle and place the left palm beside the left foot. Raise the right hand over the head so that it is near the right ear. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position it is necessary to keep the right arm, right side of the body and right leg in one straight line. The right arm should be touching the right ear. The left leg is at a 90 degree angle. The left arm is straight and the palm is placed on the floor on the outside of the left foot. Most of the weight is placed on the palm and left leg. The hips should be turned facing to the side and the gaze is in the same direction.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling return the right hand to the side of the body. Straighten the left knee and return the left hand to its original place. Turn the left foot to face the front. Return the left leg to the right leg and come back to the standing position. Practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

On the stretch on one side of the body.

Awareness

On normal breathing and keeping the body open and stretched.

Do's

- Left leg should be stepped out at a distance of about 4 to 5 feet. (Distance depends on individual height and ability to stretch the body).
- Bend the left leg in the knee so that the thigh and calf make 90 degree angle with each other, the thigh will be parallel with the ground.
- Keep the hips and torso facing the front.
- Raise the right arm over the head while keeping the arm straight.
- Try to align the head and right ear with the right arm.

- Place the left hand on the ground parallel and close to the left foot, fingers pointing the same direction as the toes.
- Pull the shoulders behind, open the chest.
- Keep both the heels on the ground.
- Stretch the entire body to left side while maintaining the balance.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms.
- Overstrain your left knee or let the left knee bend over the left ankle.
- Bend the right leg.
- Try to align the left foot and right foot in one line.
- Lift the sole of the back foot off the ground.
- Loose balance.
- Hunch the body over.

Benefits

- Function of hips, knee, ankle and shoulder is improved as well as the abdominal, back side of thigh, calf and scapular muscles.
- Helps maintain proper balance of the body, removes fat from the waist.
- Improves the appetite and improves the efficiency of the digestive system.
- Strengthens the nervous system.
- Improves coordination between the nervous systems and the musculoskeletal system.
- Loosens the hip joints and strengthens the knees.
- Opens and develops the chest.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens the pelvis and tones the reproductive organs.
- Stretches the sides of the body, creating space around the belly and relieving rib pain during pregnancy.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is hip, knee or ankle pain as well as back pain.

Duration

Over time it can be built up to 1 minute.

Variations and tips

- If you cannot get the hand to the floor then it is ok to place the fingertips on the ground. If this is difficult then place the forearm on the thigh and continue to have the right arm raised. These two variations are also useful when it is difficult to bend the knee to 90 degrees. It is important that the leg is comfortable; there should not be stress on the knee.
- It is also important that the chest is not closed and that the hips are open. If there is not enough distance between the feet then naturally the chest will be closed so make sure that the step is big and the hips are squared to the side.

Preparatory Poses

- Ardha chandrasan
- Preparatory movement type 5
- Sulabh Trikonasan

Follow Up Poses

- Sulabh Parivarta Trikonasan
- Parivarta trikonasan

Ugrasana – Ferocious Pose

Ugra – Ferocious



Taking the asana position

Step both feet apart to a distance of about 3 to 3.5 feet. Inhale and exhaling, bend forward from the hips. Place the palms onto the ground. Try to touch the fontanelle to the ground. The arms are bent at the elbows and balance of the body is maintained with the assistance of the hands on the ground. Once the body is in balance, catch hold of the big toes or outer sides of the feet with the respective hands, keeping the arms straight.

The asana position

In the final position, the legs are straight, and apart, with the fontanelle touching on the ground, ideally at the midpoint between the legs. The hands are straight and catching hold of the big toes or the sides of the respective foot. The entire weight of the body is balanced between the feet and fontanelle.

Releasing the asana position

Place both the hands back onto the ground. Exhale and while inhaling lift up the head and the arms. Straighten the upper body and bring both the arms back to the sides of the body. Step the feet together and come back to the standing position.

Anatomical focus

On the stretch on the back of the legs and upper body.

Awareness

On normal breathing and keeping the body balanced while inverted.

Do's

- Keep the legs and arms straight.
- Bend from the hips.
- Try to keep the head in line with the legs in the final posture.
- Move in a slow and controlled manner so as not to lose balance.

Don'ts

- Hunch the back in order to touch the fontanelle to the ground.

Benefits

- Strengthens the legs.
- Improves the functioning of the digestive, reproductive and excretory organs in the abdominal area.

- Increases blood supply to the brain.
- Balances the nervous system.
- As a preliminary pose to Shirshasana, it accustoms the brain to the increased influx of blood and the fontanelle to supporting the weight of the body.
- Stretches the hips and inner thighs.
- Stretches the lower back.
- Stretches the hamstrings and calves, removing tension and tightness.

Benefits for Women

- Opens and stretches the pelvic region
- Creates space in the pelvic area and help prevent and decrease fluid retention and leg cramps during pregnancy.
- Can relieve heaviness during menstruation.
- Tones reproductive organs.

Therapeutic applications

- Low blood pressure
- Poor memory

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart conditions, brain diseases, inflammation of the ear, weak eye capillaries, slipped disc or sciatica, vertigo, cervical spondylitis, back pain, pelvic pain.

Duration

30 seconds and up to 5 minutes over time.

Variations and tips

- If the head is not able to touch the ground, try to find a balance between stepping the feet further apart while trying to keep the balance.
- If the head is still not able to touch the ground, regular conscientious practice of the preparatory poses is necessary.

Preparatory Poses

- Paschimottanasana
- Ekapad Hastasana
- Ugrasana (sitting)
- Titaliasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shirshasana

Uttanasan – Squat and Rise Pose

Uttan - raise



Taking the asana position

From standing position bring the feet hip width apart and turn the toes slightly outward. Interlock the fingers in front of the body. Inhale and exhaling slowly start to bend the knees.

The asana position

Keep the spine erect and try to avoid bending forward.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and straighten the legs then exhale bend the knees again, squatting a little deeper. Continue the movement, going as deeply as feels comfortable, aiming for a full squat eventually, over time.

Anatomical focus

Pelvis, lower back, calves

Awareness

On gently moving deeper into the asana with comfort.

Do's

- Go slowly
- Keep the spine upright.
- Go as far as is comfortable.

Don'ts

- Go straight into a full squat
- Lift the heels.
- Bend forward.

Benefits

- Loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Progressively prepares one for squatting.
- Loosens and strengthens the legs
- Relieves heaviness in the legs.
- Helps relieve constipation and flatulence.

Benefits for Women

- Helps prevent fluid retention, cramps and restlessness in the legs during pregnancy.
- Helps to encourage the baby to engage during pregnancy.
- Opens and creates space in the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive problems
- Reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is hip, knee, pelvic or ankle pain. Be gentle and listen to the body. It is not necessary to come into the full squat.

Duration

Practiced as a movement but it can be held for up to a minute over time.

Variations and tips

- Can use a wall as support.

Preparatory Poses

Pawanmuktasan series one
Leg movements

Follow Up Poses

Namaskarasan
Vayu nishkasan

Veerasana – Warrior Pose

From Sanskrit *veer* (brave). The name of this asana does not completely correspond with the Sanskrit name however it roughly means brave, particularly due to the way that the asana is performed as it looks like a brave man taking position to attack his enemy.



Taking the asana position

Step the left leg forward at a maximum distance from the right leg. Bend the left knee at a 90 degree angle and place the hands on the knee, palms joined together. Exhale and while inhaling raise the joined hands up over the head, let the neck fall back so the gaze is towards the ceiling and arch the spine backwards. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position there should be enough distance between the legs. Ideally the front leg should be bent at a 90 degree angle but whatever is comfortable should be performed. The back leg should remain straight. The arms, neck, back and back of the leg form a nice arch which is desirable in this position. To keep an arch there should be some pressure on the back leg and foot to maintain balance and also to move the strain away from the front knee. The arms should remain close to the ears and the neck bent back.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly straighten the body and the neck, lowering the arms back down so the hands rest on the knee. Straighten the knee and release the hands. Restore the left leg to its place and return to standing position. Practice on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus

Back, pelvis, legs

Awareness

On maintaining balance and stretching the front side of the body.

Do's

- Place the right foot at a 45 degree angle to the left foot. (The angle may vary as per the convenience of every individual.)
- Keep the hips and torso facing the front.
- Bend the left leg to a 90 degree angle so the thigh is parallel with the floor.
- Raise the arms straight over the head with palms joined in Namaskar position.
- Take the arms backwards as far as possible.
- Pull the shoulders back, open the chest.
- Keep both the heels on the ground.
- Stretch the entire body in the backward direction while maintaining the balance.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms or the right leg.
- Try to align the left foot and right foot in one line.
- Loose balance.

Benefits

- Improves the strength and blood supply to the joints like the ankles, knees, hips, lumber region, cervical region and shoulders.
- Abdominal muscles are stretched so helps to remove fat from the region.
- Helps to maintain the proper balance of the body.
- Improves the flexibility of the spinal column.
- Puts pressure on the digestive organs and increases their efficiency and function.
- Strengthens the legs.
- Puts pressure on the nervous system and improves coordination of the nervous system with the musculoskeletal system.
- Improves balance.

- Relieves tension in the neck and shoulders.
- Expands the chest.
- Reduces fat around the pelvic region.
- Grounding

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region
- Tones the reproductive organs
- Relieves tension in the upper back and chest which is helpful for breastfeeding mothers.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Digestive problems
- Respiratory problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

The process of bending backwards should be slow and controlled in order to maintain balance.

Duration

Up to one minute.

Variations and tips

- It is important to get the balance of an arch and also a stretch into the legs. Do not try to bend the front knee so much that it is difficult to arch the back. In the same way do not arch the back and prevent the stretch into the front leg.
- Make sure that you turn the hips and shoulders to the front before coming into the asana.

Preparatory Poses

- Trikonasana
- Parivarta Trikonasana
- Sahaja Veerasana
- Sulabh Veerasana

Follow Up Poses

- Veerabhadrasana

Veerabhadrasana - Gracious Warrior pose

From the Sanskrit *veera* (warrior) and *bhadra* (gracious) In this asana, the body looks like that of a warrior extending his hands out to help another, hence the name Gracious Warrior pose.



Taking the asana position

Step the left leg forward as far away from the right leg as is comfortable. Bend the left knee at a 90 degree angle and place the hands on the knee, palms joined together. Exhale and while inhaling raise the joined hands forward until the arms are parallel to the ground. Exhale, bend the body forward about 45 degrees, so that the right leg, the trunk of the body and the head forms a diagonal line. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position

In this position there should be enough distance between the legs. Ideally the front leg should be bent at a 90 degree angle. The back leg should remain straight. The back leg, trunk of the body, neck and head should form a diagonal straight line. The arms are straight and parallel to the ground, and the eyes are gazing forward.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and inhaling, slowly straighten the body. Exhale and place the hands back on the knees. Straighten the knee and release the hands. Restore the left leg to its place and return to standing position. Practice on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Hips, legs, back, arms

Awareness

Maintaining stability in the legs

Do's

- Place the right foot at a 45 degree angle to the left foot. (The angle may vary as per the convenience of every individual.)
- Keep the hips and torso facing the front.
- Bend the left leg to a 90 degree angle so the thigh is parallel with the floor.
- Keep the arms straight and parallel to the ground.
- Pull the shoulders back, opening the chest.
- Keep both the heels on the ground.

Don'ts

- Bend the arms or the right leg.
- Overextend the left knee such that it goes over the left toes.

Benefits

- Improves the strength and blood supply to the joints like the ankles, knees, hips, lumber region, cervical region and shoulders.
- Improves the flexibility of the spinal column.
- Puts pressure on the digestive organs and increases their efficiency and function.
- Strengthens the legs.
- Puts pressure on the nervous system and improves coordination of the nervous system with the musculoskeletal system.
- Improves balance.
- Reduces fat around the pelvic region.

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region
- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is knee or back pain.

Duration

Up to one minute over time.

Variations and tips

- Ideally the trunk of the body should be away from the thigh of the left leg and should form a straight diagonal line with the back leg. However, if the back is not strong enough to support the upper body in the initial stages of practice, it is ok to rest the upper body on the thigh of the front leg.
- The front leg should also be bent at 90 degrees, but if the leg is not strong enough initially, it is ok to have the leg bent at more than 90 degrees, as long as the knee is not extending over the toes.

Preparatory Poses

- Veerasana

Follow Up Poses

- Patangasan

Advanced

Series

Advanced Surya Namaskar

Surya - sun
Namaskar – salutation

This is an advanced variation of the surya namaskar as it has additional positions some may find more difficult. The surya namaskar involves practicing asana, performing pranayama, worshipping or respecting the sun and contains the strength of mantras. Hence surya namaskars are an exercise which is considered complete in all respects.

THE SEQUENCE:

1. Starting in standing position with hands in namaskar gesture, thumbs at the heart centre, fingers pointing away from the body at 45°.



- Inhaling raise the arms above the head looking towards the sky with a slight back bend.



- Exhaling bending forward at the waist keeping the legs straight and placing the palms on the floor next to the feet, with the forehead touching the knees



- Hold the breath bending at the knee and lower the hips into a squatting position



- Inhaling straighten the knees and raise up in to a forward bend position (as in position 3)



- Exhaling take the left leg back into half cobra, keeping the toes erect with the knee on the ground. Keep the head looking up, the shoulders back and arms straight. In the ideal position the calf and thigh of the front leg should be touching.



- Inhaling, bringing the front knee on to the ground, placing the hands into namaskar gesture and raise the arms above the head with a slight back bend.



8. Exhale lowering the arms down, placing the palms on the floor and raising the front knee up into half cobra.



9. Hold the breath bring the right leg back so into the plank pose



10. Inhale; raise the left hand to the sky opening up the whole body to the left hand side, placing the left foot on top of the right.



11. Exhaling lower the left hand back to the ground and come into plank pose once again



12. Inhaling raise the right hand skyward opening the body to the right and place the left foot on top of the right



13. Exhaling lower the right hand down back into plank



14. Holding the breath half bend the arms into chaturanga, keeping the back straight.



15. Continue to hold the breath lowering the knees then the chest and finally the forehead into ashtanga



16. Inhaling raise the head and body off the floor back into chaturanga



17. Holding the breath raise the hips and push up with the shoulders into downward dog, keeping the head between the arms and trying to keep the feet flat on the floor



18. Exhaling bring the hips forward swiping the body through bent arms and then arching the back straighten the arms with the head facing skyward in cobra position



19. Inhaling raise the hips and push back with the shoulders back into downward dog, keeping your head down and your feet flat on the floor



20. Raising the left leg then bending the knee open the hips by twisting the body to the right. Then come back into downward dog placing the foot back on the floor...



... and repeat with the right leg twisting to the left



21. Exhaling bring the left foot through in front and raise the head skyward into half cobra



22. Bending the left knee and placing the leg on the floor bring the hands into namaskar gesture and inhale raise the arms over the head



23. Exhaling bring the arms down, placing the hands on the floor beside the knee. Shifting the weight back allowing the left foot to come forward and place it between the hands flat on the floor back in half cobra



24. Inhaling bring the right foot level with the left raising the hips, keeping the legs straight with the palms on the floor next to the feet, the head next to the knee into a forward bend.



25. Exhale bending the knees and come into a squatting position. At this point one can also raise up the arms above the head as an additional balance challenge.



26. Inhaling up straighten the legs back into standing position and bring the hands back to the heart centre



Anatomical focus

Stressed areas for each individual asana

Awareness

Asana, breath, flow, relaxation

Do's

- Correlate breathing with your movements
- Keep movements slow and controlled
- Follow the Surya namaskar mantra

Don'ts

- Over stretch
- Have jerky movements

Benefits

- Warms up the body for asana practice or can be practiced by itself as a strong exercise
- Strengthens the arms, shoulders, wrists and core muscles
- Develops sense of physical balance.
- Develops concentration and focus
- Increases confidence
- Strong workout for the body
- Good for those who are attracted towards a very dynamic and strong practice

Benefits for Women

Strengthens the upper body, shoulders and arms which are often weaker for women.

Therapeutic applications

Weight loss

General health and fitness

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, cerebral thrombosis, weak wrists, carpal tunnel syndrome, back or neck pain, pregnancy, recent abdominal surgery, menstruation.

Note that this is a very strong practice so one should listen to their body and only practice if comfortable.

Duration

Practice as many repetitions as comfortable. Can also maintain poses for longer to get more of a yogic effect.

Variations and tips

If it is difficult to move from chaturanga to downward dog then the knees can be placed on the ground.

Preparatory Poses

Surya Namaskar

Zor (Indian warm up) – Cobra and downward movement

Follow Up Poses

Shavasana

Advanced Vajrasana Series

This series is based on Vajrasana, Thunderbolt pose. The poses can be practiced in a series in the following order or they can be practiced alone. If practicing in a series one can practice all the asanas on one side, finishing with Vajra Padma Matsyasana, then practice on the other side. After that one can practice Vajra Matsyasana and Supta Vajrasana.

1. Vajra Ardha Paschimottanasana – Half Thunderbolt Forward Bend
2. Vajra Ardha Naukasana – Half Thunderbolt Boat Pose
3. Vajra Ardha Matsyendrasana – Half Thunderbolt Spinal Twist
4. Vajra Ardha Bhujangasana – Half Thunderbolt Cobra Pose
5. Vajra Ardha Dwikonasana – Half Thunderbolt Double Angle Pose
6. Vajra Ardha Veerasana – Half Thunderbolt Warrior Pose
7. Vajra Ardha Yogamudra – Half Thunderbolt Yoga Gesture
8. Vajra Ardha Padmasana – Half Thunderbolt Lotus Pose
9. Vajra Padma Matsyasana – Half Thunderbolt Lotus Fish Pose
10. Vajra Matsyasana – Thunderbolt Fish Pose
11. Supta Vajrasana – Sleeping Thunderbolt Pose (see intermediate asanas)

Vajra Ardha Paschimottonasana (Half Thunderbolt Forward Bend Pose)



1. From sitting position place the left leg in Vajrasana with the heel outside the buttock.
2. Inhale, raise the left arm and encircle the waist with the right hand
3. On exhalation, move the trunk forward and hold the right toe with the left hand, touch the forehead to the right knee like in ardha paschimottonasana. Relax the shoulders and elbows.
4. Try to keep both buttocks on the floor and extend your forehead lower on the leg towards the toes, straightening the spinal cord. Breathe normally.
5. To release inhale raising the head up, releasing the hands.
6. Practice on the other side.

*For another variation, practice holding the left toes with the left hand, right toes with the right hand while the opposite arm rests on the back.

Benefits:

- As per Ardha paschimottonasana and Vajrasana.
- Improves functioning of the lungs and digestive system.
- Strengthens pelvic region, lower back, knees and ankles.
- Gently massages lower abdomen, abdominal area organs, urinary bladder, kidneys, uterus, small and large intestines, spleen, pancreas and liver; increasing their efficiency.
- Reduces fat on waist and buttocks.
- Useful asana for prolapse, diabetes, asthma, respiratory diseases, colitis, piles and hernia.
- Energises the whole body as the nerves around spinal cord are stimulated.
- Strengthens back muscles, spinal cord and reproductive organs.
- Improves elasticity of back and spinal cord.

Precautions:

Avoid if suffering from Sciatica, slip disc, back pain and stiff knees.

Vajra Ardha Naukasana (Half Thunderbolt Boat Pose)



1. From sitting position place the right leg in Vajrasana with the heel outside the buttock.
2. Stretch the left leg out to the front.
3. Hold the toe of the left leg with both hands.
4. Inhale and raise the left leg keeping it straight.
5. Exhale and bring the knee close to the forehead. Breathe normally.
6. Exhale when releasing. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Reduces fat around the abdomen and hips.
- Gives pressure and massage to lower abdomen; intestines, liver, pancreas, urinary bladder, uterus, rectum and reproductive organs, improving their efficiency.
- Increases strength to thigh muscles and muscles of spinal cord to make them flexible.
- Strengthens and increases flexibility of pelvic joints, knees and ankles.
- Helps with hernia and kidney problems.

Precautions:

Avoid if suffering from lower back problems.

Vajra Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Thunderbolt Spinal Twist)

1. Place the left leg in vajrasana, keeping the heel outside the buttock.
2. Place the right heel over and beyond the left knee.
3. Inhale, raise the left hand, exhale, cross it over the right knee and grab the toe of the right leg.
4. Twist the waist, back, neck and eyes to the right side.
5. Encircle the waist with the right hand. Breathe normally.
6. Inhale and exhaling release the arm and then the legs.
7. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- The twist to the back is stronger than the regular spinal twist.
- Tones spinal nerves and reduce stiffness in back.
- Twist and pressure to internal organs.
- Reduce fat in the abdominal area.
- Tones thigh and arm muscles.
- Strengthens knees and ankles.
- Useful for diabetes and constipation.

Increases health and efficiency of reproductive system, excretory system, digestive system, respiratory system, nervous system and all internal glands.

Precautions:

Back and knee pain

Vajra Ardha Bhujangasana (Half Thunderbolt Cobra)

1. Place the left leg in Vajrasana, and the heel below the buttock.
2. Stretch the right leg backwards, with toes facing the floor.
3. Inhale and stretch the arms backwards, as far as possible and place the fingertips on the floor. Also stretch the neck and head back and make an arch of the backbone. Gaze up to the sky. Breathe normally.
4. Inhale and exhaling slowly release the back bend and bring the right leg next to the left in vajrasana.
5. Repeat on the other side

Benefits:

- Improves flexibility of the back.
- Pressure on digestive system.
- Nerves purified.
- Strengthens knees and ankles.
- Tones reproductive organs
- Useful in pregnancy.

Precautions:

Avoid if there is strong back pain, hernia or ulcer.

Vajra Ardha Dwikonasana (Half Thunderbolt Double Angle/Arms Behind)



1. Pre-pose Vajra Ardha Bhujangasana
2. Bring both behind the back and interlock the fingers.
3. Inhaling stretch the shoulders backward with the arms, opening the chest. Stretch the neck backward. Breathe normally.
4. Release on an exhale and repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Improves flexibility of the back.
- Relieves neck pain and tension headaches
- Pressure on digestive system.
- Nerves purified.
- Strengthens knees and ankles.
- Tones reproductive organs
- Useful in pregnancy.
- Improves respiration and posture.

Precautions:

Avoid if there is strong back pain, hernia or ulcer.

Vajra Ardha Veerasana (Half Thunderbolt Warrior Pose)



1. Pre-pose Vajra ardha bhujangasana.
2. Inhale and raise both arms above the head, join the palms together and bend back to make an arch of the back. Breathe normally.
3. Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the arms back down and release the legs.
4. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Improves flexibility of the back.
- Relieves neck pain and tension headaches
- Pressure on digestive system.
- Nerves purified.
- Strengthens knees and ankles.
- Tones reproductive organs
- Useful in pregnancy.
- Improves respiration and posture.
- Improves balance.
- Preparation for standing warrior pose.

Precautions:

Avoid if there is strong back pain, hernia or ulcer.

Vajra Ardha Yogamudra (Half Thunderbolt Yoga Gesture)



1. From Vajrasana, extend the right leg back resting the top of the foot on the mat.
2. Inhale, raising the arms up.
3. Exhaling, slowly lower the forehead towards the mat, extending the arms forward with the palms down.
4. Exhale and inhale releasing. Swap the legs over and repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Puts pressure on the abdominal region, improving the digestion.
- Nice stretch for the back and shoulder region
- Stretches the hip joints.
- Surrender posture allows one to go mentally inwards.

Precautions

Avoid if there is strong back pain.

Vajra Ardha Padmasana (Half Thunderbolt Lotus Pose)



1. Place the right leg in Vajrasana, heel outside the buttock.
2. Place the left foot on the right thigh.
3. Keep the fingers in dhyana mudra.
4. Practice on opposite side

Benefits:

- Good meditation pose.
- Fewer efforts are required to be steady and to keep the backbone erect.
- Pressure on the abdomen and organs.
- Improves digestive system.
- Strengthens knees and ankles.
- Helps with constipation.
- Good alternative and preparation for full padmasana.

Precautions:

Take care if there are any knee problems.

Vajra Padma Matsyasana (Half Thunderbolt Fish Pose)



1. Place the right leg in Vajrasana, heel outside the buttock.
2. Place the left foot on the right thigh in vajras ardha padmasana.
3. Using the elbows for support, arch the back and lower the crown of the head onto the ground.
4. Catch the left toes with the right hand and rest the left hand on the left thigh.
5. Repeat on the other side.

Benefits:

- Good stretch for the abdominal region, improves the digestion.
- Improves function of thyroid and thymus gland.
- Stretches the pelvic region.
- Stretches and strengthens the knees and ankles.
- Opens the chest and improves respiration.

Precautions:

Hip, knee or ankle ailments, proceed with caution. Avoid if you have heart disease, ulcers, hernia or other serious illness.

General Precautions for the complete series

Avoid if there is knee, ankle or back pain.

Duration for all

From 15 seconds up to 2 mins

Variations and tips

One does not have to follow the exact order of the series. If some poses are not suitable then one can leave them out or change them around.

Preparatory Poses

Vajrasana series

Padmasana preparatory movements

Vajrasana, Paschimottanasana, Naukasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Bhujangasana, Veerasana and Matsyasana are all helpful

Follow Up Poses

Shavasana

Sarvangasana Series (Shoulder Stand Variations)



From sarvangasana:

Vistrut pad sarvangasana (legs split sideways as far as comfortable)

Vistrut pad sarvangasana (left leg split to the front, right leg to back)

Vistrut pad sarvangasana (right leg split to the front, left leg to back)

Tiryak sarvangasana (legs split and twist clockwise)

Tiryak sarvangasana (legs split and twist anti clockwise)

Eka pad bhumisparsha sarvangasana (left leg to the ground in halasana, right leg points upwards)

Eka pad bhumisparsha sarvangasana (right leg to the ground, left leg points upwards)

Padma sarvangasana (both legs in lotus pose)

Eka pada chakra sarvangasana (keeping the upper body in the same position slowly lower one leg to the floor, keeping the other leg vertical)

Anatomical focus:

Neck, shoulders

Awareness:

Remaining balanced.

Normal breathing.

Do:

- Make sure that the trunk is raised enough vertically so that the chin can comfortably rest against the chest.

Don't:

- Move the neck or overstrain it in the chin lock position.
- Raise the head from the floor.
- Tense the legs or point the feet as this contracts the legs and prevents drainage of blood.

Benefits:

- The Jalandhar Bandha improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all other systems of the body.
- The thyroid gland is improved due to the increase oxygen and blood as well as by reducing excess emotional and mental stress which affects the thyroid.
- Stagnant blood from the lower regions of the body, i.e. legs and abdomen is drained to the heart thereby improving the supply of fresh blood to these parts and the whole circulatory system. Blood supply to the head area i.e. brain, eyes, ears, nose and throat is improved thereby improving their functioning. Therefore all of the pelvic and abdominal area circulation, ear, throat and nose ailments are improved.
- The lung capacity is increased as the diaphragm, which is the muscle of respiration, has to work against gravity in this posture, this helps in the abdominal respiration and is therefore helpful in the treatment of asthma. Toxins in the respiratory system are drained thereby improving the respiratory system.
- Prevents and cures varicose veins.
- Detoxification of the body due to improved efficiency of the organs of the body which leads to youthfulness and anti-ageing effects
- Normalizes body weight due to its effect on the thyroid..
- Due to the effect this asana has on the hormonal system, particularly the thyroid, it balances the circulatory, digestive, reproductive and nervous system.
- Due to the increased blood flow to the head the mind is tranquilized, stress and psychological disturbances are removed.
- The increased blood flow can be beneficial for those who suffer from headaches, though it should not be practiced at the time of headache.
- The thymus gland is stimulated which boosts the immune system.

- It balances the parathyroid glands that ensures regeneration and normal development of the bones.
- It releases the normal gravitational pressure from the anus muscles which helps with haemorrhoids.
- The nerves passing through the neck are toned and the neck flexibility is increased.
- The digestive system is greatly improved due to the increase in blood circulation and drainage of stagnant blood.
- The pranic flow is harmonized, increasing energy and having a positive effect on all the body systems.
- Sarvangasana has all the benefits of Shirshasana but is safer and easier to perform.
- The twist makes the whole spine more flexible while refreshing the blood supply.

The variations are useful when one wants the benefits of sarvangasana but cannot hold the position for long periods.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Removes pelvic congestion
- Opens the pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

Thyroid disorders

Asthma

Reproductive problems

Headache

Haemorrhoids

Varicose veins

Prevention of cough and colds

Diabetes

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should not be performed by people suffering from high blood pressure, heart conditions or brain diseases. Should be avoided during menstruation and pregnancy. Should be avoided if suffering from a very enlarged thyroid, enlarged spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache, weak blood vessels in the eyes, sinus congestion.

Duration:

Hold each variation for 15 seconds – 2 min. Increase the duration slowly.

Variations and tips:

One may need a folded blanket under the neck and shoulders for support.

For some beginners it may be difficult to raise the legs straight. If so then one can bend the knees a little while taking the position and then straighten out the legs.

Generally it is easier to hold the position than to come into the position as there is less stress on the abdominal and spinal muscles, however there is more stress on the upper back muscles.

Preparatory poses:

Dwi Pada Uttanpadasana

Viparit Karni

Sarvangasana as preparation for the variations

Follow up poses:

Matsyasana is essential to practice after Sarvangasana to counter balance the effect of the Jalandhar Bandha. Otherwise an asana that bends the head backwards like Bhujangasana or Chakrasana.

Halasana

Vistrut Pada Halasana

Karnapeedanasana

Ashwini Mudra

Shirshasana Series (Head Stand Series)

Shirsha – head

When performing this asana, the body is inverted, with the top of the head on the ground and the legs up in the air, hence the name.



From shirshasana:

1. Vistrut pad shirshasana (legs split sideways as far as comfortable)
2. Vistrut pad shirshasana (left leg split to the front, right leg to back)
3. Vistrut pad shirshasana (right leg split to the front, left leg to back)
4. Tiryak shirshasana (legs split and twist clockwise)
5. Tiryaks shirshasana (legs split and twist anti clockwise)

6. Eka pad bhumisparsha shirshasana (left leg to the ground in halasana, right leg points upwards)
7. Eka pad bhumisparsha shirshasana (right leg to the ground, left leg points upwards)
8. Padma shirshasana (both legs in lotus pose)
9. Eka pada chakra shirshasana (keeping the upper body in the same position slowly lower one leg to the floor, keeping the other leg vertical)

Anatomical focus:

Crown of the head, shoulders, arms, abdomen

Awareness:

On maintaining balance.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight.
- Focus on the breathing in order to calm and quiet the mind.

Don't:

- Jump or fling the legs up to come into the asana.
- Become unsteady from trying to do a variation too strongly

Benefits:

- Improved blood circulation to the brain and eyes, increasing their efficiency.
- Helps to bring the impure blood from the lower region of the body to the heart, relieving strain from the heart.
- Helps to reverse the effects of gravity on the spine which helps to relieve the pressure on the vertebrae and also helps in the re-alignment of the vertebral column, correcting any minor postural defects.
- Puts pressure on the pituitary gland which helps to increase its efficiency, and in turn the efficiency of all other hormone-producing endocrine glands which are controlled by it.
- The weight of the abdominal organs on the diaphragm encourages deeper exhalation so that more carbon dioxide and other toxins are removed from the lungs.
- Relieves anxiety
- Reduces strain on the heart as the blood is flowing with the gravity to the brain.
- Improves health of brain cells, benefits memory and concentration.
- Impure blood from the legs is brought to the heart.
- Removes minor defects of the vertebra as all vertebrae are pressed in reverse manner.
- Pressure on pituitary glands, improves the functioning of the endocrine glands to generate hormones in the blood.
- Beneficial for varicose veins.
- Removes toxins from the digestive system.
- These variations give more proficiency in shirshasana and the time of stability can be increased
- The stretch in the legs gives strength and flexibility in the joints at the thighs and the waist.
- Increases proficiency in lotus pose.

Benefits for Women:

- Tones the uterus
- General opening of the pelvic region and toning

Therapeutic applications:

- Many forms of nervous and glandular disorder, especially those related to the reproductive system
- Varicose veins
- Anxiety
- Anger management
- Recommended for the prevention of asthma, hay fever, diabetes, menopausal imbalance, headaches and migraine.

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Heart disease, high or low blood pressure, thrombosis, arteriosclerosis, chronic catarrh, chronic constipation, brain diseases, weak blood vessels in the eyes, severe asthma, excess weight, chronic or acute neck pain, general neck stiffness, osteoporosis, kidney problems, conjunctivitis, chronic glaucoma, inflammation of the ears, blood haemorrhage in the head, pregnancy and menstruation, during a headache or migraine

Take care to balance correctly and avoiding jumping into the position.

Too thick a cushion under the head can result in loss of balance.

Duration:

Hold each variation for 15 seconds – 2 min. Increase duration slowly.

Variations and tips:

If there is difficulty in balancing in shirshasana then it is better to try the variations when one has improved in the pose.

A wall can be helpful or support of another but one should not be dependent.

Preparatory poses:

Dolphin pose is an excellent all-rounder pose to strengthen the arms, shoulders, abdomen and back, as well as to improve flexibility in the hips.

Other inverted poses such as Ugrasana (ferocious pose), Sarvangasana (shoulderstand pose) can be practised to gain confidence and get used to the feeling of being inverted.

To strengthen the arms: Merudandasana

To strengthen the back: Backbends such as chakrasana, naukasana (prone), niralambha shalabhasana, niralambha bhujangasana.

To strengthen the abdomen: Naukasana (supine)

To improve hip flexibility which makes it easier to walk the toes toward the head and lift the toes off the ground: Forward bends such as paschimottasana, uttanpadasana, pawanmuktasana

Sarvangasana series

Shirshasana – held for longer periods of time

Follow up poses:

Shashankasana, followed by Vajrasana and then Shavasana

Ancient texts: (for shirshasana, not the variations)

The third chapter in the Hathapradeepika describes various mudras. The description given as Viparita Karni Mudra is best suited to Shirshana.

Urdhwanabhirhdhastalurdhwavam bhanuradhah shashi |

Karani viparitarakhya guruvakyen labhyate || H P 3.78

Meaning: When the navel is upward and the fontanelle is downward, ie. The sun is pointing up and the moon down, this pose of the body is known as Viparita Karani Mudra. This can be learnt by proper guidance from the guru.

Nitambyambhyasyuktasya jatharagnivivardhini |
Aaharo bahulstasya sampadyah sadhakasya cha ||
Alpaharoyadi bhavedgnirdahati tatkshanat || H P 3.79

Meaning: If this mudra is studied regularly, the fire (agni) in the stomach is precipitated. Hence, a sadhaka should have a proper diet. Any reduction in diet will result in the consumption of the body by this fire.

Adhah shirascordhwapadah kshanam syat prathame dine |
Kshanaccha kinchidadhikambhyaseccha dine || H P 3.80

Meaning: While studying this, efforts to stand on the head on the very first day should last for only a few seconds. Every day the duration should be gradually increased by a few seconds.

All these points are given in detail in the third chapter of Gherand Samhita.

Nabhimoole vasetsuryastalumule tu chandramah |
Amrutam grasate suyrastato mrutuvasho narah || G S 3.29

Meaning: The sun resides at the navel and the moon at the fontanelle. The fluid from the moon is swallowed by the sun, which leads to death in the end.

Urdhwan cha yojayetsurya chandram chapyadha aanayet |
Viparitkari mudra sarvatantreshu gopita || G S 3.30

Meaning: When the position of moon is made downward with sun facing upward, the mudra is called Viparit Karni Mudra. This is a secret Mudra.

The next shloka describes Shirshasana.

Bhoomou shirastha sansthapyam karayugmam samahitah
Urdhwapadhsthirou bhootwa viparitkari mata || G S 3.31

Meaning: Both the hands should be joined and kept on the ground. The head should be placed there and the legs lifted, making the body stable and balanced. This is known as Viparit karni Mudra.

The next shloka says that when the mudra is kept firm, both aging and death can be conquered.

Supine

Chakrasana Variations (Wheel Pose)

Chakra – Wheel



From chakrasana make sure you are stable and your hands are firmly placed on the ground.

1. Slowly lift one foot from the ground and bend the knee towards the chest. If needed adjust the other leg towards the centre for balance. Slowly extend the leg until it is straight. Repeat on the other side.
2. Slowly lift one arm and place it on the thigh. Release and repeat on the other side.
3. Push the body forward gently to straighten the legs and increase the arch in the spine. Slowly release.
4. Slowly lower one forearm to the ground and then the other, pulling the shoulder blades together. Either release or move to the next variation.
5. With the forearms on the ground slowly lower the head and support it with the hands around the head and elbows on the ground, as in shirshasana.
6. With arms in shirshasana slowly raise one leg and straighten it. Repeat on the other side.
7. With arms in shirshasana slowly push the body forward to extend the legs, walking the legs away to create more of an arch. Release.

Anatomical focus:

Back, shoulders, arms, legs

Awareness:

Maintain slow and rhythmic breathing throughout the whole process of staying in the pose and on balance.

Do:

- Keep the breathing slow and rhythmic
- Keep the shoulder blades and neck region relaxed and comfortable
- Keep the facial muscles soft and relaxed
- Keep the arms and knees straight
- Keep some distance between the feet for better support and balance while in the pose
- Respect and find acceptance with the body, by not pushing yourself into the pose.

Don't:

- Exert excessive force, which may cause undue strain onto the arms while lifting the body up into the position.
- Force yourself into getting the arch in the spine
- Strain and tense up the body while moving into the pose and/or while doing the pose.
- Try to do any variations where the body is not stable.

Benefits:

- The entire front part of the body is being stretch entirely, which is good for people who are introverts as the openness in the heart may work on their heart chakra.
- Due to the stretch at the upper part of the abdomen muscles, it gives some pressure on the internal organs of the abdomen and therefore, increasing their efficiency.
- The muscles on the front part of the thighs are stretch and the calves are strengthening while doing and holding the pose. This will also help to strengthen the leg muscles.
- This pose is extremely beneficial for those who sit long hours in front of the desk or computer as they usually hunch over the desk all day long. The backward bend in the pose will relieve tension or stress from the body and help in decreasing the ailments arising out of it.
- This pose will also help in toning and strengthening the entire back muscles.
- More stress is being put onto the spine than normal wheel pose.
- Opens the hips and pelvic region.
- Strengthens nervous system and improves balance.
- These variations are useful to increase flexibility and strength in the spine.
- Useful preparation for more advanced back bends.

Therapeutic applications:

- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications:

People who suffer from serious spinal column ailments, such as cervical and lumbar spondylitis should avoid doing this pose. If there is any strong back pain, high blood pressure, abdominal surgery, menstruation, weak wrists or pregnancy one should avoid.

Duration:

Each variation can be held for 30 seconds to a minute. One can do all variations or just one.

Variations and tips:

To relieve tension felt in the lower back, one can try to lift the heels of the feet off the ground and thus, balancing on the toes and palms.

Do not focus on arching the spine, instead focus on maintaining steadiness and comfort in the pose..

Preparatory poses:

Ardha Chakrasana

Chakrasana – held for a longer period of time

Follow up poses:

Forward bending posture, such as paschimottanasana.

Makarasana- Crocodile pose

Shavasana

Dwi Pad Shirasan - Two Feet to Head Pose (supine)

Dwi – two

Pad – leg

Shir - head



Taking the asana position

Prepare with ek pad shirasan in supine position, or sitting if comfortable. From ek pad shirasan in supine slowly hold the other leg and try to place it on the leg already kept on the neck. Fold the hands in namaskar before the chest or straighten in front.

The asana position

Breathe normally once in the asana and try to relax the whole body.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly release one leg, with the help of the hand if needed. Release the other leg and come back to supine position.

Anatomical focus

Hips, hamstrings, back

Awareness

Pelvic region, abdominal compression

Do's

- Try to relax as much as possible in the pose

Don'ts

- Force the legs behind the head. It should be comfortable.
- Hunch the back too much.

Benefits

- Both sides of the abdomen are compressed, peristalsis stimulated and constipation removed.
- Useful for disorders of the reproductive system, digestive system and excretory system. Strengthens respiratory system.
- Strengthens lower back and neck muscles.
- Improves blood circulation in the legs, good for knees and varicose veins.
- Improves blood circulation of all muscles and joints.
- Brings vitality to the body and mind
- Haemoglobin content can be improved.
- Helps to control the nervous system.
- Reproductive organs toned and strengthened.
- Adrenal glands are massaged.

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic floor and reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Anxiety
- Reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is slipped disc, sciatica, hernia or back pain. This asana should not be practiced unless proficiency in ek pad shirasana is gained as there is a possibility of strained muscles and torn ligaments.

Duration

Hold asana for 5- 30 seconds.

Variations and tips

This asana can be done from sitting or supine but supine is easier to start. One can also practice it from halasana.

Preparatory Poses

- Ek Pad Shirasan
- Paschimottanasan
- Halasan

Follow Up Poses

- Dwi Pad Shirasan (sitting)
- Shavasan

Halasana - Plough - Variations

Hala - Plough



1. Take the position of **halasana**.
2. Take the hands above the head. Interlock the fingers and place the palms just near the head.
3. Stretch the toes as far as possible from the head.
4. Bring the toes near the head, keeping the legs straight in the knees and lowering the waist towards the ground, toes may be raised slightly above the ground.

Anatomical focus:

The back side of the body is stretched and the front side of the body is compressed.

Awareness:

On the spine and abdomen.

Normal breathing.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight with toes vertical on the ground over your head.
- Legs are in one straight line.
- As far as possible, the back remains straight and vertical.
- Shoulders resting on the ground.
- The chin resting against the chest.

Don't:

- Bend the knees.
- Move the neck or overstrain it in chin lock position.
- Move into this asana fast as a lot of stress is put onto the spine.

Benefits:

- Improves the tone and strength of back muscles as the back is folded, as well as the leg muscles and abdominal muscles. It also removes the rigidity of the back muscles.
- Improves the working of the spinal nerves, putting pressure on the nerves in the neck region which are predominantly sympathetic.
- Improves the function of the thyroid, parathyroid and pituitary glands. All of the other endocrine glands are regulated by these main glands and so the overall function of the endocrine system is improved. This results in the improved functioning of all the systems of the body.
- Gives a complete stretch to the spine which increases its elasticity and overall functioning.

- Activates digestion and helps with constipation, improves the efficiency of all the abdominal organs such as the spleen, pancreas, liver and kidneys. The breathing movements of the diaphragm help to massage the abdominal organs.
- Activates the thyroid gland and thymus gland, stimulating metabolism and immunity.
- Can induce states of pratyahara (sense withdrawal).
- These variations increase the stretch on the back and give variety and interest to practicing this pose.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications:

- Asthma
- Cough and cold
- Constipation
- Menstrual disorders

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation, high blood pressure and brain diseases. Should be avoided if suffering from an enlarged thyroid, spleen or liver as well as cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, headache and weak blood vessels in the eyes.

Duration:

Up to one minute in each variation

Variations and tips:

If one does not like have the hands behind the head one can keep the hands supported on the back or on the ground and still move the legs in the different positions.

Preparatory poses:

Sarvangasana
Viparit Karni
Ashwini Mudra
Halasana – normal version

Follow up poses:

Vistrut Pada Halasana
Karnapeedanasana
Matsyasana – to counterbalance the Jalandhar Bandha
Chakrasana

Uttan Pad Kati Chakrasana - Raised Leg Waist Rotating Pose

Uttan – raised

Pad – leg

Kati – waist

Chakra – wheel, rotate



1. From supine position, inhale and raise the legs to uttanpadasana. One can keep the arms in the same position or away from the body.
2. Exhale, rotate the legs in a big circle anti-clockwise (towards the left) with the straight legs. Start inhalation when the legs start moving upwards again on the right side.
3. When the legs are back to the position of uttanpadasana, rotate the legs clockwise (follow the same breathing).
4. When back to uttanpadasana, exhale, and release by bringing the legs to the ground.
5. Make sure the knees are always straight in this asana.

To practice in a stronger way -

1. From supine pose, inhale and raise the legs vertically and acquire the pose of uttanpadasana.
2. Stretch the hands to either side in line with the shoulders. Place the palms down on to the floor.
3. Keeping the legs stretched exhale and bring both legs onto the left hand and rest the legs on the ground.
4. Rotate the legs along the floor, without touching the floor, from the left hand and bring them on the right hand. Rest the legs on the ground.
5. Inhale, raise both the legs from the right side and bring them vertical into uttanpadasana.
7. Rotate in the reverse way.
8. When back to uttanpadasana, exhale and release by bringing the legs to the ground.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, abdomen

Awareness

Keeping the movement slow and steady without strain. Abdominal focus.

Do:

- Keep the legs straight
- Rest with the legs bent whenever needed

Don't:

- Have tension or try to make the circle larger than is comfortable.
- Tighten the face and neck.

Benefits

- This asana strengthens the abdominal muscles and inner organs.
- Removes fat on the abdominal area and thighs.
- Efficiency of the stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys, urinary and reproductive organs

- increases and sluggishness of digestion is reduced.
- Strengthens and improves functioning of the intestines.
 - Improves digestion and helps in constipation
 - Flatulence is relieved.
 - Stimulates and improves functioning of adrenal glands, kidneys, urinary bladder and pancreas.
 - Gives a nice twist to the lower back. Good for blood circulation to this area.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Poor digestion

Precautions and Contra-indications

Those who have weak abdominal muscles, swellings or surgery in the abdominal organs as well as heart problems, high blood pressure and hernia should not practice. Avoid if there is slipped disc, spinal disorders, lower back pain, menstruation or pregnancy.

Duration

3-5 times each direction

Variations and tips

- Keep the arms where they are most comfortable.
- If needed support the lower back by keeping the hands under the buttocks

Preparatory Poses

- All the leg movements
- Uttanpadasana

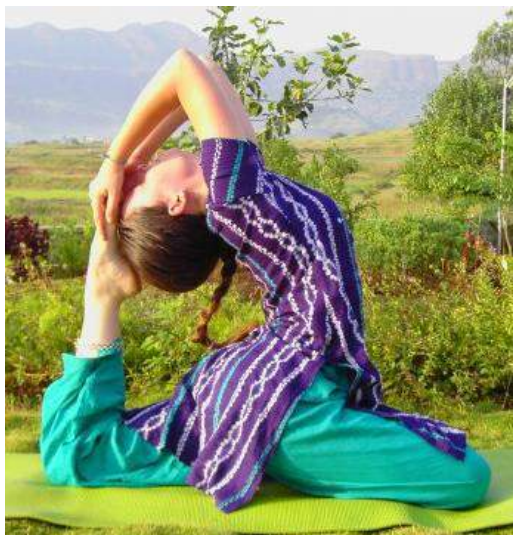
Follow Up Poses

- Pawanmuktasana

Prone

Kapottanasana - Pigeon Pose

Kapot - pigeon



Taking the asana position

From vajrasana slowly bring the left leg back and move the right foot from under the buttock towards the left side. Make sure the body is balanced. The right foot should be near the left hip but not underneath it. Over time you can bring the foot further away from the hip to intensify the stretch. Place both hands on the ground, either side of the body. Slowly arch the spine, pushing the hips downwards and the chest out.

Slowly bend the left leg towards the head, as far as it will comfortably go.

Raise the arms up, bend the elbows and try to hold the foot with the hands.

Slowly bring the foot towards the head and if possible rest the head on the foot. Breathe normally.

The asana position

In this position the body should be balanced and stable. The position of the foot in front of the hip should be as per ones flexibility and comfort and this will maintain stability. The elbows are pointing upwards and the chest is open. The breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Release the hands from the foot and on an exhale slowly straighten the neck and look forward, lowering the leg back down and placing the hands on the ground. From here one can swap the legs over to practice on the other side or come back into vajrasana.

Anatomical focus

Hips, lower back, buttocks, chest

Awareness

Slowly arching the spine, natural breathing

Do

- Only arch back as far as comfortable.
- Take the legs in the most comfortable and stable position

Don't

- Overstretch, either by placement of the foot or arching beyond ones capacity
- Twist the body

Benefits

- Tones the spinal nerves.
- Strengthens and increases the flexibility of the back.
- Stretches the abdomen and pelvic region.
- Opens the pelvic region.
- Opens the hips.
- Opens the chest and improves respiration, posture and rounded shoulders.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive system.

Therapeutic applications

- Reproductive problems
- Asthma

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are spinal problems, abdominal problems, pregnancy, hip pain or back pain. One should be comfortable in the more simple back bends before attempting this asana.

Duration

Hold for up to one minute.

Variations and tips

- If one finds it very comfortable then they can raise the arms over the head instead of holding onto the feet.
- Simple versions of pigeon pose are a good preparation for this position, one should not expect that they have to do the full position immediately.
- For some people new to the pose the back bend is not a problem but the balance and stability can be difficult and catching hold of the foot may be hard. If this is the case then bending the leg and arching back can help one improve and also teach the body where the head and foot should be.

Preparatory Poses

- Simple pigeon variations in the Vajrasana series variations – for back, hips and balance
- Bhujangasana series
- All simpler back bends to improve the back bend
- Leg movements to loosen the hips

Follow Up Poses

- Shashankasana
- Vajra Ardha Yogamudra
- Poorna Bhujangasana

Poorna Bhujangasana (Full Cobra Pose)



Taking the asana position

From saralhasa bhujangasana slowly bend both knees and raise the legs up. Slowly arch the spine a little more and try to touch the head to the feet. Bring the hands a little closer towards the waist if needed to increase the arch.

The asana position

If possible the soles of the feet are completely on the head but only if it is comfortable. The breath should be normal and natural, the body should be steady.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling slowly straighten the neck, lower the chest to the ground and bring the legs back to the floor. Come back to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, thighs.

Awareness

The arch of the back, relaxing the lower back and normal breathing.

Do

- Open the chest; pull the shoulders backwards and downwards.
- Tilt the head back as far as it is comfortable.
- Try to keep the knees together.

Don't

- Overstretch, listen to the body
- Let the shoulders hunch upwards towards the ears.

Benefits

- As per saralhasa bhujangasana but at increased levels.
- Increased stretch into the hips, pelvic region, abdomen and thighs.
- Keeps the spine supple and healthy. By arching the spine blood circulation is increased to that region toning the nerves along the spinal column and improving the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.
- The pressure on the abdomen is also beneficial to the abdominal organs and in particular the digestive organs, it stimulates the appetite, relieves flatulence and constipation.

- In normal day-to-day life we do a lot of forward bending but not much backward bending, therefore it is good to practice for a healthy back.
- Preparation for more advanced backbends.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the ovaries and the uterus and helps to alleviate any gynaecological disorders.

Therapeutic applications

- Back ache
- Gynaecological disorders
- Anorexia
- Flatulence
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should not be practiced by those with back or neck pain, stomach ulcers, hernias, pregnancy or menstruation. It is a strong pose so one should have sufficient practice of the normal cobra poses before practicing this.

Duration

As long as one is comfortable.

Variations and tips

It is not necessary that the feet must touch the head, it can be something to aim for over time. Just bending the knees gives a different effect to the regular cobra pose and is a good preparation for the full position.

Preparatory Poses

Saralhasta Bhujangasana
Bhujangasana series
Chakrasana

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasana
Poorna Ushtrasana

Poorna Dhanurasana (Full Bow Pose)



Taking the asana position

From prone position bend the knees and take a little distance between them. Hold the feet with the hands, ideally hold the big toes between the fingers, to do this the elbows should be pointing upwards. Inhaling, slowly raise the head, neck, shoulders, chest and thighs.

The asana position

In this position the whole body rests on the abdomen. The thighs are raised from the floor along with the head, shoulders and chest. As the weight of the body is on the abdomen there will be a slight rocking movement due to the breath. The elbows face upwards and the feet are raised towards the sky. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

From here you can release on an exhale or do any variation such as bringing the feet to the head, or shoulders, or trying to straighten the arms and legs even more. To release, tilt the head to look forward, release the toes, inhale and while exhaling bring both knees, shoulders and chin slowly to the floor. Bring the hands beside the body. Straighten the bent legs, bring them to the floor and return to the prone position.

Anatomical focus

The stretch on the front side of the body, compression of the spine and stretch into the arms and legs.

Awareness

On the abdomen, back and expansion and contraction of the abdomen

Do's

- Try to balance on the abdomen.
- Keep the knees and thighs off the ground; keeping about 1 foot distance between knees.
- Raise the chest and shoulders off the ground.
- Open the chest and pull the shoulders back.

Don'ts

- Drop the head.

Benefits

- As per dhanurasana but at increased levels.
- Stretches the arms, upper back and chest more in this variation.
- The body weight is balanced on the abdominal muscles and they are given pressure so that the intra-abdominal organs, i.e. stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas and intestines are massaged by the change in pressure. It also improves the secretions of these organs. It improves the peristalsis of the intestine and relieves constipation. The blood flow to the abdominal organs is also improved. Sluggishness of the liver is removed as is dyspepsia. With regular practice it will reduce the fat around the abdomen and thigh areas.
- This asana creates strength in the muscles of the spinal cord and the nerves of the back. It helps to realign the spine. It also strengthens the muscles of the arms and thighs.
- It widens and opens the chest area thereby improving respiration, relieving asthma and bronchitis. It is helpful for breast development and helps to remove hunching of the upper back and shoulders.
- There is an improvement in the circulation of lymph and blood throughout the body especially the arms and legs due to the toning of the muscles.

- Tones the adrenal glands and balances their secretions.
- Massages the kidneys.
- Stimulates the sympathetic nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes
- Incontinence
- Colitis
- Menstrual disorders
- Asthma
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Should be completely avoided if you are suffering from diseases of the backbone. If there is recent abdominal surgery, hernia or ulcer in the stomach this posture should be avoided. Avoid in menstruation and pregnancy. One should be comfortable in dhanurasana before attempting this asana.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- There will be some rocking movement because of the diaphragm movements for breathing.
- Some people find it easier to come into the position if they place their forehead on the floor before raising the body.
- An advanced variation is to have the knees and ankles together.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Dhanurasana
Tiryak Dhanurasana
Dhanurasana – normal
Chakrasana

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasana
Kapottanasana
Poorna Bhujangasana

Sitting

Ardha Bhramacharyasan - Half Celibate's Pose

Ardha – half
Bhramacharya – celibacy



Taking the asana position

From sitting position, move the left foot to the outside of the left arm and with a bent leg move the leg as far up the arm as possible. Squeeze the leg around the arm so it stays there. With both palms on the floor (right palm is outside right thigh), fingers pointing forward raise the body off the floor, keeping the right leg horizontal to the ground. Gaze forward.

The asana position

Here one uses the core muscles to raise the body up. There should be steadiness and stability, along with normal breathing.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and exhaling slowly lower the body back to the floor. Release the leg and bring the legs together. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, back, wrists

Awareness

Maintaining stability, using the core muscles

Do

- Keep focused on a point.
- Make sure the hands are next to the thighs, not the hips.

Don't

- Create tension and overstrain

Benefits

- Strengthens arms and shoulders as well as abdominal, thigh muscles and lower back.
- As the muscles in the perineum are contracted, sexual energy is moved upwards.
- Massage of abdomen.

- Tones pancreas.
- Strengthens wrists and legs.
- Preparation for bhramacharyasan.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic floor muscles

Therapeutic applications

- Diabetes
- Incontinence
- Obesity

Precautions and Contra-indications

Wrist problems, abdominal and back problems.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- It can take time for some to be able to lift the leg off the ground, if needed the leg can be bent to start and then over time straighten the leg.

Preparatory Poses

- Merudandasana
- Ashta Vakrasana

Follow Up Poses

- Brahmacharyasana

Ashta Vakrasan - Eight-Twists Pose

Ashta – eight

Vakra - twist



Taking the asana position

From sitting position wrap the left leg over the left upper arm. The knee should be on top of the upper arm. Raise the right foot and put the right foot over the left ankle. Using the arms and core, pressing the hands down, lift the buttocks off the ground. Bend forward and if possible stretch the legs away. Stretch out the legs and at the same time lean forward to get the balance. The arms should be bent in a 90 degree angle. Raise the head and look forward.

The asana position

In this position the body should be stable, the thighs firmly pressed around the arm and the legs stretched and crossed at the ankles. The chest should be quite low, parallel with the floor so that the bottom can be raised from the ground.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly raise the head, lower the buttocks and legs, releasing the arms and coming back to a sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Core, wrists, upper arms

Awareness

Maintaining balance

Do's

- Keep equal weight on the hands
- Find a point to focus on

Don'ts

- Push and become unstable
- Try to jump forward to lift the buttocks

Benefits

- Strengthens the wrists, arms and legs and also the stomach muscles.
- Energy is directed to manipura chakra.
- Redirects sexual energy.
- Strengthens the nervous system.

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Anxiety
- Stress

Precautions and Contra-indications

Do not practice if you have heart ailments, high blood pressure, back, hip or wrist problems

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- If it is very difficult one can avoid bending so far forward and also keep the legs bent.
- This pose looks harder than it actually is. One just needs to find their point of balance, it one can do merudandasana then one can do this in a short period of time.

Preparatory Poses

- Merudandasana

Follow Up Poses

- Mayurasana

Bakasan - Crane Pose

Baka – white crane



Taking the asana position

From Padmasan, place the palms on the ground in front of the body with the fingers stretched. Using the core muscles slowly lift the padmasan, bending slightly forward and rest the shins on the backs of the arms.

The asana position

In this position one can bend the elbows slightly to maintain the pose. Gaze to the front, focusing on a point. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the padmasan to the floor. Release padmasan and come back to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Core, wrists

Awareness

Maintaining stability.

Do

- Lift as high as is comfortable to go.
- Keep focused on a point.

Don't

- Loose balance or start shaking.

Benefits

- Improves efficiency of the stomach and intestines.
- Strengthens wrists, arms, shoulders, chest muscles and abdominal muscles
- Improves balance, focus and concentration.
- Stimulates nervous system.
- Improves flexibility of hips, ankles and knees.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic floor.

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is heart trouble, hypertension, knee pain, wrist pain, pregnancy or menstruation.

Duration

Hold asana for 10 seconds - 1 minute

Variations and tips

- One should raise as high as is comfortable. For some they can bring the knees right up to the armpits and for others the knees only raise a little from the ground.
- If one cannot sit in padmasan one can use ardha padmasan.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Merudandasan
- Utthit Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

- Padma Mayurasan
- Padma Shirshasan

Brahmacharyasan - Celibate's Pose

Brahmacharya – celibacy



Taking the asana position

From sitting position, place the palms of the hands, fingers facing forwards, on either side of the hips, or slightly further forward. Keep the arms straight and push down into the palms, using the core and lifting the whole body off the floor.

The asana position

In this position all the weight is on the arms. The legs should be horizontal and straight, the gaze on one point and the body stable. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling gently lower the legs back to the ground.

Anatomical focus

Core, wrists

Awareness

On maintaining stability

Do's

- Focus on a point
- Keep the legs straight

Don'ts

- Overstrain and tremble

Benefits

- Strengthens abdominal organs and muscles.
- Moolabandha, ashwini and vajroli/sahajoli mudra are activated, therefore sexual energy is drawn upwards.
- Strengthens the arms and wrists.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the pelvic floor
- Useful for prolapse

Therapeutic applications

- Incontinence
- Prolapse
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are weak wrists, abdominal or lower back problems, menstruation and pregnancy.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Adjust the placement of the hands if needed to lift the body up. Often it is easier if the hands are a little further forward.
- If it is too difficult aim at lifting the legs slightly bent, over time one can straighten them.

Preparatory Poses

- Ardha Bhramacharyasan
- Merudandasan
- Bakasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shavasan

Dwi Hasta Bhujasan - Two Hands Pose

Dwi – two

Hasta – arm

Bhuj – complete arm



Taking the asana position

Come into a squat from sitting position. The feet should be a little more than hip width apart. Place the hands between the feet with the hands firmly on the ground and the fingers spread. Transfer the weight onto the arms, especially the right side and wrap the left leg around the outside of the left upper arm. The thigh should be resting on the upper arm. Transfer the weight equally onto both arms and slowly raise the right leg, wrapping it over the right upper arm.

The asana position

In this position both feet are off the ground and the legs remain bent. One can advance in this pose by straightening the legs in front. Keep the gaze forward and fixed on a point. Breathe normally. All the weight remains on the hands and arms.

Releasing the asana position

To release bend the legs if they are straight and slowly lower one foot back down at a time, coming back into a squat and then back to sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Core, arms

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Focus on a point

Don'ts

- Straighten the legs if stability is not there
- Overstrain

Benefits

- Arm muscles strengthened.
- Increases flexibility in shoulders and back.
- Massage of abdomen.
- Tones pancreas.
- Strengthens wrists and legs.

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic floor

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are wrist, abdominal or back problems.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Straighten the legs only if one is stable and has enough flexibility in the hamstrings.

Preparatory Poses

- Merudandasan
- Ardha Bhramacharyasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shashankasan
- Bhramacharyasan

Dwi Pad Shirasan - Two Feet to Head Pose (supine)

Dwi – two
Pad – leg
Shir - head



Taking the asana position

From sitting position, bend the left leg, and with the help of both hands and the left upper arm place the foot behind the head. One may need to bend the head slightly forward to get the foot in position. From here very carefully place the other foot behind the head, maintaining balance. Place the hands in namaskar if possible; otherwise use the hands as a support. Gaze forward.

The asana position

In this pose the feet are behind the head and the head is slightly forward. One should try to avoid a strong compression of the neck. There will be a slight hunch of the back in this pose. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

With the help of the hands, slowly take one foot from behind the head and place it back on the ground. Slowly do the same with the other leg. Relax.

Anatomical focus

Hips, hamstrings

Awareness

Pelvic region, abdominal compression

Do's

- Use support of the hands to get into the position
- Try to relax as much as possible in the pose

Don'ts

- Force the foot behind the head, one should always be comfortable

Benefits

- Both sides of the abdomen are compressed, peristalsis stimulated and constipation removed.
- Useful for disorders of the reproductive system, digestive system and excretory system. Strengthens respiratory system.
- Strengthens lower back and neck muscles.
- Improves blood circulation in the legs, good for knees and varicose veins.
- Improves blood circulation of all muscles and joints.
- Brings vitality to the body and mind
- Haemoglobin content can be improved.
- Helps to control the nervous system.
- Reproductive organs toned and strengthened.
- Adrenal glands are massaged.

Benefits for Women

- Tones pelvic floor and reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Anxiety
- Reproductive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is slipped disc, sciatica, hernia or back pain. This asana should not be practiced unless proficiency in ek pad shirasana is gained as there is a possibility of strained muscles and torn ligaments.

Duration

Hold asana for 5- 30 seconds.

Variations and tips

This asana can be done from sitting or supine but supine is easier to start. One can also practice it from halasana.

Preparatory Poses

- Ek Pad Shirasan
- Paschimottanasan
- Halasan

Follow Up Poses

- Shivasan

- Utthit Dwi Pad Shirasan
- Omkarasan

Ek Pad Shirasan - One Foot to Head Pose



Taking the asana position

From sitting position, bend the left leg, and with the help of both hands and the left upper arm place the foot behind the head. One may need to bend the head slightly forward to get the foot in position. Place the hands in namaskar and gaze forward.

The asana position

In this pose the foot is behind the head and the head is slightly forward. One should try to avoid a strong compression of the neck. There will be a slight hunch of the back in this pose. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

With the help of the hands, if needed, slowly take the foot from behind the head and place it back on the ground. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Hips, hamstrings

Awareness

Pelvic region, abdominal compression

Do's

- Use support of the hands and arm to get into the position

Don'ts

- Force the foot behind the head, one should always be comfortable

Benefits

- Massages internal organs. Good for constipation.
- Blood circulation increased to the hip and leg.
- Increases flexibility of hips, stretches legs and opens pelvic region.

Benefits for Women

- Good for reproductive organs.

Therapeutic applications

- Varicose veins
- Reproductive problems
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is sciatica, hip problems or hernia.

Duration

Hold for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- If one cannot place the foot behind the head then holding the foot as close as possible will help prepare for the complete pose.

Preparatory Poses

- Aakarna Dhanurasan
- Rocking the baby movement
- Paschimottanasan

Follow Up Poses

- Dwi Pad Shirasan

Garbhasan - Womb Pose

Garbha - foetus



Taking the asana position

Sit in padmasana. Insert the hands between the calves and thighs. Raise the knees, balancing on the buttocks and bend the arms so that the calves are on the upper arms. Hold onto the ears.

The asana position

In this pose the body is balancing on the buttocks. There is a slight roundness of the back and the gaze is focused on a point. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling bring the hands back to the ground, slowly taking the hands out from between the calf and thigh. Lower the knees to the ground, coming back into regular padmasan. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Hips, abdomen

Awareness

Abdominal compression, on maintaining balance

Do's

- Focus on a point
- Maintain balance

Don'ts

- Avoid overstretching the knees

Benefits

- Creates stability of mind and emotions.
- Good for abdominal organs and digestive system.
- Pressure on kidneys and adrenal glands.
- Improves concentration.
- Improves padmasan

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Constipation

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is hip, knee or ankle pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

This can also be practiced while lying down.

For some people it is easier to place one hand between the thigh and calf before bending the leg into padmasan and then the other leg.

For some people it can be difficult to get the hands through the legs. The type of clothes will have an effect and also the flexibility. One can prepare by trying to put one arm through instead of two.

Slowly the body will become used to it.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements

Follow Up Poses

- Kukkutasan

Gupta Padmasan - Hidden Lotus Pose

Gupta – hidden
Padma - lotus



Taking the asana position

From padmasan slowly lean forward, coming on to the knees, from there come on to the ground, using the hands as a support. Place the chin on the floor. Take both arms and wrap them behind the back with the palms together in namaskar position.

The asana position

In this position one tries to press the pelvis towards the ground as much as possible. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Release the namaskar position, placing the hands next to the chest. Slowly push the hands, lifting the body up and back into a sitting padmasan position. Release the legs and repeat with opposite legs in padmasan.

Anatomical focus

Hips, pelvis, ankles, knees

Awareness

Gently pressing the pelvic, relaxing the body

Do's

- Press down with the pelvis only as much as is comfortable.
- Close the eyes and focus on relaxation.

Don'ts

- Strain the body and push oneself into padmasan if the body is not ready.

Benefits

- Opening of the hips and shoulders, as well as straightening of the spine.
- Creates peace in the mind.
- Soothing and calming.
- Introverting
- Good preparation for holding padmasan for longer periods of time and for other asanas in padmasan.

Benefits for Women

- Opens pelvic region
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is any knee, shoulder, hip or ankle pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- One can practice this pose in ardha padmasan or swastikasan also.
- To increase the relaxation aspect one can turn the head and rest it on the side with the arms relaxed next to the body.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

- Padma Bhujangasan
- Padma Mayurasan

Kashyapasan - Rishi Kashyap Pose



Taking the asana position

Come into sitting position and then plank pose. Roll the body to the left side into a side plank. Keep the body straight and balanced with the left hand on the ground. Bend the right leg and place the right foot on top of the left thigh with the sole of the foot facing up, like in padmasan. Wrap the right arm behind the body and grab the right big toe.

The asana position

Keep the chest open and the lower leg straight. Maintain balance and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly release the right big toe, straightening the leg back into side plank. Move back into plank and repeat on the right side.

Anatomical focus

Pelvic region

Awareness

Maintaining balance

Do's

- Keep the chest open
- Focus on a point

Don'ts

- Drop the hips
- Loose balance

Benefits

- Deep muscular massage to the abdominal organs.
- Tones the digestive organs.
- Increases appetite, relieves constipation.
- Sense of balance and concentration is developed.
- Disorders of the large intestine are alleviated.
- Manipura chakra and Samana Vayu is activated.
- Relieves pain and stiffness in the sacral region.
- Strengthens and improves blood circulation of toes, ankles, calf muscles, knees, pelvic joints, wrists, shoulders, thighs, lower back.
- Reduces fat around hips and waist.
- Balances endocrine glands

Benefits for Women

- Balances reproductive system
- Opens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is heart disease, high blood pressure, wrist, knee or ankle pain.

Duration

Hold asana for 5- 25 seconds

Variations and tips

Another way to come into the pose is to place the foot on the thigh first, in standing and then lower the body down to the side.

If one cannot bring the foot onto the thigh in the position of ardha padmasan then a simple variation is to have the sole of the foot on the outer thigh.

If one cannot reach the big toe one can stretch the arm behind the back as much as is possible and keep it at that point or raise the arm vertical.

Preparatory Poses

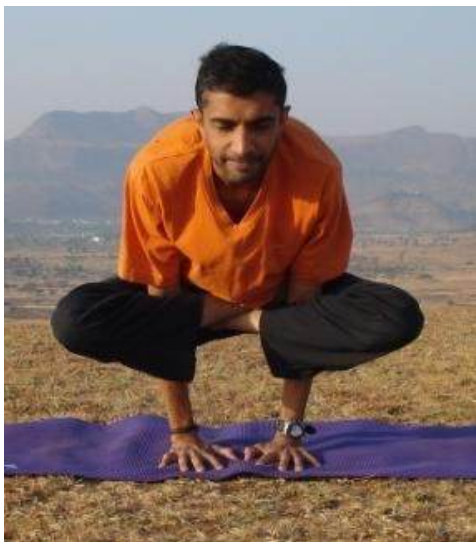
- Padmasan
- Side Plank
- Ardha Padma Bandhasan
- Vashishtasan

Follow Up Poses

- Vatayanasan

Kukkutasan - Cockerel Pose

Kukkut - cockerel



Taking the asana position

Sit in padmasan. Insert the hands between the calves and thighs up to the elbow. Place the palms on the floor, hands facing forward, fingertips spread. Activate all fingers as well as the palm of the hands and using the core muscles raise the body off the floor.

The asana position

In this position the padmasan is lifted as high as is comfortable. There is a slight forward bend and the core muscles are in use. Keep focused on a point and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale and while exhaling slowly lower the padmasan back to the floor. Release the arms and come back into the regular padmasan position. One can repeat it by swapping the legs over in padmasan.

Anatomical focus

Core, wrists, pelvic region

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Focus on a point
- Maintain balance

Don'ts

- Try to lift the padmasan too high, causing instability and trembling

Benefits

- Strengthens the arms, wrists, shoulders and abdomen.
- Loosens the hips, knees and ankles.
- Stimulates chakra awakening
- Balances nadis.
- Strengthens pelvic region
- Balances nervous system

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic floor
- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Incontinence
- Stress
- Anxiety

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are heart problems, high blood pressure, hernia, back, ankle, knee, hip or wrist pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as it is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- Only raise as high as is comfortable.
- If one cannot get both arms through the padmasan then one can lift with one hand through and the other hand by the side.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Garbhasan

Follow Up Poses

- Padmasan Yoga Mudra 1 and 2

Malasan - Garland Pose



Taking the asana position

From sitting position bend the legs and come into a squatting pose. The feet should be on the ground and together. Slightly lean forward and wrap the shins, trying to clasp the fingers together.

The asana position

Breathe normally and maintain stability.

Releasing the asana position

Release the arms, straightening the back and coming back into a sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Hips, pelvis, arms

Awareness

Maintaining stability

Do's

- Try to have the soles of the feet on the ground
- Reach the arms behind as far as possible

Don'ts

- Overstretch

Benefits

- Muscles of the arms are strengthened increases flexibility of the shoulders.
- Helps to remove pain in the waist and hip joints.
- Strengthens the abdominal organs, improves their health.
- Strengthens the back.
- Useful for opening the pelvis.
- Increases blood circulation and elasticity of fingers, wrists, ankles, shoulder, forearms.
- Increases flexibility of legs and ankles.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Reproductive problems
- Leg cramps

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is are any abdominal problems, pregnancy, back, hip, knee, ankle or shoulder pain.

Duration

Hold asana for 5- 30 seconds

Variations and tips

One can grip the ankles instead of clasping the fingers.

If it is difficult to squat fully one can keep the heels on a rolled up mat.

Preparatory Poses

- Namaskarasan
- Vayu Nishkasan

Follow Up Poses

- Vatayanasan

Mayurasan - Peacock Pose

Mayur – peacock



Taking the asana position

From Hansasan, maintaining the weight firmly on the palms, bring the shoulders and face slightly downwards and slide the torso forward, raising the toes above the ground.

The asana position

Try to keep the body horizontal and then elevate the legs higher if possible. Gaze forward. In the final position the weight of the body is on the elbows and the wrists. The elbows are placed between the navel and ribs. The upper back will be slightly hunched. The breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly bring the knees and toes back onto the ground. Lift the torso up, straightening the arms and bring the legs next to the arms, coming back into the sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, wrists, elbows

Awareness

Maintaining balance, the strong compression of the upper abdomen

Do's

- Slide the body forward
- Maintain a slight hunch so that the elbows will be between the navel and ribs.
- Keep the elbows bent to 90 degrees so that the body is balanced on the elbows
- Focus on a point

Don'ts

- Try to kick the legs upward
- Jump forward
- Push oneself into the pose

Benefits

- Metabolic process is stimulated, all the digestive organs are massaged and digestion is improved due to increased blood supply.
- Increases blood circulation in the body. Useful for skin diseases.
- Useful for flatulence, constipation, diabetes, sluggishness of the liver, kidneys and spleen.
- Endocrine system is balanced.
- Stimulates elimination of toxins from the blood and stomach.
- Strengthens hands, wrists and elbows.
- Improves concentration.
- All muscles of the body are strengthened.
- The three doshas are balanced.
- Activates manipura chakra and increases the energy level.

Benefits for Women

- Balances endocrine system

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are weak wrists, weak abdomen, back pain, recent surgical operations, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcer, physical weakness, pregnancy, menstruation or hernia. Do not practice if there is swelling on pancreas, intestines or liver. Do not practice shirshasan or sarvangasan after this asana as mayurasan stimulates the impure blood circulation.

Duration

Hold asana for 5 – 30 seconds

Variations and tips

- For some people keeping the head on the ground to start with can help one to lift the legs. Over time one can also raise the head.
- Using a cushion under the head may be helpful and can also help remove the fear of falling.

Preparatory Poses

- Hansasan
- Padma Mayurasan

Follow Up Poses

- Vajrasan
- Shashankasan

Padma Bhugangasan - Lotus Cobra Pose

Padma – lotus
Bhujanga - cobra



Taking the asana position

From Padmasan lean forward and come on to the knees, using the hands as a support and slowly lower the body onto the ground in prone position. Place the hands next to the chest and forehead on the ground. Exhale and while inhaling raise the head and lift the upper body upwards, trying to press the pelvis downward as much as possible. Try to straighten the arms and press the palms on the floor. Tilt the head back.

The asana position

One is trying to press the pelvis down gently to get a stretch into the pelvic region. If one cannot straighten the arms completely then they can be slightly bent but this will increase pressure on the lower back. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Lift the hips upward, pressing on the palms and slowly come back into padmasan in a sitting position. Swap the legs over and repeat the asana.

Anatomical focus

Back, pelvis, hips

Awareness

Gentle pressure on the pelvis, arching the back

Do's

- Press the pelvic down comfortably
- Relax the shoulders
- Tilt the head as far back as is comfortable

Don'ts

- Overstrain by pushing the pelvis or trying to arch the back too much
- Hunch the back

Benefits

- Pressure on the abdomen stimulates digestive organs.
- Maintains and increases flexibility of the back.
- Good for opening of the hips.
- Opens pelvic region.
- Improves padmasan and flexibility in knees and ankles.

Benefits for Women

- Tones reproductive organs

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is hip, knee, ankle or back pain, abdominal surgery, menstruation, pregnancy, hernia or ulcer.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

If it is difficult then keep the forearms on the ground for less of an arch.
One can also sit in ardha padmasan or swastikasan.

Preparatory Poses

- Padmasan
- Saralhasta Bhujangasan
- Padmasan Preparatory Movements
- Gupta Padmasan

Follow Up Poses

- Padma Mayurasan

Padma Mayurasan - Lotus in Peacock Pose

Padma – lotus
Mayur – peacock



Taking the asana position

From padmasan, shift your body weight forward, coming onto the knees and using the hands as a support. Place the palms to the front, fingers are pointing towards the body and wrists to the front. There should be a few inches distance between the wrists. elbows Make sure the fingers are spread apart. Bend the elbows towards the body and hunch the back so that the elbows put pressure in the area between the ribs and navel. The arms should be at 90 degree angles. Shift the weight of the body onto the arms slowly by shifting the shoulders and head forward. Raise the legs in padmasan slowly.

The asana position

Try to keep the body horizontal and then raise the padmasan higher if possible. Gaze forward. In the final position the weight of the body is on the elbows and the wrists. The elbows are placed between the navel and ribs. The upper back will be slightly hunched. The breath should be normal.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly bring the knees and back onto the ground. Lift the torso up, straightening the arms and come back into the padmasan sitting position.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen, wrists, elbows, pelvis

Awareness

Maintaining balance, the strong compression of the upper abdomen

Do's

- Slide the body forward
- Maintain a slight hunch so that the elbows will be between the navel and ribs.
- Keep the elbows bent to 90 degrees so that the body is balanced on the elbows
- Focus on a point

Don'ts

- Jump forward
- Push oneself into the pose

Benefits

- Balancing is easier in this pose than the full peacock.
- Metabolic process is stimulated, all the digestive organs are massaged and digestion is improved due to increased blood supply.
- Increases blood circulation in the body. Useful for skin diseases.
- Useful for flatulence, constipation, diabetes, sluggishness of the liver, kidneys and spleen.
- Endocrine system is balanced.
- Stimulates elimination of toxins from the blood and stomach.
- Strengthens hands, wrists and elbows.
- Improves concentration.
- All muscles of the body are strengthened.
- The three doshas are balanced.
- Activates manipura chakra and increases the energy level.
- Balancing is easier.
- Stretches the hips, knees and ankles.

Benefits for Women

- Balances endocrine system
- Opens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Digestive problems
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there are weak wrists, weak abdomen, back pain, recent surgical operations, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcer, physical weakness, pregnancy, menstruation or hernia. Do not practice if there is swelling on the pancreas, intestines or liver. Do not practice shirshasan or sarvangasan after this asana as this asana stimulates the impure blood circulation. Avoid if there is hip, knee or ankle pain.

Duration

Hold asana for 5 – 30 seconds

Variations and tips

- For some people keeping the head on the ground to start with can help one to lift the padmasan. Over time one can also raise the head.
- Using a cushion under the head may be helpful and can also help remove the fear of falling.
- If one cannot sit in padmasan they can do ardha padmasan or bhadrasan.

Preparatory Poses

- Hansasan
- Gupta Padmasan
- Padma Bhujangasan

Follow Up Poses

- Mayurasan
- Padmasan Yoga Mudra 1 and 2

Parighasan - Circle Pose

Parigha - perimeter



Taking the asana position

From Vajrasana come on the knees. Bring the left leg to the left side with the left leg straight. Point the toes to the left side. Inhale and raise both the arms from the sides till they are parallel from the floor with the palms turned upwards. Exhaling start bending on the left and place the back of the left hand onto the left foot and slowly bring the right hand over the head towards the left side. Right arm forearm should be near the ear. If possible place the palms of the hands together on the left foot but remember not to bend forward to accomplish this.

The asana position

There is a strong stretch on the side of the body as well as the inner thigh. One should keep the chest open and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Inhale raising the body upward and bringing the arms parallel to the floor. Exhale lowering the arms. Come back onto the knees and repeat on the right side.

Anatomical focus

Waist, inner thigh

Awareness

Maintaining balance and not bending forward

Do's

- Stretch as much as possible to the side, maintaining comfort
- Keep the leg that is outstretched straight.

Don'ts

- Hunch or bend forward
- Loose balance

Benefits

- Good lateral stretch to the pelvic region and trunk.
- Massages the abdominal muscles and organs.
- Prevents the skin around the abdomen from sagging.
- Reduces fat around abdomen and waist.
- Improves digestion.
- Relieves stiffness in the back.
- Increases flexibility of spinal cord.
- Improves health of pelvic region and back.
- Relieves back pain.
- Tones kidneys and adrenals
- Strengthens shoulders and forearms.

Benefits for Women

- An easy variation is good during pregnancy due to the pelvic opening effect and nice side stretch.

Therapeutic applications

- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Digestive problems
- Mild back pain

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is any pain in the intercostal muscles or knees

Duration

Hold asana for 15 to 45 seconds.

Variations and tips

- Instead of stretching the other arm over the head one can keep the arm bent and hand on the waist.
- One doesn't have to have the palms together, which is the full version, one can keep distance between the palms and as flexibility improves one can bring the hands closer.

Preparatory Poses

- Ardha Chandrasan
- Preparatory Movement 5
- Tiryak Tadasan
- Titaliasan

Follow Up Poses

- Ushtrasan
- Shashankasan

Poorna Matsyendrasan - Full Spinal Twist Pose

Poorna – Full

Matsyendra – Famous Rishi

This was the favourite meditation pose of the Rishi Matsyendranath.



Taking the asana position:

From sitting position bend the right leg and place the back of the foot on top of the left thigh, as if one is going to sit in padmasan. Bend the left leg and place the left foot on the ground over the right knee. Bring the right hand over the left leg and grab the big toe of the left foot. Inhale and exhaling twist the trunk of the body as much as possible, turning the neck so the gaze is over the left shoulder and encircle the waist with the left hand with the palm facing outwards. Continue to maintain the asana, breathing normally.

The asana position:

In this position there is a strong twist on the spine and abdomen. The right arm is pressed against the left knee and the left arm is wrapped behind the back, leading to an increased twist on the body. The chest is open and the spine is erect. One side of the abdomen is compressed and the other side is stretched. There is a strong pressure of the right foot against the abdomen. The left knee should be close to the right armpit.

Releasing the asana position:

Inhale and exhaling turn the neck back to face the front. Release the hands and place them beside the body. Release the left leg, straightening it and release the right foot from the left thigh, straightening the leg. Practice the same on the opposite side.

Anatomical focus:

The spine, hips, chest and arms.

Awareness:

The twist on the spine and relaxed breathing.

Do:

- With the right hand, hold the left big toe from the left of the left knee. If it is difficult to hold the toe then one can hold the ankle or raise the toes keeping the heel on the ground.
- Encircle the lower back with the left arm, palm facing outwards.

- Turn to the left side in the spine; turn the shoulders and head to the left.
- Try to keep both of the buttocks firmly on the ground.
- Only twist as far as you can and keep your back and neck straight.

Don't:

- Lift either of the buttocks off the ground or sit on the heel.
- Let the back or neck bend.
- Overstrain the knees and hips.
- Lift the left sole of the foot from the floor.

Benefits:

- The benefits are the same as ardha matsyendrasan but at a higher level. There is also an addition of the strong compression of the foot against the abdomen.
- Increases the elasticity of the spine, tones the spinal nerves and improves the functioning of the spinal cord.
- Stretches the muscles on one side of the body whilst compressing the muscles on the other side.
- Relieves back pain and stiffness from between the vertebrae.
- Useful for slipped disc.
- Massages the abdominal organs and increases the digestive juices making it useful for loss of appetite and constipation.
- Useful for diabetics, with concentration on the pancreas.
- Regulates the secretion of bile and adrenaline.
- Relieves tension that may have built up in the back from forward and back bending asanas.
- Opens the chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs.
- Loosens the hip joints, relieving stiffness.
- Releases tension in the arms, shoulders, upper back and neck.
- Increases purification of the blood as well as the internal organs.
- Improves round shoulders.

Benefits for Women:

- Increases the circulation to the pelvic region and therefore providing fresh blood, nutrients and oxygen, improving the health of the reproductive organs as well as the urinary system.
- Useful for preventing urinary tract disorders.
- Beneficial for menstrual disorders.

Therapeutic applications:

- Diabetes
- Constipation
- Anorexia
- Cervical Spondylitis
- Urinary tract disorders
- Menstrual disorders
- Indigestion

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Should be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation due to the strong twist in the abdomen. Care should be taken for those with peptic ulcer or hernia. Those with severe spinal problems should avoid and those with mild slipped disc can benefit but in severe cases it should be avoided. Avoid if there is any hip, knee or ankle pain.

Duration:

Hold asana for 10 – 30 seconds

Variations and tips:

- If it is difficult to hold the foot or remain in the position there are some other variations that can be used to begin with.
- Instead of holding the left foot with the right hand the feet can be raised, closer to the hands.
- Instead of holding the toes the right arm can be bent with the hand pressed against the left shoulder or the left knee can be held by both the arms.
- If it is difficult to balance the left hand can be placed close to the body with the palm on the ground supporting the torso instead of wrapping it behind the back.
- If one wants to get more stretch between the shoulder blades then one can wrap the right arm under the left leg and behind the body, clasping the left hand.
- Note that this is a very advanced pose. One should be very comfortable in the full position (holding the foot) in ardha Matsyendrasan as well as padmasan before attempting this position.

Preparatory poses:

Padmasan

Padmasan Preparatory Movements

Ardha Matsyendrasan

Follow up poses:

Shavasan

Parshwa Merudandasan - Side Crow

Parshwa - side

**Taking the asana position**

From the sitting position come into a squatting position. Twist the body towards the right and place the palm of the right hand on the side of the left thigh, at about the middle and the left hand further back so that the distance between the palms is a little wider than shoulder width. Fingers are spread apart. Raise your heels so that the middle of the left thigh touches the right upper arm. Shift the weight partially onto the left arm, if one can reach, as you slowly lift the feet off the floor, shifting forward, not down. Stretch out your legs and gaze forward.

The asana position

All the weight is being placed on the arms and hands in this pose. One should remain focused on a point with the breath normal. If difficult then one can keep the legs bent.

Releasing the asana position

Bend the knees and slowly lower the toes back down to the ground. Come back into a squatting position and repeat from the other side.

Anatomical focus

Core, wrists, arms

Awareness

Maintaining balance, finding ones centre of gravity

Do's

- Keep awareness of the palms and fingers
- Find a point to focus on
- Move forwards not down to lift the legs up

Don'ts

- Try to jump into the pose
- Straighten the legs if the stability is not there.

Benefits

- Similar benefits to merudandasan
- Balances the nervous system.
- Great for strengthening of the arms and wrists.
- Good for concentration.
- Strengthens the core muscles.

Benefits for Women

- Increased pressure on lower abdomen

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, abdominal surgery, pregnancy, menstruation, wrist or back pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult try to lift one foot up first and then, over time, the other.

Preparatory Poses

- Merudandasan

Follow Up Poses

Ashtavakrasan

Ek Pad Merudandasan

Vashishthasan - Rishi Vashishtha Pose

Rishi Vashishtha was a great yoga master



Taking the asana position

From sitting position come into the cat pose and then the plank pose. Roll the body onto the left. Keep the body straight and maintain balance in this position. Raise the right hand and balance on the left side. The right foot should rest on top of the left foot. This is Santolanasan. Bend the right leg and grab the right toe with the right hand. Slowly straighten the right leg vertically up with the right hand. Gaze on the right toe or forward.

The asana position

In the full position the body is not tilting forward or backwards. The chest is open and the body is stable. There should be a straight line from the left shoulder to the left foot and the hip should not fall downwards.

Releasing the asana position

Slowly bend the right leg, releasing the toe and coming back into side plank. From here come back to plank and then move to side plank on the right side and repeat.

Anatomical focus

Core, pelvis, hips, hamstrings

Awareness

Maintaining balance

Do's

- Straighten the leg being held
- Keep the chest open
- Find a point to focus on

Don'ts

- Lift the leg if side plank is not stable
- Try to hold the toes if one cannot hold the toes normally in anantasan
- Overstretch

Benefits

- Improves the nervous system and balancing ability.
- Increases the concentration and confidence.
- Stimulates endocrine glands.
- Strengthens the muscles of legs, arms, shoulders and spine
- Tones the pelvic region, lower back and coccyx region of the spine
- Leg muscles become supple.

Benefits for Women

- Opens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Bulleted list

Precautions and Contra-indications

Weak wrists and forearms, shoulders, lower back, heart trouble, high BP.

Duration

Hold asana for 5- 30 seconds or as long as is comfortable

Variations and tips

- One can come into plank pose from prone or standing position instead.
- If difficult one can hold the ankle instead of the toe.
- If the full position is too hard one can practice santolanasan or side plank.

Preparatory Poses

Anantasan Type 3

Plank

Side Plank

Santolanasan

Follow Up Poses

Kashyapasan

Standing

Ardha Padma Bandhasan - Half Lotus Tied Forward Bend

Ardha – half

Padma – lotus

Bandha – tied, lock



Taking the asana position

From standing pose raise the left leg and place the left foot on the right thigh with the back of the foot on the top of the thigh. Wrap the left hand from behind the back and grab the left toe. Bend forward and place the right hand on the floor near the right foot. Rest the forehead on the right knee.

The asana position

In this pose one needs to maintain balance and breathe normally. There is a compression of the foot against the lower abdomen and a slight twist inward. One should reach as far forward as is comfortable to go and if needed keep focused on a point.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and inhaling slowly raise the body up. One can lift the straight arm up also if preferred and can balance. Release the toe and straighten the bent leg. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Hip, pelvis, lower abdomen, hamstrings, lower back

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Try to bend from the hips to avoid hunching the back
- Try to hold the toe firmly
- Slightly twist inward and forward to grab the toe
- Find a point to focus on if balance is a problem

Don'ts

- Push oneself and lose balance
- Try to force and cause a hunch
- Bend the legs to touch the hand to the ground

Benefits

- Abdominal organs are contracted and digestive power increased. Intestines, urinary bladder, uterus and reproductive glands are massaged and stimulated.
- Good for constipation.
- Partial inversion strengthens heart and lungs.
- Can help with stiffness in the ankles, calf muscles and knees, strengthening them.
- Improves intestinal peristalsis.
- Prepare legs and hips for meditative poses.
- Stimulates spinal nerves and endocrine glands.

Benefits for Women

- Helps balance reproductive system
- Opens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Digestive problems

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is sciatica, slipped disc, back, hip, ankle or knee pain, hernia or high blood pressure.

Duration

Hold asana for 10 - 30 seconds

Variations and tips

- If it is difficult to hold the toe from behind or balance is a problem one can place both hands on the ground.
- One can also keep the arm behind the back and outstretched towards the toes as much as possible.

Preparatory Poses

Ardha Padma Bandhasana in sitting

Padmasana

Padmasana Preparatory Movements

Paschimottasana

Follow Up Poses

Vatyanasana

Bhunamanasan - Earth Worship Pose

Bhu – earth

Naman – namaskar, salute



Taking the asana position

From standing position raise the left leg and place it to the left at the maximum distance possible. Turn the left toes to the left. Keep the right leg straight and toes facing slightly inwards. Join the hands in namaskar position behind the back. Bend the left leg to 90 degrees if possible. Bend from the waist, lower the head down and place the forehead on the floor near the left toe.

The asana position

One should keep the right leg straight. There will be a slight hunch in the upper back but it should not be too much. There is a strong stretch on the inner thigh and if possible one can relax with the forehead on the ground. The breath should be natural.

Releasing the asana position

Exhale and inhaling slowly raise the upper body upward. Release the Namaskar and slowly straighten the left leg. Repeat on the right side.

Anatomical focus

Lower back, pelvis, hips, inner thigh

Awareness

Maintain balance, letting go and releasing to the earth

Do's

- Bend from the waist
- Maintain balance as one bends forward
- Bend the knee up to 90 degrees

Don'ts

- Overhunch the back
- Overstrain causing one to lose balance
- Let the bent leg knee go over the ankle

Benefits

- Pelvic nerves, pelvic muscles and hamstring muscles are stretched.
- Knee joint is strengthened, improves blood circulation of legs.
- Lateral stretch to the spine
- Appetite stimulated

- Nervous system is stimulated.
- Loosens the shoulders
- Helps remove constipation and digestive problems
- Removes excess weight around the waist.
- Self-confidence and concentration increases.
- Improves functioning of reproductive system– male and female.
- Cultivates humility.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Opens the pelvic region
- Helps one to reconnect with mother nature, ones feminine side

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Reproductive problems
- Obesity
- Stress
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is heart diseases, high blood pressure, slipped disc, sciatica, sacral infection, back, hip or knee pain.

Duration

Hold the asana for 20 seconds to one minute.

Variations and tips

If one can't place the head on the ground with the arms behind then the hands can be placed on the floor.

One can also hold the elbows behind instead of having the hands in namaskar.

Preparatory Poses

Trikonasan

Ek Pad Hastasan

Ugrasan

Veerabhadrasan

Follow Up Poses

Parivarta Trikonasan

Chakrasan - Wheel Pose from standing

Chakra – Wheel



Taking the asana position:

In standing pose take hip width distance between the legs and bend slowly backwards. Bend the knees first, then the lower back and finally the upper back. Place the hands on the ground in chakrasan.

The asana position:

The whole back is in a backward arching position. There should be no tension in between the shoulder blades and in the neck region. The weight of the body is distributed evenly on the feet and palms. You can do so by shifting the body (not the palms or feet) back and forth to find a balance in the weight distributed. The neck should be in a relaxed position. Do not turn the head to either side as this might put unnecessary tension in the neck and shoulders. The facial muscles should be relaxed. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position:

One can release the pose in two ways.

The easiest is to come back to supine position - Inhale and while exhaling bend at the elbows and knees. Slowly lower the head, shoulders, waist and buttocks onto the ground. Rest the back entirely on the ground. Bring both the palms away from the shoulders and have the arms down by the side of the body. Straighten out the legs and come back into supine position.

Back to standing – contract the buttocks, lower back and abdomen and slowly lift the upper body upwards, lifting the palms off the ground and coming back into the standing position.

Anatomical focus:

Spinal column and the muscles attached to the vertebrae, muscles on the upper part of the abdomen, thighs, calves

Awareness:

Maintain slow and rhythmic breathing throughout the whole process of staying in the pose. On the openness felt at the front part of the body, especially the chest and front thigh region. The deep arch in the spinal column.

Do:

- Keep the breathing slow and rhythmic
- Keep the shoulder blades and neck region relaxed and comfortable
- Keep the facial muscles soft and relaxed
- Keep the arms and knees straight
- Keep some distance between the feet for better support and balance while in the pose
- Respect and find acceptance with the body, by not pushing yourself into the pose.

Don't:

- Exert excessive force, which may cause undue strain onto the arms while lifting the body up into the position.
- Force yourself into getting the arch in the spine
- Strain and tense up the body while moving into the pose and/or while doing the pose.

Benefits:

- The entire front part of the body is being stretch entirely, which is good for people who are introverts as the openness in the heart may work on their heart chakra.
- Due to the stretch at the upper part of the abdomen muscles, it gives some pressure on the internal organs of the abdomen and therefore, increasing their efficiency.
- The muscles on the front part of the thighs are stretch and the calves are strengthening while doing and holding the pose. This will also help to strengthen the leg muscles.
- This pose is extremely beneficial for those who sit long hours in front of the desk or computer as they usually hunch over the desk all day long. The backward bend in the pose will relieves tension or stress from the body and help in decreasing the ailments arising out of it.
- This pose will also help in toning and strengthening the entire back muscles.
- Beneficial to nervous, digestive and respiratory systems.
- Improves cardio-vascular co-ordination.
- Stimulates all glands and influences the hormonal secretions.
- Removes sluggishness, improves self- confidence and concentration.
- Beneficial for kidneys, urinary bladder, uterus, indigestion, constipation.
- Improve strength of wrists, arms, thighs and calf muscles.
- Stretches and massages vocal cords.

Benefits for Women:

- Tones reproductive system
- Creates lightness

Therapeutic applications:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Depression
- Indigestion
- Asthma

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is any back pain, heart trouble, high blood pressure, hernia, weak wrists, menstruation, pregnancy or abdominal surgery. One should be able to practice chakrasan from supine with ease before attempting this.

Duration:

Hold asana for 10-60 seconds

Variations and tips:

To relieve tension felt in the lower back, one can try to lift the heels of the feet off the ground and thus, balancing on the toes and palms.

Do not focus on arching the spine, instead focus on maintaining steadiness and comfort in the pose. Letting go of perception on how the ideal pose should look like.

Preparatory poses:

Ardha Chakrasana
Chakrasana from supine position

Follow up poses:

Pawanmuktasan
Shashankasan
Paschimottanasana
Shavasana

Eka Pada Merudandasan - One-Legged Crow Pose

Ek – one
Pad – leg
Merudanda – Spinal column
Meru – A name of mountain

Neither of these Sanskrit words translate to the word crow but this is the name that many people correlate with this pose. The relation to Meru or Hill is there as when the hips are raised high the body looks a little like a small hill.



Taking the asana position:

From sitting position come into a squat with the feet apart. Balancing on the toes, place the hands flat on the floor in front of the feet, fingers spread apart and elbows slightly bent. Lean forward and rest the knees on the upper arms, as close to the armpits as possible. Slowly lean further forward lifting the feet off floor while balancing on the hands. Gazing at a point slowly stretch the right leg back until it is straight.

The asana position:

In this position, the hands form the base of the posture, so the fingers should be spread to form a wide base. The knee should be pressing firmly against the upper arm with the other leg as straight as possible. Awareness should be maintained on the hands, particularly the palms. Breathe normally, staying focused on a point.

Releasing the asana position:

Return the right knee to rest on the right arm, then slowly lower the feet to floor. Practice with the left leg.

Anatomical focus:

Hands, wrists, legs, core

Awareness:

On maintaining balance.

Do:

- Spread the fingers to form a wide base.
- Lean the body forward so that the body weight shifts to the arms and the feet automatically lift off the floor.
- Breathe normally.

Don't:

- Keep the elbows straight.
- Look straight down on the floor. This increases the likelihood of falling forward and landing on the nose/face.
- Try to jump into the position, instead gradually transfer the weight forward, but not downwards.
- Straighten the leg until one is completely stable in the regular merudandasan pose.

Benefits:

- As per merudandasan but a little more.
- Strengthens and balances the nervous system.
- Strengthens the arms, wrists and core muscles.
- Tones and strengthens the abdominal muscles and organs.
- Develops sense of physical balance.
- Develops concentration and focus
- Increases confidence

Benefits for Women:

- Opens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Helps reduce hyperactivity

Precautions and Contra-indications:

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, weak wrists, carpal tunnel syndrome, pregnancy, menstruation or abdominal surgery.

One should be able to maintain merudandasan with ease before attempting this asana.

Duration:

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips:

Remember balancing positions reflect the state of the mind. If you are feeling emotional it may be more difficult to achieve this pose, instead try at another time when your mind is more steady. Some prefer a different placement of the legs, instead of having the knee on the upper arms one can place the shin across both upper arms and straighten the other leg.

Preparatory poses:

Plank pose
Adho Mukha Shwanasan
Utkatasan
Merudandasan
Parshwa Merudandasan
Ashta Vakrasan
Bakasan

Follow up poses:

Shashankasan

Vatyanasan - Rishi Vatayan Pose

Rishi Vatayan was a famous yoga master



Taking the asana position

From standing position bend the left knee and place the left foot on the right thigh with the sole of the foot facing up, like one is doing ardha padmasan. Hold the left ankle until the body is steady. Slowly bend the right knee, lower the body and rest the top of the left knee on the floor just near the right foot. Slowly raise the body, straighten the back and balance the body, do not lean forward. From here one can either place the hands in Namaskar or bend the elbows, raise the left elbow to the level of the chest and encircle the left hand with the right hand and join the palms.

The asana position

In this pose one balances on the foot and knee. One should try to keep the spine upright as much as possible. Stay focused on a point and breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

Release the arms and slowly stand up. Release the foot from the thigh and come back to standing position. Repeat on the other side.

Anatomical focus

Knee, lower back, pelvis

Awareness

On maintaining balance

Do's

- Focus on a point
- Maintain balance
- Keep the spine upright
- Choose the arm position most comfortable

Don'ts

- Hunch over
- Become unstable

Benefits

- Hip joints receive proper blood circulation.
- Helps correct minor deformity in the hips and thighs.
- Good for stiffness in the sacro-iliac region.
- Strengthens the leg and thigh muscles as well as ankles and knee joints.
- Reduces hyper activity of the kidneys.
- Great for the reproductive organs and seminal fluid can be retained.
- Stimulates nervous system as it is a balancing asana.
- Massages and stimulates uterus, urinary bladder and colon. Good for constipation.

Benefits for Women

- Opens the pelvic region
- Tones the reproductive system

Therapeutic applications

- Constipation
- Reproductive problems
- Stress

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is hip, ankle or knee pain.

Duration

Hold asana for 10 – 45 seconds

Variations and tips

Keep a folded towel under the knees if there is discomfort.

If one cannot keep the foot next to the knee one can keep distance and over time bring the foot and knee closer. One can also turn the foot out to the side slightly.

Preparatory Poses

Padmasan

Ardha Padma Bandhasan

Follow Up Poses

Shavasan

Vrischikasan – Scorpion Pose

Vrischik - scorpion



Taking the asana position

From standing come down to vajrasan. Place the forearms on the ground, shoulder width apart. The hands should have a little distance between them but when one is new to the pose the hands can be closer. The fingers should be spread apart. Lift the hips up and straighten the legs. Walk the feet close to the upper body. Using the core muscles slowly lift the feet vertical. This is often known as pincha mayurasan. From here slowly bend the legs, arching the spine and bringing the feet to the head, or as close as possible.

The asana position

In this position one should have a point to focus on. Try to keep the head as high up as possible. Using the core and back muscles be aware of the position of the hips. Press the hands, elbows and forearms down. Try to pull the shoulders back, opening the chest. Breathe normally.

Releasing the asana position

To release slowly straighten the legs, coming back to pincha mayurasan and lower them back to the floor. Come into shashankasan or vajrasan yoga mudra.

Anatomical focus

Back, core, arms

Awareness

On the arch of the back and maintaining balance

Do's

- Keep the head up and shoulders open
- Maintain balance
- Focus on a point
- Keep awareness of the position of the feet

Don'ts

- Drop the head down
- Let the hips go over the shoulders
- Try to touch the feet to the head if one is losing balance

Benefits

- Many of the same benefits as shirshasan
- Improves blood circulation to brain, pituitary, thyroid, legs and abdomen.
- Balances nervous and endocrine systems.
- Helps with varicose veins and haemorrhoids.
- Tones reproductive organs and spinal nerves.
- Develops balance.
- Strengthens arms, shoulders, neck and back.
- Re-organises and balances the pranic energy system.
- Develops humility and tolerance.

Benefits for Women

- Strengthens pelvic region

Therapeutic applications

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression

Precautions and Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart problems, menstruation, pregnancy, weak arms, neck or back, vertigo, any major health problems. It is a strenuous asana and a lot of care should be taken.

Duration

Hold the asana for as long as is comfortable.

Variations and tips

This asana can also be done from shirshasan.

If one finds it hard to lift the legs using the core muscles one can very slowly kick the legs up but a lot of care should be taken.

Preparatory Poses

Dolphin
Shirshasan
Saralhasta Bhunagasan
Dhanurasan

Follow Up Poses

Shashankasan
Shavasana

Pranayam – Breathing Techniques

- ॐ Natural Breathing
- ॐ Basic Abdominal breathing
- ॐ Thoracic breathing
- ॐ Clavicular breathing
- ॐ Yogic breathing
- ॐ Deep breathing with ratios
- ॐ Fast breathing
- ॐ Viloma – Interrupted Breathing
- ॐ AnulomVilom – Alternate Nostril Breathing
- ॐ Cooling Breath - Sheetal, Sitkari, Kaki mudra
- ॐ Ujjayi – Victorious Breath
- ॐ Bhramari – Humming Bee Breath
- ॐ Bhastrika – Bellow’s Breath
- ॐ Surya Bhedan – Right Nostril Breathing

Natural Breathing

Natural breathing is basically breath awareness. It is the starting point of working with the breath. It allows us to understand how we are breathing and our breathing patterns. It is relaxing, soothing, can be practiced at any time and is the basic starting point of meditation.

Sit in a comfortable position. The body is stable, the shoulders are relaxed, chest is open and eyes gently closed. Become aware of the breath. Notice if it is shallow or deep. Notice what part of the body is moving, the abdomen or the chest. Notice if there is any sound with the breath. Try to focus only on the breath. Try to become aware of the temperature of the breath. When the air is inhaled it is a little cool, when it is exhaled it is a little warmer. Notice the difference. Notice if the breath is becoming smoother and deeper. Notice if there is any strain. Be aware only of the breath. Now try to become more aware of the breath entering the nostrils. Focus only on the nostrils. Now notice the breath flowing down towards the lungs. Focus only on that area. Now focus on the lungs, only on the lungs. Now try to follow the air flowing from the nostrils and down into the lungs. Follow the breath with the inhalation and exhalation. Try to focus only on the breath. Continue with this practice for as long as is comfortable.

Basic Abdominal Breathing

This should be practiced before any pranayam for at least a few minutes and we should always breath with our diaphragm for all breathing techniques. Sit in a comfortable sitting position, using the wall, a chair, cushions or bolsters as support if needed. Alternatively lie in shavasan or tadagasan. Tadagasan is useful during pregnancy as it allows the lower back to relax, however in the later stages of pregnancy sitting is preferred.

Place one hand on the belly and the other on the chest. Inhale deeply, using the diaphragm. If one is using the diaphragm then as one inhales the diaphragm will move downward, pushing the abdominal contents down and out, making the abdomen rise. On exhalation the diaphragm will move upward and the abdomen will fall. Continue the practice. This is the type of breathing we want to practice. If the chest is moving then we are still breathing shallow, without the diaphragm. If we use the diaphragm then the lower lobes of the lungs are being used, improving their efficiency and giving a positive effect to the heart, liver, stomach and intestines. It is the most natural and efficient way to breathe, however many people do not breathe in this way due to the modern lifestyle. Just by altering the way we breathe we can see huge benefits.

Thoracic Breathing

This type of breathing is mostly helpful to create awareness in how we breathe and as a stepping stone to learning yogic breathing. It is the common way many of us breathe which expends more energy than abdominal breathing.

To practice thoracic breathing one starts with breath awareness and then tries to focus on expanding the ribcage only, without using the diaphragm. The focus should be only on the expansion of the chest as one inhales and the contraction of the chest as one exhales.

Clavicular Breathing

This type of breathing is generally done in combination with thoracic breathing in periods of great stress such as strong physical exertion or obstructive airways problems such as asthma or emphysema. The upper ribs and collar bones are pulled upward by the sternum and neck and this allows more air into the lungs. In yoga we only use it alone to create awareness and then afterwards combine it with thoracic and abdominal breathing to form yogic breathing.

To practice clavicular breathing one starts with breath awareness and then thoracic breathing for a few minutes. After that breathe in fully, into the chest, from there try to breathe in a little more so that one can feel the expansion right into the upper lungs. The collar bones and shoulders will raise up slightly. Next exhale, first relaxing the neck and upper chest and then the ribcage. Continue a few rounds.

Yogic Breathing

This involves the use of the abdomen, chest and clavicular region. It can also be practiced before other breathing techniques. It allows one to have maximum inhalation and exhalation. It can be combined with deep breathing (using a ratio).

Inhale slowly, allowing the abdomen to rise. When the abdomen had expanded as much as it can allow the chest to expand outward and upward. Once the ribs have expanded as much as they can inhale a little more so that the collar bones move up slightly. Then slowly exhale first allowing the collar bones to move downward, then the chest and finally the abdomen. Continue the practice without any strain, jerks or tension. The breath should feel natural and after some time it should be mostly thoracic and abdominal breathing. Abdominal breathing should be at least 70% of the breath.

Deep Breathing

Begin with normal breathing, ideally abdominal or yogic breathing, bringing awareness to the movement of the abdomen and the chest. Inhale deeply and smoothly in counts (use a timer, metronome, clock or count in your head, a nice way is to say 1 aum, 1 aum etc) according to the ratio you are following (see below). Exhale smoothly in the required counts. Continue this process. Be aware of the abdomen rising and falling with the breath. Return to normal breathing. Practice another round if desired.

Ratio - This may be 4:4 to start. This means inhale to 4 counts and exhale to 4 counts. If this causes strain then start with 3:3 or 2:2. After some time, when it is very comfortable to practice 4:4 the ratio can be changed. Start exhaling for longer, 4:6. Later this can be increased to 4:8. Remember there is no rush to do this. After some time one can start 5:5 then 6:6 but at no time should it cause strain.

Benefits

- Due to slowing of respiration rate the heart rate is reduced.
- Blood pressure is lowered.
- Stress and stress related ailments. Anxiety, tension, anger.
- More oxygen is made available per breath, making the breathing most efficient.
- Conscious deep breathing greatly affects the cortical activities, relaxing the nervous system, which calms the mind by removing thoughts and emotions.
- Enhanced movement of the diaphragm gives a good massage to the internal organs as the liver, pancreas, stomach, heart and lungs are attached to the diaphragm which is moved up and down during the breathing.
- Good preparation for labour
- Gives us control over our breath

Precautions & Contraindications

There are no contraindications as such however the breathing must be smooth and rhythmic and not in steps. There should never be strain and one should not feel that they are running out of breath.

Fast Breathing

Types of Fast Breathing:

Type1: Inhaling and exhaling through both nostrils.

Type2: Close the right nostril and inhale and exhale through the left nostril.

Type 3: Close the left nostril and inhale and exhale through the right nostril.

Type 4: Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril.

Type 5: Inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril.

Type 6: Inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right, inhale through the right and then exhale through left.

Begin with normally breathing, bringing awareness to the movement of the abdomen and the chest. Place the right hand in Pranava Mudra and bring the hand to the lips. Block the appropriate nostril depending on the fast breathing type being performed. Begin inhalation and exhalation, building up speed. Practice fast inhalations and exhalations, about 30 times is enough when pregnant. Reduce the speed and return to normal breathing. Make sure the body remains relaxed and steady throughout the practice.

Benefits

- Due to the fast inhalations and exhalations, the carbon dioxide levels in the blood fall and oxygen levels increase in the blood. Rich oxygenated blood is supplied to the vital organs, improving their function.
- Due to rapid exchange of gases on a cellular level, toxins are removed and the cells are revitalized.
- The fast movement of the diaphragm gives massage to the digestive organs, lungs and heart, increasing their efficiency.
- Increases the overall prana in the body.
- Gets rid of excess mucus which helps in removing sinusitis and common cold etc.
- Clears blocked nostrils in preparation for pranayam
- Increases lung capacity
- Preparation for labour, particularly during contractions

Precautions & Contraindications

Should be avoided if one has high blood pressure, heart problems, ulcers or hernia.

Only a small amount (1-2 rounds) of fast breathing should be done during pregnancy and only if it feels comfortable to do so. It is not recommended in the first trimester and is generally not comfortable to do in the third trimester. If one feels any dizziness or light headedness it should be avoided. If this happens stop the fast breathing and hold the breath for about 10 seconds, or try to inhale and exhale in a paper bag, then continue normal breathing. If one has any complications during pregnancy then avoid fast breathing completely.

Viloma Breathing – Interrupted Breathing

Start with relaxed breathing. Imagine a set of stairs or imagine a ladder in one's body, with the base at the pelvic floor and the top at the throat.

- ॐ Start inhaling but instead of inhaling smoothly like in deep breathing inhale in steps. Imagine you are walking up the steps or visualise the prana moving up the ladder in your body. There should be between 3-5 steps. Keep inhaling till you reach the top and the lungs are full. Slowly exhale, smoothly, without steps till the lungs feel empty. Continue the practice.
- ॐ Next inhale smoothly and completely then exhale in steps, moving down the stairs or ladder till the breath has been fully expelled and you have reached the bottom of the ladder. Continue the practice.
- ॐ Next inhale and exhale in steps, a combination of the first two techniques.
- ॐ Finish with a few rounds of relaxed breathing or continue with deep breathing.

Benefits

- Preparation for deep breathing
- Helps give finer control over the flow of air
- Helps to expand breath capacity
- Preparation for labour

Precautions & Contraindications

There should be no jerking movements in the steps and no strain at any time.

Anulom Vilom – Alternate Nostril Breathing

Make the pranava mudra with the right hand. Pranava mudra is made by bending the index and middle finger towards the palm. When we bring the right hand up to the nose we can block the right nostril with the thumb and then change to blocking the left nostril with the ring finger, which may be supported with the little finger. In this way we can move the hand from side to side, as needed. Slowly inhale through the left nostril, close the nostril and exhale slowly through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril and then exhale through the left nostril. This is one round. Continue at your own pace. If that is comfortable a ratio can be added, such as 4:4 or 4:8. Always start by inhaling through the left nostril and finish by exhaling through the left nostril. The left nostril relates to the calming energy in our body so it will give us more benefits to practice in this way.

Benefits

- The whole body is nourished by the extra supply of oxygen
- Blood is purified of any toxins
- The brain centres are stimulated to work to their optimum capacity
- Gives tranquility, clarity of thoughts and improved concentration
- Lowers levels of stress and anxiety
- Increases vitality
- Function of all systems (endocrine, digestive, excretory, reproductive, nervous, respiratory, circulatory) are improved
- Balances left and right energy pathways, ida and pingala, clearing pranic blockages. This can awaken sushumna.

Precautions & Contraindications

There are no contraindications as such however the breathing must be smooth and rhythmic and not in steps. There should never be strain and one should not feel that they are running out of breath. One should choose a ratio that suits them. If one has a cold or one nostril is blocked then it can be better to practice deep breathing or do a round of fast breathing first.

Cooling Breath

Sheetali (Sheetal - that which is calm and soothing)- Open the mouth and extend the tongue outside of the mouth, rolling it from the sides to form a tube. Inhale through the tube. Close the mouth and exhale through the nose. Make sure the breaths are slow, deep and comfortable.

Sitkari– Bring the teeth together lightly. Separate the lips so that the teeth are exposed. Fold the tongue so that it touches the soft palate in kechari mudra. If that is uncomfortable keep the tongue flat. Inhale slowly, through the teeth. Close the mouth and exhale slowly through the nose. Keep the breaths slow and relaxed.

Kaki Mudra – *Though this is a mudra we are including it here due to its cooling effect.*- Keep the eyes open and focus on the nosetip. Purse the lips into the shape of a beak. Relax the tongue and inhale through the lips. Close the lips and exhale through the nose. Let the breath be slow and relaxed.

- ॐ Cooling breath can be practiced in combination with other breathing practices such as Ujjayi and Bhramari. Either cooling breath can be practiced, whichever is most comfortable.

Benefits of Cooling breath

- Acidity such as heartburn
- Reduces high blood pressure

- Muscular relaxation
- Peptic or mouth ulcer
- Controls hunger or thirst, gives feelings of satisfaction
- Helpful for nausea
- Removes excess heat
- Allows prana to flow more freely through the body
- Can help cool the body, such as during hot weather or a hot flush
- Cools, calms and tranquilises the mind, in cases of anger or frustration
- Reduces emotional excitation
- Balances endocrine system
- Purifies the blood
- Useful to practice before going to sleep if one suffers from insomnia
- Sitkari has a beneficial effect on the teeth and gums which is beneficial during and after pregnancy when mouth health can be compromised.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Low blood pressure
- Asthma, respiratory disorders, excessive mucous, cold or flu
- Chronic constipation
- Avoid in a cold climate
- Avoid if one feels cold easily
- Addition for sitkari – sensitive teeth

Ujjayi – Victorious Breath

Focus the awareness on the throat. Imagine you are inhaling and exhaling through the throat. Start to contract the throat slightly on inhalation and exhalation. Keep the breath, slow, relaxed and deep. Focus on the breath and sound. The sound should not be very loud and will be like a baby snoring. The breath will become slower as one continues.

Benefits

- Decreases high blood pressure
- Activates the natural relaxation response
- Good for any heart problems
- Insomnia
- Mental tension, stress, anxiety, tranquilising effect
- Helpful for fluid retention
- Encourages introversion
- Increases psychic sensitivity and relaxes on a psychic level
- Stimulates parasympathetic nervous system and inducing muscular relaxation
- Useful preparation for meditation
- Helpful to balance the emotions
- Helpful during labour

Precautions and Contra-indications

- Very introverted people should avoid
- Low blood pressure
- Avoid contracting the throat too strongly, it should be relaxing and soothing.

Bhramari – Humming Bee Breath

Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose. On exhalation make the sound of 'm', as in the third letter of 'aum', like the humming sound of a bee. Exhale slowly and do not strain. The sound should be smooth, even and controlled. The exhalation will naturally be longer than the inhalation. Continue. If that is comfortable block the ears with the fingers to increase the vibrations through the body. One can block the ears by placing the thumbs in the ears and elbows pointing out, arms by the sides of the head and fingers around the head or by blocking the ears with the index fingers and elbows pointing down, arms in front of the chest.

If bhramari exhalation is comfortable one can start inhalation with 'm' sound. It is higher and more difficult to create but very beneficial and comes with practice. Again the sound should be slow and controlled, without strain. Ujjayi is a good alternative to the bhramari inhalation and can be substituted, or bhramari exhalation can be practiced with a normal inhalation.

Benefits

- Mental tension, anxiety, anger, stress.
- Insomnia, especially when done before bed
- Strengthens the throat and voice, useful for any throat problems
- High blood pressure
- For healing of body tissue after operation, useful postnatally
- Improves hearing
- Useful to practice postnatally when soothing a baby
- Allows one to become more introverted.
- Useful preparation for meditation.
- Can be helpful during labour
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing muscular relaxation
- Good for the thyroid'
- increases psychic sensitivity and awareness of subtle sound vibrations which is useful for Nada Meditation

Precautions & Contra-Indications

- Severe ear infections

Bhastrika – Bellow's Breath

One has to operate the lungs like bellows.

Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Do not strain. During inhalation the abdomen moves outward as the diaphragm descends and as one exhales the abdomen is pulled in. The movement should be slightly exaggerated. Do not expand the chest or raise the shoulders. There should be no jerk to the body. Continue with this type of breathing but increase the speed. This is basically fast breathing. After practicing one round inhale through the right nostril slowly and then exhale through the left nostril. This is one round.

**Note – 100 repetitions of kapalbhati can be done, before inhaling through the right nostril, instead of a round of fast breathing if preferred.*

Benefits

- Practice is ideal for purifying blood
- Improves complexion.
- Clears the air passages.

- Gives massage to the chest area.
- Warms the body up
- Used for reducing fats
- Speeds up the metabolism.
- Tones digestive system.
- Helps remove excess mucus, helpful when there is cough or cold.
- Helps to balance the doshas.
- Can be helpful during labour.
- Balances the nervous system.
- Brings focus and calmness.
- Gives energy.
- Helps with depression.
- Improves circulation to the heart and lungs.

Precautions & Contra-indications

If there is feeling of faintness, dizziness, excessive perspiration or a vomiting sensation it should be stopped immediately. It should not be stressful or uncomfortable to practice. The respiration, though exaggerated should still be calm. The face should remain relaxed and there should not be shaking of the body. One should build up slowly with bhastrika as it is a very powerful and dynamic practice. It should be avoided if there is too much heat in the body, high blood pressure, heart disease, recent abdominal surgery, stroke, eye problems, epilepsy, ulcer, acidity, headache, vertigo or menstruation.

Surya Bhedan –Right Nostril Breathing

Surya means sun, bheda means to pierce/awaken. In the body pingala nadi represents the energy of the Sun or vital energy, Surya bhedan therefore means to pierce or purify pingala nadi.

Inhale through the right nostril, exhale through the left nostril.

Benefits

- Increases vital energy in the body.
- Heats the body.
- Stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and the left part of the brain.
- Eliminates wind or gas related trouble (Vata) and
- Helps to balance mucus (Kapha)
- Helps to balance acidity (Pitta)

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, epilepsy, ulcer, acidity, hyperthyroidism, anxiety, headache or menstruation.

Shatkarmas - Cleansing Techniques

The hatha yoga cleansing processes have been placed into six groups of purification practices known as shatkarmas, 'Shat' meaning six and 'karma' meaning action. They are described in the ancient texts of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gherand Samhita. The six shatkarmas are neti, cleansing of the nasal passages, dhouti, cleansing of the alimentary canal, nauli, strengthening of the abdominal organs, basti, cleansing of the large intestine, kapalbhathi, cleansing of the frontal area of the brain and tratak, intense gazing of a point developing concentration and cleansing the mind. A variety of practices come under these categories. We will look at the following cleansing practices that can be helpful for many problems.

- ॐ Bindu Tratak – Concentrated Gazing on Dot
- ॐ Jyoti Tratak – Concentrated Gazing on Flame
- ॐ Kapalbhathi – Frontal Lobe Cleansing
- ॐ Agnisar Dhouti – Fire Breath
- ॐ Jal Neti – Nasal Cleansing with Water
- ॐ Danda Neti – Nasal Cleansing with Tube
- ॐ Vaman Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing
- ॐ Danda Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Tube
- ॐ Vastra Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Cloth
- ॐ Lagoo Shankarprakshalan – Partial Cleanse
- ॐ Purna Shankarprakshalan – Master Cleanse

Tratak – Concentrated Gazing

This is concentrated gazing on a point, flame or object without blinking the eyes. It is a cleansing practice for both the eyes and the mind.



Bindu Tratak – Concentrated Gazing on Dot

The bindu, a dot, usually red or black should be placed on the wall at eye level and one should sit in front of it, at about an arms distance. Sit comfortably with the spine erect and eyes relaxed. First close the eyes and relax. Keep the body steady and stable throughout the practice. Open the eyes and gaze steadily at the point. Try not to blink or move the eyeballs, do not strain the eyes. Try to focus only on the point. When the eyes start to get tired or begin to water gently close them and gaze at the after image of the point in chidakash. When the image disappears open the eyes and repeat the process. Continue as many times as desired. After completing palm the eyes and if needed splash some cold water into the eyes.



Jyoti Tratak – Concentrated Gazing on Flame

Light the candle and sit as per bindu tratak, an arms length away from the candle which should be at eye level. Make sure there is no draft in the room so that the flame can remain steady. It is best practiced at night so that the room can be dark and the focus can be directed on the candle more easily. Follow the same procedure as bindu tratak but gaze at the tip of the wick, not the whole flame. Sometimes the flame may flicker but the wick will remain steady. Continue for as long as desired. Finish with palming and/or cold water.

Benefits

- Helps to remove suppressed thoughts and associated worries
- Makes the eyes clear and bright
- Cleanses the eyes
- Balances nervous system
- Relieves mental tension and anxiety
- Improves memory and concentration
- Decreases thoughts
- Helpful for depression
- Helps remove insomnia
- Strengthens will power
- Activates Ajna chakra
- Preparation for meditation.
- Curbs the changing and spontaneous tendency of the mind and channels it in one continuous stream, leading to one-pointedness.

Precautions & Contra-indications

The flames must be steady, there should be no draught and no strain of the eyes. Bindu tratak should be practiced instead of jyoti tratak for epileptics and those with eyestrain or eye problems. Good lighting should be there for bindu tratak. One should build up slowly with tratak due to its mental cleansing effects so that one doesn't become disturbed.

Duration

Beginners should start with a few minutes in total. Later it can be practiced for up to 15 minutes.

Kapalbhati – Frontal Lobe Cleansing

Kapalbhati is related to the breathing process but is classified under cleansing techniques.



First sit in any comfortable sitting position with the hands on the knees. Relax the body and breathe naturally. Bring the awareness to the breath and abdomen. Inhale deeply and exhale with a forceful, but never straining, contraction of the abdominal muscles. The next inhalation will occur passively as the abdominal muscles relax and expand. There should not be any effort to inhale. Continue with the active exhalation and passive inhalation, which is the opposite of what we normally do. If necessary have a break, breathe naturally and then continue.

Benefits

- Strengthens and exercises the muscles of the respiratory system
- Clears the air passages
- Increases the efficiency of the lungs
- Purifies the respiratory system
- Increases the supply of oxygen in the blood
- Purifies nadis
- Removes sensory distractions and energises the mind
- Strengthens the nervous system due to its action of reversing the breathing process.
- Improves digestion and metabolism
- Brings a state of lightness and clarity to the mind
- Removes sleepiness

Precautions & Contra-indications

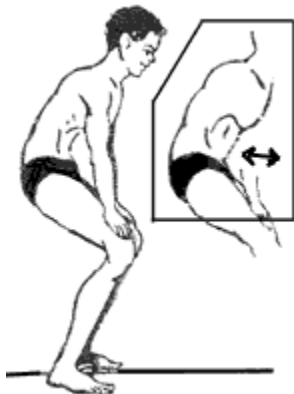
If there is any dizziness stop the practice and breathe naturally. Recommence when ready but with less force. If it continues seek guidance. Avoid if there are heart problems, high blood pressure, lung problems, recent abdominal surgery, stroke, vertigo, epilepsy during pregnancy and menstruation.

Duration

It is said that the ideal ration for kapalbhati is 120 repetitions per minute. Practicing faster than this is not advisable. If one cannot practice that speed they should do what is most comfortable for them.

The amount of repetitions can slowly be increased as per the individual's capacity and strength. One may start with 2 rounds of 20 repetitions and slowly build up to 2 rounds of 120 repetitions. After some time one can build up to 500 repetitions.

Agnisar Dhouti – Fire Breath



Stand erect with a distance of 1 to 1.5 ft in between both the feet. Inhale. Bend the legs, place both the hands on the knees and exhale. The pressure of the shoulders should come onto the knees through both the hands. After exhaling completely contract the abdomen and bring it inwards, towards the spine. Immediately release the abdomen and continue the contraction and expansion in a rapid manner until you feel that you need to inhale. Stop the process and gradually inhale as you stand up, raising the arms upward and then exhaling lower the arms. This is one round. After completing as many rounds as desired lie down in shavasan and give a gentle clockwise massage to the abdomen.

Benefits

- Increases the circulation of blood to the digestive organs
- Removes impurities and improves the efficiency of all the organs.

- Digestion is improved and the agni or digestive fire is lit.
- The appetite is stimulated
- Removes digestive troubles
- Massages and strengthens the abdomen
- Increases prana in general and stimulates all 5 pranas in the body.
- Removes tiredness and depression.
- Helps remove fats
- The pancreas is given a good massage which helps with insulin production and therefore diabetes.
- Massages bladder

Precautions & Contra-indications

The movement of the stomach should not be jerky but should be done rhythmically. Avoid if there has been any abdominal surgery, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, diarrhoea, menstruation, hernia, pregnancy and acidity. Always practice on an empty stomach and if possible, empty bladder and bowels.

Duration

3-4 rounds can be practiced, slowly increasing the amount of repetitions per round. 100 strokes per practice is a good amount to aim for.

Jal Neti – Nasal Cleansing with Water



In a jug mix 1 teaspoon of water with 500 mls of warm water. Fill the neti pot with water. Usually the neti pot holds 125mls. Bend the knees and place one hand on the knee. Tilt the head to the side and insert the spout into the upper nostril. Keep the mouth open and breathe naturally through it. The water will naturally flow out of the lower nostril. Sometimes a little water may flow down the throat or face. In this case adjust the position of the head. Everybody is different and when the correct position has been found then it becomes very easy. Once all the water from the pot has gone through the nostrils repeat on the other side. This can be practiced twice if the pot holds 125mls otherwise use 500 mls of water. After practicing it is important to dry the nostrils. To do this lean forward and swing the head in a half rotation from side to side, exhaling forcefully but without tension as the head moves downwards, inhaling as the head comes up. If you feel there is still some water inside then tilt the head forward for some time then try blowing your nose, remembering not to strain.

Benefits

- Helps to purify the breathing path right from the nostrils to the throat
- Removes mucus and pollution from the nasal cavities
- Helps in reducing allergies

- Helps to prevent colds and sinus problems
- Cleans the eyes and ears
- Improves nasal functions, sinuses and brain
- Awakens Ajna chakra

Precautions & Contra-indications

Those with blocked nostrils should not practice jal neti as it may cause a blockage of water inside the cavity. It is best as a preventative so instead practice when both nostrils are flowing. If you are prone to nose bleeding then again it is not recommended without advice. Placing a drop of warm ghee in each nostril before the practice can help. Also for some people they may have a structural blockage preventing the flow of water out of the other nostril. Ask your doctor about this.

Duration/Frequency

It can be practiced everyday if necessary but for a normal healthy individual once a week is adequate. If one has allergies then it can be practiced daily.

Danda Neti – Nasal Cleansing with Tube



Take a comfortable position, sitting or standing. Relax the body, breathe normally. Take your rubber tube and dip it in a few drops of ghee. Place the tube into one nostril. It is best to start with the nostril that is flowing first. Slowly and carefully continue to insert the tube. It will reach the nasal cavity and then one will be able to feel it in the throat. It is very important to go slowly here. Sometimes the tube will not go and one needs to gently twist the tube until the correct position is found. There should never be any pain or discomfort. When the tube reaches the throat insert the index and middle finger into the throat to hold onto the tube. It will be very slippery at this point and may take some time to get a hold of. It is important that the fingernails are not long so that they do not scratch the throat. Once the tube is held very gently move the tube to and fro, to gently clean, and then slowly remove the tube from the mouth. Repeat with the other nostril.

Benefits

- Same effects as jal neti
- Also increases the blood flow to nasal passages which makes the nose function better

- Has a friction effect which can be helpful if there are any fleshy outgrowths preventing the free flow of air.
- It helps with excess mucus/kapha so indirectly helps tonsillitis.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Don't practice is one has a deviated nasal septum or has nosebleeds. Always follow with jal neti to flush out any impurities or particles. It should always be practiced under guidance to begin with. There should never be any kind of pain or discomfort.

Duration/Frequency

Can be practiced weekly or if needed a few times a week.

Vaman Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing

Prepare warm salted water to the proportion of 2 teaspoons salt per litre of water. Prepare about 2 litres of water. Sit in a squatting position or sitting down. Start drinking the water at a continuous speed. Do not sip the water slowly and do not drink very fast. The aim is to drink 6-8 glasses of water for proper cleansing. If one only takes a few glasses then the effect will not be there. With each glass of water one will become a little slower in drinking as the stomach fills up. Sometimes some nausea will be felt, try to overcome that, take a few breaths and continue. When one's stomach is completely full and one feels they cannot take another sip then stand up, relax and press two fingers onto the back of the tongue. This pressure normally causes the water to be expelled automatically. Continue with this process until no more water can be expelled. If it is difficult to get the water up uddiyan bandha may be used. Take 10 minute shavasan. One can eat after 30 minutes.

Benefits

- Removes mucus from the stomach and also from the lungs
- Helps remove cough, cold or congestion.
- Helps to remove excess acid if there is acidity and helps to increase the secretions if there is low acid.
- Improves the function of the stomach.
- Improves appetite and digestion
- Helps with all acid related problems such as headaches and migraines.
- Helps to remove mental blockages and suppressed emotions.
- Removes fears
- Removes morning sickness in pregnancy but should only be practiced if they are used to it
- Tones abdominal organs

Precautions & Contra-indications

The fingernails should not be long as this may cause scratching of the throat. Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy (except first trimester), stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly. If one is having a lot of congestion or acidity it can be practiced daily for up to a week.

Danda Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Tube



Drink 2 glasses of plain water. Find a comfortable sitting position, squatting is ideal. Relax the body and breathe normally. Open the mouth and slowly insert the tube into the throat. Slightly chew, to produce saliva and swallow. Slowly the tube will move down the throat towards the stomach. One may feel some retching as the body tries to throw out the tube. Try to overcome this reflex and continue. Do not push the tube down hard, let it move slowly and carefully. Once the tube reaches the stomach water may automatically come out of the tube. Stand up and bend forward slightly to allow the tube to pull out all the water from the stomach. Sometimes it can take a bit of time because the mucus can block the tube. Practicing uddiyan bandha can be helpful to increase the pressure of the water. When no more water is coming out very slowly start to remove the tube. Do not pull it. The oesophagus may try to pull the tube downward. Relax and do not worry. Breathe normally and continue to gently pull the tube upwards and out. Take shvasan for ten minutes.

Benefits

- The effect is similar to vaman but the benefits are more.
- Causes friction in the oesophagus and helps to stimulate the nerve plexus.
- It needs coordinated action of the three layers of oesophagus muscles, so improves oesophageal function.
- Helps remove excess mucus much more than vaman.
- Strong effect on the emotions, suppressed emotions, anxieties and fears.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if the throat is sore.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly.

Vastra Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Cloth



Get a cotton cloth that is 2.5 cm wide. The length can vary, one can start with one metre and build up to three metres. The cloth should be soft and have no loose threads. Boil the cloth. Remove the cloth from the water and place in a bowl with a little water covering it and if desired a bit of honey. Also get a glass of water to drink.

Take a sitting position, ideally squatting if comfortable. Relax, breathe normally. Take one end of the cloth and fold the corners to make a point. Place it in the back of the mouth and start chewing the cloth and swallowing. Sip the water. The cloth should slowly start to move down the throat. The chewing action will increase the saliva that helps the cloth glide downwards. The cloth may bunch up a little in the back of the throat so it is essential to keep drinking water. As the cloth starts moving down one may feel nausea or retching. Try to relax till the sensation passes. Continue. As the cloth passes down the sensation will decrease slightly. Keep swallowing the cloth till there is only 30 cms left. It is very important that the cloth is held tightly at the end so that it does not go down the throat. Next stand up and practice nauli or agnisar. Sit back down and very slowly start to pull the cloth out gently. The body may try to pull the cloth back down. Do not get stressed about this but continue to relax, breathe and slowly pull the cloth out. Never pull on the cloth. Once it is out take shavasana for ten minutes.

Benefits

- The autonomous nervous system is toned due to the person controlling the reflex urge to vomit.
- Removes mucus from the chest and stomach
- Cleans the stomach, removing toxins.
- Allows the bronchial tubes to relax which is beneficial for asthma
- Helps with cough
- Removes excess pitta.
- Improves the function of the stomach and oesophagus
- Removes bad breath
- Improves will power, focus and concentration

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if the throat is sore.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly.

Lagoo Shankarprakashan – Partial Master Cleanse

This is the short version that can be practiced more frequently and without the restrictions that the master cleanse has.

To practice, prepare 2 litres of warm water, add 4 teaspoons of salt and a few squeezes of lemon. Sit down, relax and drink two glasses of the water. Try to drink continuously, not too slowly and not too fast. After drinking the water practice two sets of the exercises.

One set is as follows –

1. Tadasan – Palm Tree Pose – 6 x
2. Tiryak Tadasan – Swaying Palm Tree Pose – 6 x to each side
3. Kati Chakrasan – Waist Rotating Pose – 6 x to each side
4. Tiryak Bhujangasana – Twisted Cobra – 6 x to each side
5. Udarakarshanasan – Abdominal Stretch Pose – 6 x to each side
6. Kauva Chalsan – Crow Walking – one round of the mat

Again drink two glasses of water and practice two sets of exercise. Repeat this one more time. There should be a total of six glasses of water and six sets of exercise. Even four glasses and four sets can have a beneficial effect. After completing take at least 10 minutes of shavasana and wait for half an hour before eating. If one needs to go to the bathroom at any time one should do so. Some people will find that the water starts to come through before finishing the practice whilst others will find they have looser motions later in the day. If one has severe constipation then it may only soften the stools and the practice should be repeated the next day.

Benefits

- Very helpful for constipation
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- General cleansing of the digestive system
- Improves functioning and efficiency of all digestive organs
- Helps to flush out the kidneys
- Helps to improve bowel functioning

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems, any abdominal surgery. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if feeling tired or weak.

Duration/Frequency

Can be practiced weekly or monthly or even daily for up to a week if one is suffering from severe constipation.

Poorna Shankarprakashalan – Full Master Cleanse

This practice takes physical and mental preparation. One should practice the sets of exercise, slowly building up, over a week. It is very important that this is practiced under the guidance of a yoga expert.

To practice prepare 4 litres of water as per lagoo shankarprakashalan. Sit down, relax and drink two glasses of the water. Try to drink continuously, not too slowly and not too fast. After drinking the water practice two sets of the exercises, as per lagoo shankarprakashalan. Again drink two glasses of water and practice two sets of exercise. Continue to repeat this process. It is helpful to make a chart to note down how many glasses of water have been consumed and how many sets of exercise practiced. This process will continue until one starts to have bowel movements. From this moment on one needs to be aware of what is in the toilet and let their supervisor know so that if needed the amount to drink or the sets of exercise can be changed, as needed. Unless specified by the supervisor one continues with the two glass, two set routine. Generally most people will need between 14-16 glasses of water, but some will need less, only 8-10, whilst other may need more than 20. One will start to go to pass movements more frequently. When one starts to pass brown water it is time to stop the practice. Eventually the remaining water inside will also come out and that will lead to almost clear water coming out. It is very important not to overdo it because if one drinks too much then it can be difficult to stop the motions.

When the practice is complete a one hour shavasan is needed. Please make sure that you DO NOT SLEEP as sleep will slow down the recovery process and may result in a cold or headache.

After shavasan one should feel very hungry. This is the time to eat khichadi, the porridge of rice and mung dal. Ghee is essential to be taken to coat the intestines which now have no lining. It should be taken until the body produces a new mucus lining. If ghee is not taken it will lead to many problems. One needs to eat plenty of khichadi, at least two bowlfuls, to fill the intestines so that they do not spasm and cramp due to the absence of bulk. Eat as much as you comfortably can. Avoid drinking water as this will start the motions again. If one is very thirsty take a sip and hold it in the mouth and then swallow. One can start drinking water 2 hours after finishing the practice but avoid drinking huge amounts to start. Take one glass and then wait half an hour before the next glass.

After eating rest and relax. One can now do yoga nidra and if wanted one can sleep. The rest of the day should be relaxing. There should be nothing strenuous. When one is hungry they should eat khichadi. Avoid going out in the sun. Avoid asanas.

The next day rest should be taken and strong asanas or exercise avoided. Khichadi should be taken but vegetables can be added.

Look below for what needs to be avoided after the practice.

Benefits

- Removes toxins from the blood
- Revitalises the entire digestive system
- Helpful for irritable bowel syndrome
- Removes indigestion, acidity and gases.
- Removes constipation
- Beneficial for obesity
- Good for diabetes
- Beneficial for gynaecological problems.

- Remove the mucus that may be in the digestive glands, improving enzyme production and therefore digestion.
- Removes excess blood sugar that causes diabetes. It has been found to be very useful for diabetes when combined with the partial cleanse.
- Improves both voluntary and involuntary muscle activity of intestines.
- Strengthens immunity
- Brings mental calmness
- Purifies the nadis, chakras and pranic body.
- In Gherand Samhita it says the body becomes like that of God, meaning energetic, charismatic, light and flexible body with concentrated pranic energies.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, colitis, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems, those under 16 years of age, any abdominal, spine, heart or brain surgery. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if feeling tired or weak. One needs to be physically and mentally strong for this practice.

Duration/Frequency

Only practice once in six months.

Points to Note During the Practice

- Please observe the silence during the process and focus on abdomen.
- While drinking the water, you should sit down and drink continuously but not fast.
- If you feel vomiting then stop the process temporarily and take a walk in shade focusing on breathing, resume the process when you are comfortable.
- Do not relax or do shavasana during the process as it will slow down the process of removing the water.
- If you feel giddiness or a headache then talk to the supervisor immediately.
- You can listen to relaxing music to keep your mind focused and relaxed during the process.
- Sometimes going to the toilet more than 8 times results in dehydration and weakness. Keep the supervisor updated with each trip to the toilet.
- Also do not exceed the point beyond which almost clear water is being passed. Otherwise the system may start producing bile and bright yellow water will be seen.
- In case of any problem contact the supervisor immediately.

Dietary Changes following the practice

- ॐ Avoid milk, milk products, and bakery products for three days.
- ॐ Avoid all chemically processed, preserved food, pungent, spicy, acidic and heavy to digest food for at least three weeks.
- ॐ Avoid non-vegetarian food for at least 40 days or preferably forever.
- ॐ Alcohol, tea, coffee, cigarettes, intoxicants and drugs avoid for at least 40 days or preferably forever.
- ॐ All fruits especially acidic fruits such as lemons, grapefruit, oranges and pineapples should be avoided for three days.
- ॐ The dinner should be same as the lunch. Take the second meal about 6 hours after the first meal or earlier if one feels hungry. The stomach must be filled to its capacity at both meals even if there is no hunger.

Other Recommendations for Purifying the Body

As well as the yogic cleansing techniques there are some other recommendations to take into consideration when trying to purify the body. A natural, wholefood, preferably vegetarian, diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables, both raw and cooked, whole grains, lentils, legumes, nuts and seeds. Try to fill between half to two thirds of the diet with fruit and vegetables. Avoid salt, sugar, saturated fats, fried and fast foods, alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes.

Make sure you drink enough fluids. If you are eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables then the fluids needed are less. Don't drink just to complete the daily two litres of water like many books say. It is important to listen to the body. It tells you when it needs water and you can also check your urine so you will know if the amount you are drinking is sufficient. The urine should be a very pale yellow. If you drink too much water it can lead to loss of electrolytes as well as water retention.

Once a week have a fruit and vegetable fast, eating only fresh fruit and steamed or raw vegetables. It gives the digestive system a little break and will also help to clear any old waste. Drink warm water with lemon or herbal teas. If you find it difficult to do this all day then substitute just one meal with fruits and vegetables.

Regular exercise is also important, whether it is sun salutations as exercise or walking, swimming or other forms of exercise.

Dry skin brushing is very good for improving the circulation, getting rid of cellulite and toxins as well as dead skin cells, leaving the skin glowing. All you need to do is get a body brush and brush the body in circular motions from the feet and arms towards the heart before you take your shower.

Self massage is also good for improving the circulation, skin appearance and is soothing and relaxing for the mind. After dry skin brushing massage any cold pressed vegetable oil into the skin, first warming it with the hands. Massage in upward strokes towards the heart.

There are so many ways to cleanse and detoxify the body and it is becoming increasingly necessary to do this both for our body and mind. By following a yogic lifestyle we can remain happy, healthy and free of disease.

Bandhas - Locks

A bandha may be defined as a particular action involving pressure or strain on the muscles. It is expected in Yoga to retain a firm pose in a bandha as it is retained in the asanas. The bandhas are to be studied mainly while studying pranayama but they also have their own individual effects. Bandha means to lock, hold or tighten and aims to lock and move prana in particular areas.

- ॐ Jalandhar Bandha – Chin Lock
- ॐ Moola Bandha – Root Lock
- ॐ Uddiyan Bandha – Abdominal Lock

Jalandhar Bandha – Chin Lock

Introduction

It is difficult to explain why this bandh is known as Jalandhar *Bandha*. However, one may guess that Rishi Jalandhar might have defined the act of this bandha for the first time, and it was therefore named after him.

If we try to trace the meaning of the word Jalandhar, "Jal" means "Net", in this case, net of Nadis (energy channels) and the word "Dhar" means to hold the flow of the fluid (Amrut), flowing through the nadis.



This bandha can be achieved without getting into any asana pose but generally it is practiced in Padmasana or Siddhasana but any other meditative asana can be used.

Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ In the meditative asana have the hands in either drone or dhyana mudra. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.
- ॐ Contract the throat as if you are swallowing.
- ॐ Bring the chin back towards the spine and gently press downward. It does not have to be a strong bend. Over time one will feel the compression of the windpipe.
- ॐ Hold the bandha for as long as it is comfortable, then relax the throat, raise the chin and exhale slowly through the nose.
- ॐ Repeat as many times as desired.

Anatomical focus

Throat, neck

Awareness

Vishuddhi chakra, mental calmness, introversion

Do

- Contract the throat. Contraction is similar to what is done in ujjayi pranayama.
- Slightly bend the neck forward but avoid excessive bending of neck.
- Check if you are doing it correctly by trying to talk. If you cannot talk then the bandha is correct and you are preventing the flow of air out of the body.

Don't

- Contract so strongly that it is painful. This bandha should be relaxing and calming.
- Hold the air inside for too long, build up over time.

Benefits

- This bandha is the most important in practice of pranayama with breath retention. If one cannot practice Jalandhar bandha correctly then one cannot do pranayama. This is preparation for tribandha.
- The pressure of the bandha slows the blood supply to the carotid artery which sends a signal to the brain to balance the blood pressure, preventing it from increasing, which can occur in breath retention.
- This bandha stimulates vagus nerve, which is a parasympathetic nerve. This is stimulating parasympathetic nervous system. Blood pressure, heart rate slows down. Muscles are more relaxed, and it creates calmness in the mind and removal of thoughts
- Improves blood supply to the cervical region of the spine.
- Prevents air from entering the eustachian tubes which causes pressure on the ear drums.
- Good for thyroid gland especially hypo thyroid. It has good effect on regulation of metabolism.
- Prevention of coughs, throat problems, it is good for vocal chords.
- Induces introversion.

Benefits for Women

- Emotional tension related to menstrual cycle

Therapeutic Applications

- Thyroid problems
- Stress & anxiety

Precautions & Contra-indications

- high or low blood pressure,
- cervical spondylitis or any neck pain,
- Intracranial pressure, vertigo or any heart disease.
- Practice with caution for hyperactive thyroid problems.

Duration

Beginners can practice from 4 seconds and slowly increase the time duration as per comfort. In the beginning doing 3 to 5 repetitions and then increasing repetitions as per comfort.

Variations & Tips

- ॐ Some people like to have their hands in drone mudra and arms straight. This causes a hunch in the shoulders but can help improve the Jalandhar *bandha*.
- ॐ For those who find it hard to achieve the lock one can practice by inhaling with ujjayi, this helps one to understand and start the contraction of the throat.

Preparatory Practices

- ॐ Deep breathing and/or ujjayi breathing

Follow Up Poses

- ॐ Samyakasan – where the hands are placed behind the body and the head is tilted back to stretch the throat.

References in the ancient texts

Jalandhar *Bandha* has been described in Hatha Yoga Pradipika in the third chapter :

Kanthamakunchya hridaye sthapayechhibukam dridham |
Bandho jalandharakhyoyam jaramrituvinashakah || H P 3-70
Badhnani hi shirajalam adhogami nabhojalam |
Tato jalandharo badhah kanthadukkhahoghanashanah || H P 3-71

Meaning -

The chin is to be pressed on the chest after contracting the throat. This *bandha* eliminates old age and death. The contracted veins in the throat ensure that the liquid from the skies is received here. Hence, the *bandha* has been appropriately known as Jalandhar *Bandha*, which means that it destroys any pain in the throat.

Gherands Samhita has also described the *bandha* :

Kanthasankochanam krutva chibukam hridaye nyaset |
Jalandharakrute bandhe shodashadhar*bandhanam* |
Jalandharam mahamudra mrityoeach kshayakarini || G S 3-12

Meaning -

The chin is to be pressed onto the heart after contracting the throat. This Jalandhar Bandh supports sixteen types of *bandhas* and destroys death.

Siddham jalandharam *bandham* yoginam siddhidayakam |
Shanmasmabyaset yo hi sa siddho natra samshayah || G S 3-13

Meaning -

Jalandhar Bandh is Swayamsiddha and the sadhaka who practises this *bandha* for six months will, no doubt, achieve siddha status.

In both the texts, the description as well as the effects of the *bandha* is more or less the same. Both the texts have assured that the *bandha* causes destruction of old age and death. Observing this *bandha* gives peace and calmness to both the heart and the mind. This in turn increases the lifetime of the sadhaka.

Moola Bandha – Root Lock

Introduction

This bandha relates to mooladhara chakra and is termed as moola bandha. Moola means root or source.

This bandha is best performed in siddhasana as it helps give an automatic Moola Bandha and creates more awareness in this region. If siddhasana is difficult then one can sit in Padmasana or any other meditative asana.

Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ In the sitting position close your eyes, relax and become aware of the area which is the trigger point for mooladhara chakra. For men it is the perineal area, between the anus and genitals. One must concentrate on that area and just slightly in, about 1 cm, is the trigger point. For women the place is at the point of the cervix, where the uterus joins the vagina. The perineal muscles are also used. It can be very difficult to isolate these points as there is a tendency to also contract the anal and urinary sphincters. Over time one learns how to isolate the muscles.
- ॐ There are a few ways to practice. One can just concentrate on this area, breathe normally and contract and relax as many times as is comfortable.
- ॐ Another way is to inhale and contract, hold for a few seconds, and then exhale, relaxing. Repeating as per comfort.
- ॐ Another is to contract, breathe normally and hold the bandha for as long as one can, then slowly release.
- ॐ This bandha can also be practiced in certain balancing asanas to improve balance.
- ॐ It is also beneficial if one contracts and pulls upward slightly.

Anatomical focus

Perineal area or cervix.

Awareness

Mooladhara chakra

Do

- Try to relax as much as possible
- Keep focused on the point

Don't

- Hold too long if it's not comfortable
- Have any kind of strain

Benefits

- Stimulates pranic energy
- Tones the reproductive, urinary and excretory systems
- Realigns the panchkoshas
- Tones the pelvic nerves
- Helps one to have sexual control
- Helps redirect sexual energy so it can be used for other purposes
- Can awaken mooladhara chakra
- Can help remove fears and take one out of depression

- Prevents urinary incontinence
- Removes fatigue
- Redirects energy in the upward direction.
- Preparation for *tribandha* and pranayama.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive system and helps regulate the menstrual cycle
- Helps to remove congestive period pain
- Stimulates prana in the pelvic region, promoting health
- Strengthens the pelvic muscles which is helpful during pregnancy
- Post natally it tones and strengthens the pelvic floor muscles, speeding up recovery.

Therapeutic Applications

- Menstrual disorders
- Period pain – practiced throughout the month
- Infertility
- Depression

Precautions & Contra-indications

- Avoid during menstruation or if there is any pain when practicing.
- Avoid if there is chronic constipation.
- Be cautious if one has haemorrhoids.

Duration

As many times as is comfortable. The bandha can also be held for up to 5 minutes over time.

Variations & Tips

- If siddhasan is difficult one can slightly bring the foot under the thigh and move the body forward so that the heel more easily presses against the body and improves the moola bandha.

Preparatory Poses

Siddhasan

Follow Up Practices

Tribandha and pranayam

References in the ancient texts

The bandha has been described thoroughly in the third chapter of Hatha Pradipika.

Parshnibhagen sampeedya yonimakunchayet gudam |
Apanmurdhwamakrushya mulbandhobhidhiyate ||
3-61

Meaning -

The heel should press the perineum, the muscles should be contracted and the gas (apan vayu) should be lifted upwards. This results in moola *bandha*. Further it is described as:

Adhogatimapan va urdhwargam kurute balat |
Aakunchanen tam prahurmulbandham hi yoginah || 3-62
Parnapanou nadbindu mulbandhen chaikatam |

Gatva yogasya samsiddhidam gachshato natra samshayah || 3-63

Meaning -

Apan vayu is generally in the downward direction. With deliberate contraction the apan vayu is lifted upwards. This is known as moola *bandha*. The *bandha* is to be performed till the time the gas is forced upwards. Hatha Yoga Pradipika, in further shlokas, describe this *bandha* as when the prana, apan, the sound and the point (nad and bindu) will merge with each other due to this *bandha*, then one can be said to succeed in yoga.

The effects of this bandh are described as under:

Apanpranayoraikyam kshayo mutrapurishayoh |
Yuva bhavati vrudhopi satatam mulbandhanat || 3-65

Meaning -

The regular study of moola *bandha* results in merging apan and prana. The excretions are minimised and an old person turns into a young one. Though, as a matter of practice, an old person may not be transformed into a youth, the general meaning can be guessed as the disappearance of the signs of old age with return of the enthusiasm of youth.

The next four shlokas in Hatha Yoga Pradipika describe how the *bandha* is related to awakening of Kundalini power. Hatha Yoga Pradipika says that when the apan vayu is forced upwards it enters the vanhimandal. The pressure of this vayu results in increasing the fire. Apan vayu and this fire heat the prana. This results in igniting the fire in the stomach. The kundalini power, which is supposed to be asleep, awakens like a snake hit by a stick. It then enters the sushumna nadi (brahma nadi) like a snake entering its hole. Hence, every sadhaka must study moola *bandha* regularly.

The thirteenth shloka in the third chapter of Gherand Samhita describes this *bandha*. The description is as given above as in Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

However, the effects of this bandh are described as:

Mulbandhah paro bandho jaramarannashanah |
Prasadadasya bandhasya sadhayetsarvavanchitam || 3-18

Meaning –

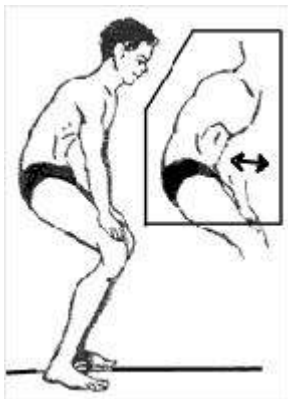
This is a superior type of *bandha* which results in reversal of old age and the death. The study of this *bandha* results in fulfilment of any desire. This description is a bit exaggerated but one can understand its importance on health.

Uddiyan Bandha – Abdominal Lock

Introduction

This bandha or lock involves the movement of the muscles of the abdomen and especially the diaphragm. Hatha Yoga assigns a special importance to Uddiyan Bandha and the study of pranayama is not complete without studying this lock. While performing this lock the muscles of the diaphragm are pulled in an upward direction; Uddiyan in Sanskrit is moving up hence this bandha is termed as Uddiyan Bandha. This lock is also useful for awakening of Kundalini Shakti which is another reason the name is there, for raising the energy upward.

The lock involves the action of the muscles of the abdomen and hence it may be performed while in a standing pose or sitting pose. The bandha can also be performed in Padmasana, Siddhasana, Vajrasana or any other meditative asana. However for best results, and especially when learning, it is best to perform the lock in a standing position.



Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ Stand with a distance of 1 to 1.5 feet between the legs.
- ॐ Bend the knees as if one is about to sit in a chair and place the palms firmly on the knees. The pressure should be on the arms so that the abdomen can relax.
- ॐ Bend the shoulders a little towards the front and the neck slightly downward.
- ॐ Inhale deeply and then exhale either through the nose or mouth. While exhaling, try to pull the muscles of the abdomen inwards. Lift up the ribs a little bit and pull the muscles from within with a gentle push upwards. The muscles of the abdomen must be relaxed at this time, so that they can be pushed up. These results in the muscles of the diaphragm

being pushed upwards and a vacuum created in abdomen. This is the final stage of Uddiyan Bandha.

- ॐ Try to remain firmly in this pose for as long as one can hold the breath out comfortably.
- ॐ When one needs to inhale slowly release the bandha by releasing the muscles of the abdomen back to the normal position. The diaphragm will also be restored to its normal position.
- ॐ Relax the strain in the shoulders and neck area and start inhaling gradually.
- ॐ After inhaling completely, bring the arms by the side and straighten the legs.
- ॐ Optional but strongly recommended – after completion of Uddiyan bandha lie in shavasana and very gently press the abdomen, in the direction of the large intestine. This helps to relax the abdomen.

Variation – when releasing the bandha one may inhale, raising the arms up over the head and exhaling lowering the arms down. This can be helpful if there is any tension in the neck.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen being pulled in and up

Awareness

Manipura chakra, Navel region, external breath retention, relaxation, stillness

Do

- Try to relax as much as possible to hold the bandha longer
- Have a slight hunch in upper back

- Bend neck forward like Jalandhar bandha, but not contracting the throat.

Don't

- Have any strain
- Hold so long that there is tension in the throat, resulting in coughing

Benefits

- The muscles of the diaphragm are well exercised and this movement therefore helps improve breathing.
- The organs in the abdomen develop a negative pressure. Due to this pressure, the blood supply to these organs is improved. The difference between the negative pressure during this bandh and the normal pressures resumed after relaxation increases friction on the internal organs such as the stomach, small intestines, liver and pancreas thereby improving their efficiency. This also results in improving the secretion of the digestive juices, improving the digestive function.
- It is stated in various ancient texts that apart from these benefits, the bandh is also useful for spiritual progress and awakening of Kundalini power.
- It is very important for practice this bandha independently as a preparation for tribandha and pranayama.
- Stimulates the digestive fire and appetite is stimulated,
- Tones liver, pancreas, adrenals, urinary and excretory systems. Removes impurities and improves the efficiency of all the organs.
- Excellent practice for helping depression, also removes fatigue and lethargy.
- Stimulates vagus nerve which is stimulation to parasympathetic nervous system and that brings mental, physical relaxation and peace.
- Improves blood supply throughout the whole torso
- Reverses the flow of apana and prana, causing union with samana and maipur chakra.
- Stimulation of manipur chakra, the energy distribution centre, increases pranic energy.
- Balances all 5 pranas in the body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Regulates the menstrual cycle.

Therapeutic Applications

- Diabetes
- Low appetite
- Weight loss
- Poor digestion and malabsorption
- Flatulence
- Depression, stress and anxiety
- Reproductive problems

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been any abdominal surgery, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, diarrhoea, menstruation, hernia, intracranial pressure, glaucoma, pregnancy or acidity. Always practice on an empty stomach and if possible, empty bladder and bowels.

Duration

3-5 rounds can be practiced, holding for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable. Slowly the time duration can be increased up to 1 minute.

Variations & Tips

- Sometimes making a false inhalation by trying to expand the chest as if one is breathing in Uddiyan bandha can help improve the bandha as it helps to pull the diaphragm upwards.

Preparatory Poses

Agnisar Dhouti

Follow Up Poses

Tribandha and pranayam

References in the ancient texts

The third chapter in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes ten mudras. *Uddiyan* bandh has been described as one of the mudras. The writer of Hatha Yoga Pradipika explains why this mudra is termed as *Uddiyan bandha* as follows :

Badhho yen sushumnyam pranastuddiyate yatah |
Tasmad*Uddiyan*akhyoyam yogibhihi samudahrutah || 3-55

Meaning –

The prana in the body is raised due to the performance of this *bandha*, hence this *bandha* is termed as *Uddiyan bandha*.

The action of this bandh is described below :

Udare paschimam tanam nabherudhwaram cha karayet
*Uddiyan*o hyasou bandho mrityumatang kesari || 3-57

Meaning –

The abdomen is to be pulled (stretched) inwards and the navel upwards. This process is known as *Uddiyan bandha*. This action is like a lion killing an elephant which represents death. Nowhere in the process is it described that the *bandha* is to be performed after exhalation. This part was taught as a matter of master–disciple tradition and hence perhaps not explained in detail in the shloka.

The effects of this bandh have been described below:

*Uddiyan*am tu sahajam gurunam kathitam sada |
Abhyasetsatam yastu vrudhohi tarunayate || 3-58

Meaning –

If the *bandha* is practised constantly and regularly as taught by the Guru, even an old man can be reverted into a young one. The effects have been a bit exaggerated however the hidden meaning is to be understood. The *bandha* causes certain beneficial effects on the body, which in turn result in a youth like state of the body, full of enthusiasm.

The next shloka describes:

Nabherurdhwamadhaschapi tanam kuryatprayatnatah |

Meaning –

If a sadhaka practices stretching the navel, the portion below the navel and the upper part of the abdomen towards the back and upward direction regularly for a period of six months, there is no doubt that he can win over death. This description is also a bit exaggerated however the logic behind it must be understood. We should not blindly believe that practising this bandah for six months will win over the death, but we should still practice this *bandha* regularly so that its beneficial effects on the body will result in increasing our life span. A shloka after this describes that the study of this *bandha* results in leading the sadhaka easily onto the path of mukti (liberation).

Mudras - Gestures

Mudras translate as gestures. They are physical positions of the whole body or parts of the body such as the hands which subtly alter the flow of prana, deepening the awareness and altering the mood. They may be practiced alone or in combination with certain asanas. Hand mudras can be used during pranayama and meditation.

- ॐ Agochari Mudra – Nose Tip Gazing
- ॐ Ashwini Mudra –Horse Gesture
- ॐ Kaki Mudra – Crow Gesture
- ॐ Khechari Mudra – Tongue Gesture
- ॐ Maha Mudra – Great Psychic Attitude
- ॐ Manduki Mudra – Frog Gesture
- ॐ Prana Invocation Mudra
- ॐ Shambhavi Mudra – Eyebrow Centre Gazing
- ॐ Shanmukhi Mudra – Closing the Seven Gates
- ॐ Vipariti Karni Mudra – Inverted Psychic Attitude

Hand Mudras

- ॐ Dhyana Mudra – Meditation Gesture
- ॐ Bhairavi Mudra – Shiva Gesture
- ॐ Hridaya Mudra – Heart Gesture
- ॐ Jnana Mudra – Knowledge Gesture
- ॐ Prana Mudra – Energy Gesture
- ॐ Yoni Mudra – Womb Gesture

Agochari Mudra - also called Nasikagra Drishti (Nosetip Gazing)

Agocharam - beyond sensory perception, unknown or invisible

Nasi – nose

Agra - tip

Drishti – gazing



ॐ Sit in a meditative asana with the hands in dhyana mudra. Close your eyes. Relax the body. Open the eyes and become aware of the tip of the nose. You should be able to see inverted V. If this is not visible, you can start with a finger on the tip to get the focus right (a red dot on the tip of the nose can also be used to gain focus). Concentrate on this point for about 10 seconds. Breathe normally. Close your eyes again. Warm up your hands and cover your eyes to relax the eyes. Continue the practice for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Good for calming and stability of the mind as well as stress relief.
- Eyes become strong and introspection is created.
- Control over pranic energy
- Awakening and balancing of mooladhara chakra.

Precautions

- Do not over strain the eyes. Do not overdo the exercise as nausea might be felt and if it's done for too long one may get a headache.

Ashwini Mudra – Horse Gesture

- ॐ This practice is also practiced in a variation of Sarvangasan – shoulder stand pose.
- ॐ In a sitting position or an asana such as tadagasana become aware of the anal sphincter. Breathing normally contract and relax the anus, holding for up to ten seconds if comfortable. Practice for a few minutes or until tired. Make sure the contraction and relaxation is smooth and without strain.

Benefits

- Preparation for moola bandha.
- Strengthens the muscles of the anus.
- Helping to prevent anal incontinence.
- Helps prevent constipation and haemorrhoids.
- Helps to prevent prolapse of the rectum or uterus.
- Helpful in pregnancy due to the above.
- Helpful in postnatal recovery.
- Prevents dissipation of prana.
- Practicing in sitting position is a good alternative if one cannot practice sarvangasan for whatever reason eg. Pregnancy, high blood pressure etc,

Kaki Mudra – Crow Gesture

Kaki - crow



ॐ Sit in a meditative asana with the hands in chin or jnana mudra.

ॐ Make the mouth into a beak, with the tongue rounded, as in shitali.

ॐ Inhale slowly and fully. (It can be combined with Agochari and looking at the nose while inhaling).

ॐ Exhale while closing the eyes.

ॐ Repeat for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Stimulates digestive system. It is said that 'your digestion system becomes like that of a crow'.
- This mudra is good for removing age related symptoms. It will make you young.
- Cools the body.
- Calms the mind and release tensions.

Precautions

- Do not practice if there is glaucoma, low blood pressure, cough or cold.
- For diabetic retinopathy or recent eye operation one should consult an expert before practicing.

Khechari Mudra – Tongue Gesture

ॐ Sit in siddhasana, or any other comfortable meditative position.

ॐ Turn the tongue to touch the back of the palate. Breathe normally.

Variation - This can be performed in Viparit Karni - Inverted Pose.

Benefits

ॐ Good for thyroid

ॐ Strengthens the digestive system as it stimulates certain hormones and saliva.

ॐ Hunger and thirst are reduced.

ॐ When performed in inverted pose, it retains ojas (life nectar).

ॐ Improves meditation.

ॐ Good for sinus problems.

ॐ Awakens kundalini.

Precautions

Mouth ailments may stop one from practicing this mudra.

Maha Mudra – Great Psychic Attitude



ॐ From sitting position, bend the left leg and sit on the heel. Keep the right leg out in front.

ॐ Hold toes of the right leg with both hands and keep the head facing forward.

ॐ Inhale with kaki and agochari mudra and bend the head a bit further back.

ॐ Hold the breath for as long as comfortable while applying khechari and shambhavi mudra, as well as moola bandha.

ॐ Exhale, close your eyes and straighten your upper body.

ॐ Practice from the other side

ॐ Practice a few rounds from both sides.

Benefits

- Increases pranic energy.
- Removes energy blockages.
- Creates heat in the body.

Precautions

- High blood pressure or heart complaints.
- If eye diseases or recent eye operations, do not practice without an experts opinion.
- Avoid during menstruation and pregnancy.

Manduki mudra - Frog Gesture



ॐ Sit in vajrasana with the heels on either sides of the buttocks and the toes pointing outwards. If this is uncomfortable then sit in vajrasana. Place the hands on the knees. Close the eyes and relax.

ॐ Move the tongue in front of the teeth with the mouth closed. The jaw should be relaxed. Start by moving the tongue to the left, right, up and down. Do this three times. Then rotate the tongue three times clockwise and three times anti-clockwise while touching the tongue to the mouth.

Benefits

- Mooladhara chakra is stimulated and the pranic energy flow is balanced.
- Good for the digestion, increases appetite, as it increases saliva.
- Face looks more attractive as the muscles of the face are relaxed.
- Good for anti-ageing and for delayed growth of grey hair.
- Good for throat and makes the tongue strong.
- Affects the sense of taste and creates a divine sense of smell.
- Stretches ankle, knees and hips.

Precautions

- Perform with caution if there are problems with the ankles, knees or hips.

Prana Invocation Mudra



ॐ In a sitting position bring the hands in front of the lower belly, fingertips pointing towards each other, hands a little away from the body. Inhaling slowly bring the hands up over the belly, in front of the chest and up to the throat. Make sure not to touch the body. Holding the breath raise the arms up over the head, looking upwards then bring the hands back to the throat and exhaling slowly lower the hands down. Try to visualize and feel the movement of the prana moving up and down. Use ujjayi breathing if desired. When the arms are open focus on ajna chakra (the eyebrow centre) and sahasrara chakra (top of the head). Feel the prana entering the body. After practicing at least 7 times bring the hands in front of the body, palms facing each other and at a distance of 10-15 cms. Move the hands and try to feel the prana then place the hands on any part of the body to give more prana. Best to practice after pranayama.

Benefits

- Stimulates the prana within our body
- Helps distribute prana in our body and to particular areas
- Increases awareness of energy within our body
- Creates peace, calmness and contentment.
- Increases trust and connection in oneself and the universe

Shambhavi mudra – also called Bhrumadhya Drishti - Eyebrow Centre Gazing

Shambhavi – Wife of Shiva or Shakti

Bhru – eye

Madhya – centre

Drishti - gazing



ॐ Sit in padmasan, siddhasan, or in any other meditative position with hands in dhyana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the body.

ॐ Open the eyes and focus on the eyebrow centre. A big V should be seen. If the V is distorted one eye might not be focusing properly, this might be due to flexibility of the eyes. Fully concentrate on this point for about 10 seconds. Do not strain the eyes. Close the eyes if there is any discomfort.

ॐ Close your eyes. Warm up the hands and cover the eyes to relax the eyes.

ॐ Repeat the practice for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Good for stress relief and concentration of the mind.
- Strengthens the eyes.
- Awakening of Ajna chakra

Precautions

- Do not practice if there is glaucoma. If there are any major eye problems consult with an expert before practicing.

Shanmukhi Mudra – Closing the Seven Gates

Shat - six

Mukhi - openings



- ॐ Sit in siddhasan or any comfortable sitting position.
- ॐ Inhale, while performing kaki mudra as well as agochari mudra.
- ॐ Hold the breath, close the eyes, and cover the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers and the nose with the middle fingers. Press the upper lip slightly over the bottom lip with the ring and little fingers. Keep your focus on ajna chakra. (Moolha banda can be applied).
- ॐ Remove the hands from the face and exhale with brahmari.
- ॐ Inhale straight away again and practice these rounds for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Useful for managing anxiety and removing negative mental patterns.
- Ajna chakra is stimulated.
- Stimulates sensory organs and later stages sense withdrawal.
- Brings about calmness, focus and introversion.
- Increases sensitivity to subtle stimuli.
- Great for facial muscles and appearance as the heat and prana of the hands and fingers stimulates and relaxes facial muscles.
- Creates balance between the materialistic and spiritual aspects.

Precautions

- If any pain is felt from performing the agochari mudra then avoid.
- Place the fingers gently on the face.
- For some people it can bring up strong emotions very fast and sometimes fear.

Viparit Karani Mudra - Inverted Psychic Attitude



- ॐ Come into viparit karani pose. Close your eyes.
- ॐ First focus on breathing with ujjayi breath.
- ॐ Then focus on abdominal breathing.
- ॐ Move on to awareness of the following chakras: vishuddi and manipura. Apply jiva bandha (tongue to top palate) or khechari mudra for the whole practice of viparita karani mudra.
- ॐ While inhaling move awareness from manipura to vishuddi chakra and while exhaling move the awareness from vishuddhi to Manipur chakra. Continue with this movement 21 times.
- ॐ Then move the awareness to the navel region, to the abdominal breathing and to manipura chakra.
- ॐ Keep breathing with ujjayi and with abdominal breathing throughout the practice.

Benefits

- Stimulates the vishuddhi and manipur chakra and all the benefits of viparit karani practiced as an asana.
- Creates sublimation of energy (from bottom to top of the body) and balances the pranic flow of energy.
- Good for balancing the mind.

Precautions

- High blood pressure, heart disease, neck or back pain. As per viparit karni, the asana.

Bhairava Mudra – Shiva Gesture



☪ Place the left hand under the belly, palm facing upwards. Place the right hand on top, palm facing upwards. Let the arms be relaxed and hands rest in the lap.

Benefits

- Balances left and right energies
- Creates mental stability and focus

Dhyana Mudra – Meditation Gesture



☪ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms upward and touch the thumb to the top of the index finger. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Used for concentration of mind, peaceful state of mind. It prevents energy dissipation.
- Stimulates mooladhara chakra
- Gives lightness and openness to receiving

Hridaya Mudra – Heart Gesture



☪ Place the hands on the knees, palms facing upwards. Bend the index finger and place it at the base of the thumb. One should be able to feel the pulse. Touch the thumb to the middle and ring fingers. Let the little finger be relaxed.

Benefits

- Helps redirect prana towards the heart, balancing the blood pressure and helping with heart problems.
- Helps open the heart on a pranic and emotional level, releasing emotions and tensions.

Jnana Mudra – Knowledge Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms downward and touch the thumb to the top of the index finger. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Used for concentration of mind, peaceful state of mind. It prevents energy dissipation.
- Stimulates mooladhara chakra
- Increases introversion

Prana Mudra – Energy Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms downward and touch the thumb to the ring and little fingers. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Increases energy and prana in the body
- Useful when there is tiredness or fatigue however avoid practicing before bed

Yoni Mudra – Womb Gesture



ॐ Bring the hands to the lap. Interlock the middle, ring and little fingers together. Press the thumbs and index fingers together. Move the thumbs and index fingers away from each other, forming a diamond shape.

Benefits

- Balances the left and right energies
 - Gives mental stability and improves focus
 - Increases prana and prevents dissipation
- Invokes the primal energy in the mooladhar chakra

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