

Balasana



Child's Pose

[buhl-AAH-suh-nuh]

Bala is the Sanskrit word for “child.” Balasana resembles the fetal position in the womb. This asana is very restorative and calming and evokes a feeling of safety and security.



DESCRIPTION

Balasana is a kneeling, prone position where the shins rest on the ground and the belly and chest lie on the thighs. The arms may be extended over the head and resting on the ground (often called Ancient Prayer Pose), or wrapped around the outside of the body with the hands resting beside the ankles. This pose calms the body and replaces energy after vigorous, challenging postures. It should be practiced as a counterpose after intense backbends and inversions.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

Second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy, sixth chakra (Ajna) perceptive energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the shins and the tops of the feet. Anchor lightly onto the forehead or the palms.

BENEFITS

- Restores energy.
- Stretches and releases the low back.
- Relaxes the neck and shoulders.
- Stimulates digestion.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee pain—Practice with modifications or practice in a supine position with the knees drawn in toward the chest.

Intestinal discomfort—The pressure placed on the abdomen in this pose can exacerbate intestinal distress, so students should avoid this pose until the discomfort passes.

VERBAL CUES

- From a kneeling position, sink your hips down toward your heels. Feel the front of your thighs elongate as you soften your hips.
- Exhale and slowly fold forward from your hips. Relax your upper body downward so that your torso rests on, or between, your thighs and your head rests on the ground or on a soft prop under your forehead.
- Exhale and bring your hands back by your feet; alternatively, if it is more comfortable for your neck and shoulders, extend your arms over your head in Ancient Prayer Pose. In either position, feel your shoulders sink toward the ground as you relax your neck.
- If your arms are stretched overhead, breathe deeply and feel your side ribs expand. If your hands are beside by your feet, allow the backs of your shoulders to soften so that your chest melts toward the ground. Take deep, slow breaths.

- With each inhalation, feel your shoulder blades move apart. As you exhale, allow your front body to sink completely toward the ground. Draw your tailbone gently down toward your heels to lengthen and stretch your lower back.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- As you relax more deeply, adjust your hips and legs so that you are as comfortable as possible. You may want to widen the space between your knees for comfort. Imagine the entire front of your body descending into the support of the ground.
- Slow down and deepen your breath, feeling its softness. Imagine each breath opening your rib cage and lengthening your spine. Relax your neck and shoulders more and more.
- To exit this position, place your palms on the ground under your shoulders. As you inhale, slowly press through your arms and lift your torso upright.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—The feet should be relaxed; however, if a student experiences discomfort in the feet or ankles, instruct the student to curl the toes under. If this is not comfortable, place a small rolled towel or blanket under the fronts of the ankle joints. If the student's toes are pointed outward, kneel behind the student and gently rotate the feet so that the toes are aligned straight back or slightly inward.

Knees—To help the student relax more deeply, cue the student to move the knees a little farther than hip-width apart. This positioning opens the hip joints and often makes the student more comfortable, especially if he or she has a larger belly.

Spine—If the student's lower back is not convex (rounded), kneel to the side and place your hand (the one closest to the student's hips) flat against the pelvis with your fingers pointing away from the student's head. Place your other hand between the shoulder blades with your fingers pointing toward the student's head. Press down only enough to feel some traction in your hands. Keep your hands in the same spot but move them in a motion away from each other as the student exhales. This action lengthens the spine and is generally comforting to the student. Never push straight down on the spine! Another option is to stand behind the student's hips, facing away, and sit very lightly on the student's pelvis. Make certain that you connect at the pelvis—not higher, which would be on the low spine. Use this adjustment only if the student is free of knee concerns. In addition, this adjustment is best practiced in small-group or private sessions because it takes time and attention away from the rest of the class. When using either of these adjustments, ask if the student is comfortable with the amount of pressure you are providing.



Adjustment: spine; breath.



Adjustment: spine.

Shoulders—If the student's shoulders press up into the ears, kneel at the student's side and place your hands lightly on top of the shoulders. As the student exhales, gently press the shoulders away from the ears and cue the student to elongate the neck. The student may need to lift the head slightly in order to reposition.

Breath—To help the student's breathing, kneel to the side and place one hand on the mid pelvis and the other between the shoulder blades, as in the spine adjustment. Instruct the student to breathe deeply into the hand at the pelvis and then move the breath up the spine into the hand at the shoulders. Ask the student to exhale in the opposite direction, from the shoulders down to the pelvis.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hips and knees—If the student is not comfortable with the knees fully flexed, place a rolled towel, blanket, or small bolster between the hamstrings and calves. It is fine if the student simply lifts the hips up away from the heels, but this generally does not allow the student to fully relax into the pose.

Tight low back—If the student's lower back does not round into a relaxing curve, place a folded towel between the upper thighs and belly. For some students, this modification allows the back to curve gently. If it does not bring a curve to the back, roll a blanket and place it under the knees. This modification lifts the front body slightly as it raises the fronts of the knees, which allows the pelvis to drop toward the ground.

Ancient Prayer Pose—Some students are more comfortable with the arms outstretched overhead rather than by the sides.

Tight shoulders—If a student has difficulty relaxing the shoulders, instruct the student to stretch the hands overhead in Ancient Prayer Pose and externally rotate the upper arms so that the backs of the hands rest on the ground.



Modification: Ancient Prayer Pose with shoulder external rotation.

KINEMATICS

Balasana is essentially a resting and restorative posture that stretches the fronts of the shins and ankles, the front thighs, the hips, and the spinal musculature. With the arms resting alongside the body, the shoulder blades gently relax away from each other as the student focuses on deepening the breath. Because this is a passive pose, all the muscles should be relaxed. The muscles indicated in the following chart are those that are additionally stretched when practicing this pose.

Balasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Plantar flexion	Anterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Lower leg	Knee flexion	Quadriceps
Thigh	Hip flexion	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Legs slightly abducted	Gluteals, deep external rotators*
Torso	Slightly flexed	Erector spinae
Shoulders	Slightly internally rotated if arms are at the sides	Rhomboids, trapezius, posterior deltoid, pectoralis
	Overhead extension	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior, trapezius, rhomboids
Upper arm	Relaxed in either position	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, triceps brachii
Lower arm	Extended	
Hand and fingers	Relaxed	
Neck	Forward flexion	Splenius capitus and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis, sternocleidomastoid

*Obturator externus and internus, gemellus superior and inferior, quadratus femoris, and piriformis.

When properly positioned in this asana, the entire body is relaxed; therefore, no muscle contractions are listed.



Pavanamuktasana

Purifying, or Wind Relieving Pose

[puh-VAH-nuh-mookt-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *pavana* means “purifying,” and *mukta* means “liberating” or “freeing.” Pavana is also the name of the god of wind (and the father of the monkey god Hanuman). This pose, true to its name, does indeed help stimulate the digestive system while gently stretching the low back.



DESCRIPTION

Pavanamuktasana is a supine asana that, when practiced with both legs drawn into the chest simultaneously, resembles a flipped-over version of Balasana. This pose gently stretches the low back as it calms.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

Second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the upper pelvis and spine. Anchor lightly onto the shins or the backs of the thighs with the hands.

BENEFITS

- Stimulates the digestive organs.
- Stretches and releases the low back.
- Massages the reproductive organs.
- Tones the arms and legs.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Neck concerns—Students with neck concerns should practice with modification.

Extreme intestinal discomfort—The pressure placed on the abdomen in this pose can exacerbate intestinal distress, so students with this condition should avoid this pose until the discomfort passes.

Abdominal surgery or herniation—Students who have a hernia or are healing from abdominal surgery should refrain from practicing this pose.

Pregnancy—After the second trimester, this pose should be practiced with modification.

VERBAL CUES

- From a supine position, with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground, breathe deeply and, as you exhale, bend your right knee and draw it in toward your right shoulder.
- Bring your right hand to the front of your right shin and, using your arm, gently pull your leg as close to your shoulder as is comfortable. Move with gentle ease. Inhale and settle in a relaxed manner onto your back.
- As you exhale, draw your left knee in toward your left shoulder. Place your left hand onto your shin to help move your leg in closer to your body.

- Inhale deeply and feel the back of your pelvis root into the ground. Tuck your chin toward your chest and keep your chest open.
- On your next exhalation, feel your navel rooting down toward your spine. Allow your breath and the flexion of your abdomen to lift the back of your head and your shoulders off the ground. As you breathe, feel your belly and thighs pressing gently together.
- Use the strength of your biceps (upper arm) to hold your legs in place. Keep your shoulders relaxed and away from your ears. If you notice tension in your chest or shoulders as you try to hug your legs closer, wrap a strap around your shins for more ease.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- If it is comfortable to do so, allow your body to rock gently from side to side. Feel the massaging action in your pelvis and low back. After a few breaths, bring your body into stillness and continue to breathe deeply.
- To exit this pose, slowly lower your head and shoulders back to the ground and release your shins. Bring your arms to your sides and, as you exhale, lower your right foot back to the ground. On your next exhalation, bring your left foot down. Relax in this position for a few more breaths.

ADJUSTMENTS

Knees—If the student's knees splay, kneel to one side and place your hands lightly on the outsides of the mid thighs. As the student exhales, gently cue her or him to press the knees closer together and take the thighs away from your hands. Ask the student to keep the legs parallel to each other.

Arms and knees—If a student is unable to reach the front of the shins, or if the pressure on the knees is uncomfortable as the student presses on the shins, invite the student to hold behind the thighs rather than on the shins. Some students may wish for an additional stretch in the hips. If they feel comfortable doing so, they can reach up for the soles of the feet and draw the bent knees toward the shoulders into a position called Balasana Ananda (Happy Baby Pose).

Neck—If the student does not tuck the chin toward the chest, or if the neck is in hyperextension, kneel behind the student's head and place your hand lightly on the back of the head. Ask the student to move the head away from your hand.



Adjustment: neck.

Shoulders—If the student's shoulders are squeezed up tightly toward the ears, kneel behind the student's head and place your hands lightly on the fronts of the shoulders. As the student inhales, gently guide the shoulders away from the ears and open the front of the chest.



Modification: Half Wind-Relieving Pose.

MODIFICATIONS

Tightness or weak low back—If the student has weakness or discomfort in the low back, cue the pose as Ardha Pavanamuktasana (Half Wind-Relieving Pose), in which the student draws in only one leg at a time. Depending on the student's comfort level, the opposite leg may remain anchored flat against the ground or with the knee bent and the foot close to the pelvis.

Difficulty in reaching the legs—If the student has difficulty reaching the shins or the back of the thighs, place a strap behind the thighs to help draw the legs in without strain.

Neck weakness or discomfort—If the student has difficulty lifting the head, instruct the student to keep the back of the head on the ground.



Modification: difficulty in reaching the legs.

KINEMATICS

Pavanamuktasana is a comforting, restorative pose. The gentle stretching of the low back while the spine is supported benefits students who have weakness or are rehabilitating after injury. It also strengthens the abdominals, as well as the upper arms and chest. Students should use the biceps in conjunction with the pectorals to draw the legs in. If students use only the chest muscles to hold the legs, they typically engage the upper trapezius in order to help hold the position, which creates tension in the neck and shoulders and defeats the purpose of the pose.

Pavanamuktasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Plantarflexion		
Lower legs	Knee flexion	Gastrocnemius (C)	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum and hallucis longus
Thigh	Knee flexion, thigh stability	Hamstrings (C, I), adductors (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	Gluteus maximus and medius
Torso	Spinal flexion and stability	Rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (C, I)	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum
Shoulders	Flexion	Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major and minor, biceps brachii (C, I)	Rhomboids, upper trapezius
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	Triceps brachii
Lower arm, hand, and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digitorum, extensor digiti minimi brevis, dorsal interossei (C, I)	
Neck	Flexion	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	Splenius capitus and cervicis, occipitals, upper trapezius

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, and I = isometric contraction.

Supta Urdhva Dhanurasana



Restorative Backbend

[SOOP-tuh oohr-dhuh-vuh dhuh-noor-AAH-suh-nuh]

Supta is Sanskrit for “sleeping” or “reclining,” and *urdhva dhanurasana* means “upward-facing bow.” This pose is a restorative, supported backbend.

DESCRIPTION

This posture is a modified backbend in which spinal support is provided by a supportive prop, such as a fitness ball, chair, or set of folded blankets. As a result, no further modifications are provided in the following description.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

Third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy,
fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy,
fifth chakra (Vishuddha) purifying energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the bottoms of the feet.
Anchor into the support of the prop under the pelvis and back.

BENEFITS

- Is relatively accessible to students with weakness or other physical challenges.
- Opens the chest.
- Increases flexibility in the spine.

⚠ CAUTION

Back pain or injury—Although this is a supported version of a backbend, caution should still be practiced by students with back or neck injury. Extra time should be allotted in moving into and out of the pose.

VERBAL CUES

Cues for a Fitness Ball

- Sitting on a fitness ball with your feet flat on the ground and hip-width apart, place your hands on your hips or against the side of the ball—wherever you feel comfortable and balanced.
- Walk your feet forward and feel your hips roll slowly forward on the ball. Continue walking forward until your lower back rests on the ball. On an exhalation, tuck your chin toward your chest and slowly lower your mid spine onto the ball. Evenly balance between both feet.
- Inhale and continue to lower your upper back and head onto the ball. Feel the openness in your throat as the back of your neck rests in the support provided by the ball. Breathe slowly and smoothly.
- If you feel comfortable and balanced, stretch your arms out to your sides or overhead.



- Breathe and feel your shoulders and chest expand and relax.
- To exit the position, draw your chin toward your chest and slowly walk your legs backward as the ball rolls away from your spine and your torso returns to an upright position. Slowly bring your head up last.

Cues for a Chair

- Place at least two folded blankets or a thick, firm pillow on the seat of a folding chair. Sit sideways at the very edge of the chair with your feet flat on the ground. Hold onto the sides of the chair for support.
- Exhale and fully engage your abdominal muscles. Move your hips forward so that your buttocks slide down the side of the chair. Tuck your chin to your chest and slowly lower your torso backward, one vertebra at a time. Breathe slowly and smoothly.
- As your shoulder blades reach the blanket, adjust your body slightly to allow the top of your shoulders and your head to drape comfortably over the side of the chair.
- If you are comfortable, stretch your arms overhead and allow your hands to float toward the ground. Breathe deeply and relax your chest and shoulders.
- To exit the position, bring your hands back to the sides of the chair. Draw your chin in toward your chest. Exhale and slowly roll your spine upright and slide your hips back so that you are once again in a seated position.

Cues for Blankets

- Place a number of stacked, folded blankets on the ground. Make the stack 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) high.
- Sit on the ground with the backs of your hips against the pile of blankets. Exhale and slowly lower your back onto the blankets. Once your shoulder blades are supported by the blankets, lower your head slowly over the back of the stack. The blankets should be pressed comfortably into the curve of your spine. Allow yourself to relax into the support of the blankets.
- Place your arms where they feel most comfortable—beside your hips, stretched out to the sides, or overhead. If your back feels comfortable, stretch out your legs. Breathe and relax your entire body.
- To exit this position, bend your knees and press your hands to the ground. Exhale and tuck your chin toward your chest. Slowly lift your body upright. Soften your shoulders and take a few more breaths while seated.

ADJUSTMENTS

Spine—The apex of the support (ball, chair, or blankets) should rest comfortably against the student's back. To help the student roll back against the support, kneel or squat behind the student's back. If using a ball, place your hands to the side of the ball and guide the movement as the student lowers back. Remain here until the student feels balanced and comfortable. If using a chair or the blankets, simply guide the student backward, providing as much support as the student needs. If the student is on the ground, place a small bolster under the lower thigh to further support the lumbar spine.



Adjustment: spine and back.

Neck—Some students require support as they lower the head back. To adjust, kneel to the side and place your hand on the back of the student's head. As the student relaxes the neck, provide support until the student feels comfortable. Some students may also require the use of your hand as a prop when lifting the head as they sit up; if so, place your hand behind the back of the head and softly support it.

Shoulders—Make certain that the student's shoulders are relaxed away from the ears and that the chest is open. Kneel above the student's head and softly place your hands on the fronts of the shoulders. Lightly press outward with your hands to encourage the student to expand the chest and soften the shoulders.

KINEMATICS

The relative softness of the ball or blankets provides support along the contours of the spine, thus allowing for relaxation throughout the entire body.

Supta Urdhva Dhanurasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension		
Lower leg	Ankle plantar flexion (and stability if on ball)	Gastrocnemius, soleus (I)	Anterior tibialis
Thigh	Relaxed knee flexion		Quadriceps
Hip and pelvis	Hip hyperextension (and stability if on ball)	Hamstrings (I)	Iliopsoas
Torso	Spinal hyperextension		Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae
Shoulder	Humeral external rotation (humerus)		Pectoralis major and minor, deltoids
	Horizontal hyperextension		
Upper arm	Elbow extension		Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, triceps brachii
	Forearm supination		Pronator teres, supinator
Lower arm	Wrist hyperextension		All
Hand and fingers	Finger extension		All
Neck	Neck hyperextension		Splenius capitus and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis, sternocleidomastoid

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, and I = isometric contraction.



Jathara Parivartanasana

Belly Twist

[juht-HAR-uh par-ee-VAR-tuhn-AAH-suh-nuh]

Jathara is the Sanskrit word for “stomach” or “belly,”
parivartana means “to roll or turn around.”

DESCRIPTION

In this supine pose, the hips are flexed and the legs are rotated to one side. The shoulder blades remain as flat on the ground as possible and act as an anchor. This asana is generally used in a finishing sequence at the end of class.

For a restful and restorative posture, as in this example, the knees are bent with one leg crossing over the other. For a more active yet still restorative pose, the legs remain straight.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

Third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy, fifth chakra (Vishuddha) purifying energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the shoulder blades and the outer arms. Anchor into the hip and the outer leg on the twisting side.

BENEFITS

- Cools and relaxes the body.
- Stretches the entire spine gently.
- Requires little strength in the back.
- Opens the chest.
- Relaxes the neck.
- Aids digestion.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Hip replacement—Students with a hip replacement should not cross the thighs over the midline of the body; therefore, they should practice with modification.

Acute spinal concerns—Students with disk injury or spinal pain should practice with modification.

Pregnancy—Students past the first trimester should avoid deep supine twists, including this pose, and instead should practice seated upper back and neck twists.

VERBAL CUES

- From a supine position, bend your knees and bring your heels as close to your hips as is comfortable, with the soles of your feet on the ground. Align your hips with your shoulders and settle your shoulder blades comfortably against your rib cage and the ground. Inhale deeply and elongate your spine.
- Exhale and cross your right leg over your left leg above the knee. If it feels comfortable, hook the top of your right foot behind your left calf.

- Inhale and reach your arms out to your sides at shoulder height with your palms facing up. Turn your head and look toward your right hand. Slightly anchor the backs of your hands into the ground.
- Inhale deeply and feel your spine lengthen and your chest expand.
- Press into your left foot and lift your hips just enough to take some body weight off of your pelvis. As you exhale, shift your hips so that your pelvis moves slightly to the right. Settle your pelvis back to the ground and slowly lower your knees to the left side of your body. Rotate as far as is comfortable for you, imagining your right hip stacking over your left hip. Be mindful of any discomfort in the spine, and back away from the pose if necessary. If your back feels comfortable, uncross the legs and reach your toes up toward your left hand. If your right shoulder lifts from the floor, back away from the pose slightly.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- With each breath, feel your legs and shoulders anchor softly, yet deeper, into the ground. If your right shoulder blade lifts off the ground, draw your legs back toward the right until both shoulder blades are once again grounded.
- To exit the posture, inhale and slowly bring your knees and head back to center and rest flat on your back. Uncross your legs and prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Spine—The spine should not round while rotating. Assist the student in lengthening the spine by kneeling behind the student's back and placing one hand on the front of the closest shoulder. Place your opposite hand on the outside of the student's hip. As the student inhales, gently press your hands away from each other to lengthen the spine. To help the student deepen the twist, as the student exhales, slowly and gently press the outside of the top hip away from you so that the top knee moves closer to the ground.

Shoulders—If the shoulder farthest from the twisted knees is lifting slightly off the ground, kneel behind the student's back and place your closest hand at the junction of the chest and shoulder and your opposite hand on the outside of the student's hip. Gently press the shoulder blade toward the ground while anchoring the top hip with your other hand. If the student gives you permission, use light pressure to press down and away on the hips slightly more with each exhalation.

Neck—If the student's neck is not lengthened, cue for length by lightly sweeping your fingers against the back of the neck from the base of the shoulders to the back of the skull.



Adjustment: spine; shoulders.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight spine or hips—Support the student's knees by placing folded blankets or a block between the legs and the ground. Another modification is to instruct the student to begin with the legs up the wall and then bend the knees so that the soles of the feet are flat against the wall. With the arms stretched wide, as in the traditional pose, the student can then slowly "walk" the feet in an arcing motion down toward the ground to one side. Cue the student to stop at the first point of resistance and to rest in that position. If the legs are not on the ground, place a prop under the leg for support.

Hip pain or hip replacement—If crossing the legs stresses the top hip, then instruct the student to keep the legs parallel and press the insides of the legs together while lowering the knees to the side. Also instruct the student not to lower the knees completely to the ground. Place blocks or blankets under the legs for support.



Modification: hip pain or hip replacement.

Posture deepening—If the student can comfortably rest the lower leg and opposite shoulder on the ground, then he or she can draw the legs closer to the opposite arm. In this variation of the pose, cue the student safely out of the pose. Students with a strong, healthy back may simply anchor into the arms and lift the legs as they inhale. For many, however, this exit is extreme and can strain the back muscles. For these students, cue them to bend the knees and bring the legs up one at a time.



Modification: deepening the posture.

KINEMATICS

The closer the knees are to the shoulders, the deeper the stretch is in the hips, low back, and shoulders. However, the closer they are together, the harder it usually is to keep the opposite shoulder relaxed on the ground. This is a good asana to use for measuring increased flexibility in the spine and chest.

Jathara Parivartanasana (Legs Rotated Left)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus, anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Lower leg	Foot dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R and L)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I, R)	
Thigh (R)	Thigh adduction	Adductors (C, I, R)	
Hip and pelvis (R and L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	Gluteus maximus
Hip and pelvis (R)	Internal rotation	Gluteus medius and minimus, adductors (C, R)	Gluteus medius and maximus, tensor fascia lata, deep external rotators*
Torso (R)	Pelvis rotation	External oblique, quadratus lumborum, latissimus dorsi (E, R)	Quadratus lumborum, external oblique, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi
Torso (L)	Stability	Rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, erector spinae (I, R)	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum
Shoulder	Adduction of scapulae	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major and minor, biceps brachii
	External humerus rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Elbow extension	Anconeus (E, I)	
	Elbow supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, upper trapezius (C, I)	Sternocleidomastoid
Neck (L)	Head rotation to right	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I, R)	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, upper trapezius

*Obturator externus and internus, gemellus superior and inferior, quadratus femoris, and piriformis.

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, left = left, and R = right (in body segment column) or relaxed (in muscles active column).

Viparita Karani



Restorative Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose

[veep-uh-REE-tuh kuh-ruh-nee]

In Sanskrit, *Viparita Karani* means “in the inverted or reversed position.” Many yoga instructors, however, simply refer to this asana as “the legs-up-the-wall” pose when using English terms.

DESCRIPTION

In this restful asana, the student’s torso is supine on the ground and the legs are stretched up a wall. Often, a bolster or set of blankets is placed under the hips to lift the student’s pelvis higher than the heart as a modified inversion. This variation makes the pose more restorative and, for many, also helps loosen and relax the low back. If props are not used, then the sacrum is placed flat against the ground and the ischial tuberosities (sit bones) are pressed into or near the wall. This pose is often used as a modified inversion for menstruating women, in which case the hips are positioned farther away from the wall.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

Second chakra (Svadhishthana) creative energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the back of the pelvis. Anchor softly into the shoulder blades and the back of the head.

BENEFITS

- Helps relax the low back.
- Calms the nervous system.
- Helps increase comfort and range for other forward bends.
- Relieves menstrual discomfort.

VERBAL CUES

- If using a mat, place it flat on the ground with the short edge against a wall.
- Lie on the outermost right edge of the mat on your right side in a fetal position with the soles of your feet pressed into the wall. Move your hips flat against the wall.
- Inhale and slowly roll your body onto your back, walking your feet off the ground in an arc. You should be lying in the middle of your mat.



Starting position.

- Exhale as you straighten your legs. Let the backs of your legs and your heels rest against the wall. If the stretch in the hamstrings feels too intense, move your hips away from the wall slightly. Settle into your shoulder blades and bring your arms to your sides with your palms facing up.
- Completely relax your legs. Allow your toes to soften. With every exhalation, feel your back and hips sink deeper into the support of the ground.
- Breathe here, close your eyes, and relax.
- To exit the pose, slowly bend your knees and walk your feet to the ground so that you are resting on your right side. Take a few slow breaths here. Press your left hand into the ground and gently lift your torso. Take your time and come completely into a seated position away from the wall.

ADJUSTMENTS

Hips—If the student's hips are slightly lifted off the ground or blanket, and if the student has sufficient flexibility in the hips, stand to the side of the legs and place your hands or a weighted sandbag on the soles of the student's feet. Press down slowly and gently. This action provides a nice stretch in the hips and legs and feels very comforting to many students. If a student does not have sufficient flexibility in the hips, cue the student to move the hips farther from the wall. You can also increase the height of any prop under the hips.

Shoulders—If the student's shoulders are up near the ears and rotated internally, kneel above the student's head. Lightly place your hands on the fronts of the student's shoulders and gently press the shoulders away from the ears and against the ground.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hamstrings—If the student has difficulty with fully straightening the knees, instruct the student to bend the knees slightly or to move the hips slightly farther from the wall.

Overly tight neck—If a student is so tight in the neck that he or she is unable to rest the back of the head on the ground, place a small pillow under the neck and back of the head for support and to allow for deeper relaxation.



Modification: hips.

KINEMATICS

Bolsters or blankets placed under the hips create more length in the low spine while providing support. In addition, the increase in the angle between the legs and torso allows students with tight hamstrings to find a comfortable position while keeping the knees straight.

Viparita Karani

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Neutral	
Lower leg	Neutral	
Thigh	Knee extension	Hamstrings, adductors
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Gluteals
Torso	Spinal extension	
Shoulder	External rotation	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	
Lower arm	Wrist extension	
Hand and fingers	Neutral	
Neck	Extension	

When properly positioned in this asana, the entire body is relaxed; therefore, no muscle contractions are listed.

Shavasana



Corpse Pose

[shuh-VAAH-suh-nuh]

Shava is the Sanskrit word for “corpse.” In this asana, the body resembles the stillness and detachment of an unmoving corpse.

DESCRIPTION

This supine pose is the quintessential finishing, resting, and restorative asana in which the student reclines on the ground with the arms stretched beside the body. Because the nervous system is constantly bombarded with stimuli throughout the day and most people are distracted by unconscious, nonessential, self-limiting thoughts (known as *vritti*), the purpose of practicing Shavasana is to completely release tension from the mind and body and to engage the parasympathetic nervous system. This shift frees the mind, allowing it to move into a more meditative state. From the outside, this important asana may appear extremely simple because it involves no effort or movement in the body. However, it can be one of the most challenging asanas because many people find it difficult to quiet the mind when the body is still.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

Sixth chakra (Ajna) perceptive energy, seventh chakra (Sahasrara) divine energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root softly into the solid support of the ground.

BENEFITS

- Relaxes both the mind and the body after a physically intense asana practice.
- Allows for deep healing and relaxation, thus leading to successful meditation.
- Removes fatigue.
- Helps increase the body's psychoneuroimmunological abilities (see chapter 5).

⚠ CAUTIONS

Pregnancy—After the first trimester, pregnant women should practice this pose either by lying on the left side or with the head and chest raised so that they are not flat on their backs.

Back injury—Students with back pain or injury should practice with modification.

VERBAL CUES

See appendix A for sample relaxation scripts to help your students become completely relaxed into Shavasana.

Getting Into the Posture

- From a supine position, exhale, bring your knees to your chest, and rock your body gently from side to side.
- Inhale and bring your body into stillness on the ground.
- Exhale and stretch your legs down onto the ground. Allow space between your thighs. Rest your arms by your sides.
- Open your chest by rotating your palms up. Wiggle your shoulders slightly and feel the upper corners of your shoulder blades settle gently into the ground. Take a big breath as you exhale and imagine your entire upper back melting into the support of the ground.
- Relax your legs and hips, allowing your feet to roll to the outside. Feel your back sinking into the support of the ground.
- Close your eyes and relax the muscles of your face.
- Allow your breath to flow in its natural pattern so that you are no longer controlling it in any manner. Feel and visualize your breath as it flows over and through your body. With each breath, allow your body and mind to sink deeper into relaxation. Let peace wash over you. (It is ideal to allow students at least 10, and preferably 20, minutes of silent meditation time.)

Bringing Students Out of the Posture

- In the next few breaths, continue to focus on your breath and begin to notice your relaxed, recharged body.
- Start to gently move your fingers, toes, wrists, and ankles as you become more and more aware of your body. Open your mouth and move your jaw from side to side; this simple movement may cause you to yawn. Continue to remain relaxed as your awareness and mindful presence builds. After a few more breaths, start to bring a little more movement into all of your limbs.
- Notice whether your body and mind feel any different than they did when you began your practice today. If so, be aware of the differences. If there are none, be aware of that without any judgment. It is simply an observation.
- When you feel comfortable and completely aware of your surroundings, begin to slowly roll yourself to one side and continue to rest. Use as little energy as you find sufficient and, when you feel ready, gradually and gently bring yourself back upright as we prepare to close our class.
- Namaste, Om Shanti.

ADJUSTMENTS

Because adjustments can be distracting to some people, it is best to make any necessary modifications to a student's positioning in Shavasana as soon as possible, unless a student specifically asks for assistance.

Feet—Kneeling down, place your hands lightly around the student's ankles and gently roll the student's feet externally.

Arms—Kneeling above the student's head, place your hands lightly on the front of the shoulders and rotate the arms externally so that the student's palms face upward.

Shoulders—Kneeling above the student's head, place your hands on the shoulders and lightly press down and out to help the student relax more deeply. Move with the student's breath.

Neck—To lengthen the neck, cradle the base of the student's skull in your palm and lightly draw the head away from the shoulders. Some students require a pillow under the head for support.

MODIFICATIONS

Spinal discomfort—If the student has discomfort in the low back, instruct the student to bend the knees and place a bolster or a number of folded towels under the knees. If no props are available, instruct the student to bend the knees and move the feet as wide apart as is comfortable and to let the knees roll inward so they touch. This modification allows the student to rest the legs without using any muscles.



Modification: spinal discomfort.

Pregnancy—For pregnant women who feel uncomfortable lying on the back, or are past the first trimester, cue them to roll to the left side in a restful fetal position. For added comfort, place pillows or bolsters between the thighs and under the head.

Respiratory discomfort—If the student has difficulty lying on the back and breathing comfortably, place a bolster under the upper shoulders and head, lifting the head slightly higher than the chest.



Modification: pregnancy.

KINEMATICS

Because all of the muscles are in a relaxed state, the kinematic chart illustrates only the body's positioning in the pose.

Shavasana

Body segment	Kinematics
Foot and toes	Toe extension
Lower leg	Slight ankle plantar flexion
Thigh	Knee extension
Hip and pelvis	Femoral external rotation
	Hip extension
Torso	Spinal extension
Shoulder	Humerus external rotation, abduction
Upper arm	Elbow extension
Lower arm	Forearm supination
	Wrist extension
Hand and fingers	Finger extension
Neck	Neck extension

Because the entire body is relaxed when properly positioned in this asana, no muscle contractions are listed.

Because many people need a bit of guidance to bring their body and mind into full relaxation, appendix A offers some sample relaxation scripts. You may also view the Belly-to-Universe relaxation video by visiting the web resource at www.HumanKinetics.com/InstructingHathaYoga.

